

**EI-586**

**GEORGE GODA**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SEGRIST**

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1994. I'm in Manhattan with George Goda. Mr. Goda came from Hungary in 1948. He was twenty-four years old at that time, and ended up detained at Ellis Island. Mr. Goda, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

GODA: Yes Paul. I was born in April 6, 1923.

SIGRIST: And where in Hungary were you born?

GODA: In Budapest, in a small hospital in Budapest.

SIGRIST: And when you were born, was your name George Goda?

GODA: No, my original name was Goldstein.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

GODA: G-O-L-D-S-T-E-I-N. Yeah, something like that.

SIGRIST: And the first name was George?

GODA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Okay. Are there any circumstances or stories around your birth that were related to you later on? Stories your mother may have told about when she was carrying you, or her actual delivery of you?

GODA: No, not that I know anything special. I was—my mother was quite young, and she got married, and I was the only grandson in the family at that time.

SIGRIST: Were your parents from Hungary?

GODA: Yes, they were both from Hungary.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

GODA: Erno, E-R-N-O.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you know about his family background.

GODA: Well, he came from a great growing part of the country in Hungary called Gyongyos.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GODA: G-Y-O-N-G-Y-O-S, but with accents on the O's—two accents, on both O's. And I really know very little about his family, but he had a fairly extensive family. They all lived outside of Budapest. And he became quite successful businessman, banker, when he was young, before even married my mother, and lived in other towns outside of Budapest.

SIGRIST: Were there any stories that he ever relayed to you about his childhood?

GODA: No.

SIGRIST: No. Tell me what his personality was like.

GODA: He was a very tough, strong businessman, very successful in Hungary, had lots of friends. And then he came to the United States, and I will get back to this later. He really lost himself, because he couldn't learn English, and he wanted to go back, but of course the Communist Regime

prevented it. So anyway, I really don't know much about him, except that he was a very good businessman, and a very industrious person.

SIGRIST: Do you have your own memories of your father when you were growing up? Maybe something that you shared with your father as a child?

GODA: Very little. Frankly, very little, because he was very busy, and you know, making a living, especially during the bad times, I would say just about when I was born and afterwards, that was the Depression in Hungary, a little later than here. And he had a hard time making a living, so he worked very hard, including my mother, who also worked.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

GODA: My mother's maiden name was Olga Laub, L-A-U-B.

SIGRIST: L-A-U-B.

GODA: Right.

SIGRIST: And let me ask you the same sorts of questions about her. What do you know about your mother's background?

GODA: I know a lot more. First of all, my mother had a father who had many brothers, and they all were quite well-situated people, including a relative, not immediate relative, but not too close a relative—if you've heard to Laszlo Philip, it's a very famous painter of the British Crown, mainly. And he also was Laszlo Laub. Also, my grandfather was a—must have been a very talented person. I loved him. He died in 1933, so I was quite young, about ten years old. But he was a wonderful person, and somebody who always wanted the first in techniques. He was a technical man, and he had the first radio, he had the best radio, whatever was available. And everything which was technical, he had.

SIGRIST: He was very progressive?

GODA: Very progressive.

SIGRIST: Sure.

GODA: He was hunting and his family, I don't know exactly, but from what I heard, that part—his father—came from Erdely, if you know what it is. That's now part of Romania; that used to be Hungary. That's Transylvania. Transylvania.

SIGRIST: Yes, what was it?

GODA: Erdely, in Hungary.

SIGRIST: E-R-D--?

GODA: E-R-D-E-L-Y. He came—his father came from there, and supposedly married very wealthy local person's daughter—actually not married, but eloped with her [laughs]. And I don't know what happened later on, but anyway, that's the story from the family. Anyway, that grandfather of mine was a very good entrepreneur. He established a motor manufacturing company after he was working for one in Hungary, working for one of the largest ones. As a matter of fact I have his work book [several words unclear]. So he made this company. It wasn't very successful, but it was very difficult for him. But it was still manufacturing.

SIGRIST: And what were they manufacturing again?

GODA: Electric motors.

SIGRIST: Electric motors.

GODA: I can show you a sample here. I got one.

SIGRIST: What are your own childhood recollections of your grandfather? You said you were very close to him.

GODA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Are there stories about you and your grandfather that [unclear] your mind?

GODA: Only that he was smoking a cigar constantly, and I was hiding the cigars, because the doctor said it's not good for him. You know, things like this. And I loved him; he was my absolutely favorite, and vice versa.

SIGRIST: Was your mother close to your father?

GODA: I'm sure, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. There were two sons, and two daughters. One of the daughters was my mother; the other one was much younger, only ten years older than I. That was the youngest one. And two men, and they both became engineers, and then they joined the manufacturing—mechanical and electrical engineers. But that happened later, of course. They went to Czechoslovakia for the university.

SIGRIST: Getting back to your mother, what was her personality like?

GODA: Well, she was very small, little or under five foot. Everybody loved her, that's all that I can tell you! Everybody loved her! She was very—fantastic personality.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that your mother liked to do for herself, hobbies, or something along those lines?

GODA: She worked with my father. Now my father had a, later on, textile printing company, and she was running the part of the production and the design. [Phone rings] Oh, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment. [Tape off/on] Okay, we've just paused with George Goda, and now we're going to continue.

GODA: Yes.

SIGRIST: You were talking about your mother working with your father.

GODA: About my mother, yes. She worked in the plant, and mainly she worked doing the design with some of the help, and some of the manufacturing. And they had been printing scarves and tablecloths and material for furniture. And of course that's changed all the time, but they were making all right.

SIGRIST: Now did you have brothers or sisters?

GODA: I had no brothers or sisters; I am the only.

SIGRIST: An only child. Can you describe for me the house or apartment that you grew up in?

GODA: Okay. The very beginning, which I don't remember, we were living in an apartment somewhere near the Parliament.

SIGRIST: This was in Budapest?

GODA: In Budapest, yeah. I don't remember the apartment. However, I remember that the move into the house where the factory was. There was a factory which was in the back of the building, and in the front were the apartments. And my grandparents—as a matter of fact my grandmother's painting is right there—they took an apartment, and my parents took an apartment, and that was an, I don't know, three or four room apartment, nothing special, right next to my grandparents.

SIGRIST: And can you describe for me how the house was lit, how the apartment was lit?

GODA: That I really don't remember, but it must have been lights in the center.

SIGRIST: Electricity?

GODA: Oh, of course, of course. It was fairly modern. I have pictures of it.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like—you said your grandfather was across the hall, and you didn't talk at all about your grandmother. Tell me a little bit about your grandmother, your mother's mother.

GODA: Okay, my grandmother was a very active woman, excellent housewife, and she had family dinners many, many occasions—every occasion there was. And well I remember that I was a very poor eater, and I don't want to eat her fantastic cooking and desserts and everything else, and I went out to the kitchen myself, and made myself a couple scrambled eggs, because that's all that I liked! And we were a fairly large family by then.

SIGRIST: Large meaning extended family, or--?

GODA: Well, they all lived in the same building. They all lived in the same building, the whole family. And [unclear] actually, by the time the war came, there were thirteen people in the immediate family. I know there were thirteen, because they all survived the Holocaust, which is very unusual.

SIGRIST: Can you just list the thirteen people for me, so I get an idea of exactly--?

GODA: Yeah, sure. So, my mother and father. My grandfather died in '33, so I cannot really consider him, because it was much earlier. My grandmother, two of my uncles, one of my aunts. And then in 1944 there were a couple more grandchilds, I mean, my cousins. I don't know how many you counted so far, but—

SIGRIST: Just trying to get an idea of who was actually in the house.

GODA: Yeah, that's about it.

SIGRIST: Can you give me a description of what it was like to be in tight quarters with so many people?

GODA: Well, we haven't seen each other too much, except maybe my grandmother, because they were on different floors.

SIGRIST: I see. So they're in the same building, not necessarily in the same apartment?

- GODA: Different floors. So it was not really which I think are close quarters.
- SIGRIST: I just want to say for the sake of the tape that it may be picking up kitchen noises. Is it picking up—yeah, okay.
- GODA: We have to close there.
- SIGRIST: All right, let me just run and do that. [Tape off/on] Okay, we're now returning again. Can you give me just some sort of idea about your childhood years? Obviously, life changed dramatically with the coming of World War Two.
- GODA: Mm-hm.
- SIGRIST: Can you give me an idea of what life was like prior to the war?
- GODA: Okay. I was a very poor student. Unfortunately they put me into the elementary school a year earlier than I was supposed to. As a result, I was always behind, and first they put me into a private, very, very private, very expensive, very exclusive private elementary school, which I attended for three years. And they picked us up by taxi every day. And you know, it was probably okay, but I don't know if it was a smart idea for my sake, because I got spoiled. And I remember that I loved every kind of sports all the time. And the routine was that after lunch we went to play soccer, or whatever. And I was a poor eater, and I had to stay at the table until I finished the food, and I didn't eat it, and they came back from the playing, and I was still sitting at the table, not eating! Anyway, for the last year of my elementary, which was the fourth year, I went to public school. They put me into public school. Otherwise, I was only interested in sports, nothing else. I didn't study; I didn't learn anything. I hated it. I had constantly tutors, including German, and whatever you want—constantly, I had tutors, and people who were teaching me. And I wasn't listening. It was just awful!
- SIGRIST: Were your parents educated people?
- GODA: Well, my father was not really. My mother was.
- SIGRIST: How important was it to them that you get a well-rounded education?
- GODA: Oh absolutely, absolutely! I think it was very important.
- SIGRIST: So this must have been frustrating for them?

- GODA: It was very frustrating for them and for me, and they didn't know what to do with me, because I was not learning, and I was not willing to do any studying.
- SIGRIST: That's interesting. One thing I want to pick up on: you mentioned of course that you were a poor eater and that you wouldn't eat a lot. I'm curious—what wouldn't you eat? What things specifically did you not like?
- GODA: Good food. Good food which my grandmother cooked. Excellent food. I just wasn't interested, and my mother—I'll tell you an interesting story, that my mother constantly said, "Gyuri"—that was my, in Hungary, my name, Gyuri.
- SIGRIST: That's J-U-R-I?
- GODA: G-Y-U-R-I.
- SIGRIST: G-Y-U-R-I.
- GODA: And said, "Gyuri, eat. Gyuri, eat. Gyruri, eat." And that went on all the time. And when I got married, later on here in the States, and I settled down somehow, then all of a sudden one day [unclear] my mother said, "Gyuri, don't eat. Gyuri, don't eat. Gyuri, don't eat." [Laughs] I started gaining weight! Anyway, that's really a side story. But then I went to a real school, which means, after the first four years. Real school, which means that I was thinking of being an engineer, so I don't wanted to study Latin. Because every other schools had Latin education, and I wanted to get away from it. So I went to a real school.
- SIGRIST: Can you say that word again?
- GODA: Real, R-E-A-L, Real gymnasium.
- SIGRIST: Yes, I see.
- GODA: Real gymnasium. So I went there. I was a very poor student, very poor student. So much so that after the third year, the mathematics professor said I better leave; I better go to another school. So I went to another school, and then he followed me to the other school! Anyway, going a little bit step ahead, in 1930—probably '37 or so, I had pleurisy, and I was sick for quite a while. You know, they didn't know how to treat it at that time, and they were very much afraid of, you know, they were very conservative, a very conservative doctor.
- SIGRIST: And what were the symptoms of pleurisy? How were you affected by this?

GODA: I really don't remember; I think I had a little fever, and there was some liquid in my lung. Or, not in my lung—between the lung and the [unclear]. And I have to tell you this because it will come back for the immigration. And I was a Boy Scout from--when I was thirteen I became a Boy Scout, and I loved to hike, and go to Boy Scout camps, and I was doing very well. It was wonderful for me. I went skiing with them, and whatever. Even today, I am in contact with all the people who were at the Boy Scouts. We have a publication at least twice or three times a year, and that's very unusual, really. We are keeping tabs on over a hundred people from the same group.

SIGRIST: Well, and it would make sense that you liked the Boy Scouts, because it was very athletic—

GODA: Oh yes, very athletic. It was a wonderful thing to be. And I went down first time, and there was a ping pong table, and somebody was playing very well, and I was playing very well, so we immediately hit it off. So, it was a wonderful thing for me. And when I was thirteen years old—this was in 1923, '33, '36—'36, I became a full Boy Scout. As a matter of fact, then I was playing a very good chess, for example, and I played Oliakin, who was the world champion at that time. Of course, I was beaten, but [laughs] it's beside the point!

SIGRIST: Now was this—you started telling this because you were bringing up the pleurisy. Is this how old you were when it first made its appearance?

GODA: Yes. What happened is I went to one of these Boy Scout camps on the Danube, and I had a cold, and I went into the canoe, and the boys were in the water, and they turned me over. And me having a cold, and the water was cold, this was I think in May or so—it wasn't very warm. So I got a lot of cold, which became pleurisy. And then later on, that's how I got to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: You ended up at Ellis Island. Tell me about your family's religious background, and what kind of religious life they maintained in Budapest.

GODA: Okay, well, I was born Jewish. I have—no one in my family had any religious inclination whatsoever except my grandmother, who was lighting a candle every Friday. That was the only religious thing I ever encountered. Now, I went to religious education, but I went so far in despising it that I didn't even buy a book. I didn't go to the classes; I didn't go to whenever I had to go to wherever—completely despised it! Why? I don't know. But I don't know anything about it, and none of my family did except for my grandmother.

- SIGRIST: With the Jewish religion being so unimportant to your parents, did they maintain the name Goldstein in Budapest?
- GODA: No, no. Actually what happened is that I was probably in the first grade in the gymnasium, or second grade. My uncle, who was at that time here in the United States, for many years by then, and he took the name of Goda. And we converted, my parents and me, to Goda.
- SIGRIST: So that was done in Hungary, then?
- GODA: Oh yes. That must have been done in probably '38, or even earlier, '36 probably.
- SIGRIST: Tell me about your own recollections of the first inklings of war, and what was going on in Budapest in the thirties, politically and socially?
- GODA: Well, you know, there were many laws which came out against the Jews. Many people lost their jobs, forcefully, which I only heard, and I learned now what happened, basically. Because I wasn't aware of that much, because it did not affect my family at all, because we were our own business, sort of.
- SIGRIST: The plant kept going?
- GODA: The plant kept going, and in the meantime, my youngest aunt married a fabulous engineer, who took over the organization of the company and reorganized it, top to bottom, and became a very efficiently run organization, and grew tremendously, just before the war. So we had probably a hundred people working at that time. And he was the primary mover because he was such a good organizer. So actually, three uncles of mine are running it.
- SIGRIST: Did the extended family, the uncles and aunts, did they also have this sort of remove from the Jewish religion, too?
- GODA: Yes, yes.
- SIGRIST: Pervasive in the whole family?
- GODA: Yes, yes.
- SIGRIST: When did you become conscious that something important was going to happen?
- GODA: Well, when I was in a Boy Scouts meeting, you know, we were a small group, let's say six or eight people, there was one guy who was

Communist. And also at that time it was not sort of expected. And we had a lot of arguments, a lot of discussion about it. I think that was the only time when, the first time, when I was exposed to this thing, and I got the feeling what it means when I heard Hitler speak. And I also went a couple times to Austria to vacation, and one time when I went to Gerten, I was staying with a family who were absolutely Nazis! Everywhere the hakenkraut was out, and they were openly Nazis. And this was just before the Anschluss, if you know what it means. And of course, I was aware. They didn't know that I am Jewish or not; I don't know whether they knew it or not, but I really hadn't been affected by it, until the very end, luckily.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what Hungary went through during the war, and what your—the experience of your family at that time, in the early forties, how the war affected the operations, or whatever.

GODA: First of all, my uncle, one of my uncles was called into not military, but work labor, and they took him to something like Russia. And also, I was called in for not military, but [unclear]. I don't know—work labor, work [unclear]. And that was in 1943. And my family had very good connections, and somehow they managed to get my uncle and me out from the work. And I came with a special guard back to Budapest. Actually, I have a lot more to tell before this happened.

SIGRIST: Oh, well please do. I'm just trying to sort of guide us along.

GODA: Yeah, I know. I jumped a little too far. Anyway, as I said, I really was not affected at all by all this. We had a very good social life, and we had a house up in a very fashionable area in Budapest, a summer arrangement, and we had a million guests, and really quite a normal life, until probably 1943, somewhere or so, when actually they first—[phone rings]

SIGRIST: We're going to pause again. [Tape off/on] Okay, we're not resuming again. You were saying that life was pretty good, actually.

GODA: Pretty good. We had parties, and whatever you want. As a matter of fact, in 1944, April 19, when the Germans occupied Hungary, we went hiking in underground—what do you call it?

SIGRIST: Caves?

GODA: Caves, with [unclear], a group of people. And we spent all day—that was a Sunday—there. And we came out—it was very interesting! [Laughs] We came out, and I rushed home, and changed, because I was invited to a concert, to a private concert, through a friend of ours. And I didn't know

anything what happened. I just went there, and I ring the bell, and she came out, "Oh, I thought that was the Germans!" So then I learned what happened. Anyway, April 19<sup>th</sup> was really the dividing line when we had to be living a little differently. Not much, but still a little differently, because the Germans were in. As a matter of fact, we had several—sort of a hotel, and Eichmann occupied it. So his SS group took over. So we couldn't go there anymore. Anyway, then I received my invitation to join the work group, and that was out in the upper part of Hungary, northern part of Hungary. And I went in, and we spent six weeks there, and I enjoyed it, because it was very nice country, and the military commander, whoever it was, was very nice. And the only thing we had to do was every week, once, we had to go to the main center, and then we had to decide which group you're going to join, if you want to join the textile workers, or if you want to join the iron workers, or whatever, you know. And that went on for six weeks, and we were—I really enjoyed it, because I was a Boy Scout, and I took it as—not as punishment, but as enjoyment. It depends how you take it, psychologically.

SIGRIST: So these camps—were they supervised by the Germans?

GODA: No, no, no Germans.

SIGRIST: So, Hungarian?

GODA: Hungarians, and that happened to be probably a very decent guy who was running it. Then one day there was—again, this distribution, and my idea was—and I had a very, very good sense to survive—that I join the smallest group, not the largest group, the smallest group, and that was the engineers. I wasn't an engineer, but I joined the engineers, and maybe there were twenty people in this. In the other one was hundreds and hundreds of people. And they put us into a train, lock up, and we went to another town, the whole—everybody. Except one group stayed there. The name of the town was Yolsva, Y-O-L-S-V-A. And we went to another town which was called Yahzbery, where there was a very famous Hungarian boss. And he put us out in a huge—all the groups, and he said, "This group goes there; this group goes there." And you know, they went to wherever he sent them. And only that little group where I was stayed. And he started individually, "What is your education?" And that went on. I said something—"Not good enough." And there were I think two or three people who said, "Not good enough." And he said, "You go back to Yolsva," where we came from. Obviously, there were [laughs] two or three more people than he was expecting. Ah, we were happy! So we went back to Yolsva, where we joined a special group who was really paying off the guards. They were absolutely paying off the guards, and trying to stay there. So that was considered this special group of workers, or whatever. Anyway, from there we went to another town called

Nishkotz. It was a larger town in Hungary, where we actually didn't do anything. But later on we went into a woodworking plant, where they cut up the wood; they put it into, they loaded it into trains. And I worked there. I don't know for how many weeks, but I worked there and I enjoyed it. I considered it as fun.

SIGRIST: Where were you housed in these camps? What kind of accommodations?

GODA: I know we were in the attic, and were sleeping on hay, or something like this. No problem. I don't remember any problem. The food was okay. As a matter of fact, even they sent me some food from Budapest there. And that was the place where they took me off, and brought me back to Budapest. Now interestingly, you know, I had some friends there, I think four or five. I have them all pictures here. And we decided at that time if the Russians came, we are going to go in their direction. None of them came back. The ones who went back with the Germans, or with the Hungarians, whatever, more or less survived. But the ones who went to the—tried to go over to Russian side—none of them. I would have gone. Anyway, they took me out, brought me back to Budapest. They put me into the company. By that time this motor manufacturing company became important for the Germans. So it became [coughs] excuse me, important for the war effort. So we had a military guy who was sitting there all day long. As a matter of fact, he was sitting in our bathroom. And I sneaked into the bathroom during the night, I took out from his desk this military certificates that you are working for whatever military, and I put in—there were by that time, I think there was about eighty Jewish people. We took everybody, whoever we could. I mean, my uncles. And I think there was close to eighty people who were there because in order to save them, because that was a certain amount of protection. So I gave everybody a false certificate with a stamp, which I stole from this guy's desk, and [unclear] pictures. They gave me a picture. But I told them that, use only in emergency. And there was a very good friend of mine. Unfortunately, he went to a movie, and they caught him, and he was not—he didn't survive. They shot him in the [unclear]. Anyway, we saved a lot of people. So I practically stayed at home, lived at home. For a while I was moving every morning from—there was a synagogue somewhere which temporarily gave us shelter, but then I moved in, back to our house. And there were also a lot of girls. A lot of my girlfriends, they were all joined the company, as very important people, including my father. Anyway, then came October 15<sup>th</sup>, when the Hungarian Nazis took over, if you know this date. That changed everything. First of all, which is an interesting fact, it came out later, after the war, that you know, there was a declaration by Horthy, who was the head of the government at that time—

SIGRIST: Horthy?

GODA: Nicholas Horthy. He was the head.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GODA: H-O-R-T-Y. He was the President, or whatever you want to call it. And he made a declaration that he doesn't want to serve the Germans anymore, and blah, blah, blah, but he had no military power to back it up. So the Germans and the Nazis, the Hungarian Nazis, took it over. And that night, October 15<sup>th</sup>, we were very close to the headquarters of the Nazi party, Hungarian Nazi party—one block away, practically. A famous place. And we decided, because of the declaration, we thought that this guy's not going to make a declaration without having some power behind him, that if they come, we are going to resist. So we equipped ourselves with metal pieces, and [unclear] and whatever. Luckily, they didn't come. They didn't come because there was a woman, a Nazi woman, who decided that--she heard that there is a lot of Jews around here, in one of these buildings, but she didn't know exactly which building. And she came around, and she saw that it is war factory, didn't come in. If she comes in, no one of us would stay alive, no one of us. They would have killed us, everybody. So luckily, they didn't. On the other hand, they were very frustrated, and they started going into the buildings near, next to us, and across the street from us, and started shooting people. They went into apartments and unfortunately some friends' parents were shot. Then, after the war there were some trials, and that came out. Anyway, that changed everything, because very shortly afterwards, they decided that--[phone rings].

SIGRIST: Want to pause? [Tape off/on] Okay, we're continuing now. Mr. Goda, you were saying how things really changed at this point.

GODA: Changed, yes. And then very shortly afterwards—I don't know the date exactly, but probably within a month, they decided to call in all the military personnel who were Jewish and they got an earlier advance notice from the State Department, from Hungarian State Department, that watch out, don't go. So my family stayed away. I was hiding under the desk when they came to collect us, and so somehow all the rest of my family did manage not to go, except one of my uncles. And they wanted to put them on the train to go out.

SIGRIST: These were the Hungarian Nazis who were rounding guys up?

GODA: Yes, that was already German operation, you know, to put them on the train and take them to Austria, or Poland, or Auschwitz, or whatever. Anyway, one of my uncles went—I don't know why and how, and then Wallenburg pulled him off from the train. You know who Wallenburg is? But otherwise, we stayed, and we started hiding. We built—we had a very tall room on the second floor which was extending into the attic. And at

one time that was cut down to normal size, and there was a space about this high above the room. And there was an entrance from the attic where you can crawl in—there were a couple bricks—and we put rugs in, and we put—that was, previously we did, and lights, food, so people could stay there. And I stayed there for a couple of days, but my uncle stayed there for a couple of weeks. And he was discovered somehow, and the Nazis brought in dogs, and they tried to find him. They couldn't, it was so well hidden that they couldn't find him. I stayed only a couple days, so that was after I left. But this was a temporary shelter, until we could find something else. So then started the process of surviving somehow, and going from one place to another. My parents were quite successful getting various different possibilities. For example, my mother rented a room, actually from a Nazi, and my father was her illegitimate lover, and I was his son. And at Christmas, in 1944, we went there, and we celebrated the Christmas there. And I stayed there, and my father stayed there, with my mother, in a small narrow room. That was the day when the Russians started bombarding Budapest, and something hit the wall where our room was. And it came in; it spread all over. There were three beds in the room, and full with shrapnel pieces, and none of us got even a scratch! I said it was an absolute miracle. Anyway, we had to move from there, of course. And then, it was difficult, but my parents always found something.

SIGRIST: How would you find food, for instance, at this period?

GODA: Well, I don't remember. I know that we had a very well-stocked kitchen and storage in the factory, which later on came into play. But I don't know where we got food. But there was no problem. Somehow, there was no—at least for us, I don't know. I know, for example, my wife was a young girl at that time. She had problems getting food. I have no idea.

SIGRIST: So would you say that your life pretty much continued this way 'til the war ended?

GODA: Well, then we were liberated by the Russians in January '45, and within a few days we went back to our house, where we found tons of food which—that was very scarce. And that was when the ghetto was liberated, and my grandmother was calling everybody and giving food to. And I had some friends who came, and so and then life started to pick up again, normal, even though some of my uncles were on the other side of Budapest, it was still the war going on. So basically that was it. From then on, it was only a matter of food, really, because that was very scarce. So we moved down to a smaller town in Hungary where there was plenty of food, and rented something, and we stayed there for, I don't know, for a month or two. As a matter of fact I went down to Seged, which was already a long time liberated, and even the university started going. And I

went to the university and enrolled. That was before the actually war ended, the final ending of the war, probably a month before or so. And then, we came back to Budapest.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the political climate in Budapest after, directly after the war, and what was going on.

GODA: Yeah. Well, in 1944, '45, when I went down to Segad—that's where the university already opened—there was a meeting, a Communist meeting, outside. And I remember that the guy said, "We are not going to take over the government until our country is built up." And that, you know, remained in my mind. And exactly that's what they did.

SIGRIST: And how did they go about doing that?

GODA: Well, in '45, there was a coalition government which was not Communist at all, and everybody had confidence in it, as a matter of fact, so much so that my family put all their money into building a new factory. And they built a new factory in 1948, and it was finished—the Communists took it over, by that time. Anyway, I have been keeping very close touch and contact with the whole situation, because I went out with a girl whose father was a member of the Parliament for many, many years, and had a big influence. And I remember the reason why I'm here, that there was a dinner meeting with a lot of politicians, plus an American newspaper. And after dinner, we had of course a big discussion, and the newspaper man said—and that was in 1947, and I'll never forget it—and he said, "There will be Communism here. Just look at the [unclear] of the Jews. They are leaving. They know." And I remembered this. And in 1948, December, in Christmas—I'm sorry, '47 Christmas, by that time the Communists took over the important posts, like the police, and the internal affairs, you know, some of the—they knew how to do this. And they came out with a ruling that the old passports, the green passports which was standard for many, many years, not going to be valid after January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945. I'm sorry, '48. And you know, I said to myself, "I don't like it. Maybe I'm not going to get a new passport." So I decided—by that time, I have to tell you, my parents were all here.

SIGRIST: Oh, your parents had come to this country?

GODA: Come to this country in 1947 as visitors to my uncle.

SIGRIST: Your uncle was in New York?

GODA: Not in New York, in Washington.

SIGRIST: In Washington.

GODA: But he was here for, by then, thirty years. And he came in '46 to Hungary visiting us, and then my parents went in '47 to visit him. So they were out here, and I was there. And I was still going to the university by that time, I mean, in Budapest, [several words unclear]. By the way, I was studying better! [Laughs] So I decided: I don't like this. And I made every effort from Christmas to January 11<sup>th</sup> that I get my passport extended to Switzerland and Austria, and I had to get permit, Russian permit, and all sorts of permits and things to be able to travel.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause right now so that Peter can put in another tape.

GODA: Sure.

[End of Tape One, Side B/Start of Tape Two, Side A]

SIGRIST: Okay, we're not beginning Tape Two with George Goda, who came from Hungary in 1948 when he was twenty-five. Today is Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1994. I'm Paul Sigrist, and Peter Hahm is running the recording equipment. Mr. Goda, when we ended Tape One, you were saying about: the Communist takeover was making you nervous, and you knew that you didn't want to be there anymore. Tell me a little bit more about the sorts of things that made you uneasy about the Communists being in Hungary. Why were they such a threat to people? [Phone rings] We're going to pause just for a second. [Tape off/on] Okay, here we go again. You were just going to tell us about some of the reasons why the Communist takeover was threatening to people.

GODA: Well, to me it was basically intuition. Secondly, I knew, somehow I felt, by reading some books, understanding what communism is all about, what's going to happen: the loss of freedom, and loss of the individualism. So I somehow felt it; I don't know from where and how, because you know, I had no experience before, or I had no exposure to it before. But it's mainly, I think, intuition, like I had a fantastic intuition during the German era, to avoid things, and to—I have been directing, practically, my family what to do. I had—I knew what to do, without having a fear of anything, ever. I never felt that I was going to get killed or anything; I had no such thing in my mind. I knew that I'm going to survive, and I know by intuition that I have to do what I have to do.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you see happening during this transitional period?

GODA: Oh, the Communist regime. Well, I saw that slowly they took over the government. I don't know whether you've heard of the salami technique. It was called salami technique, that slice by slice they took over the main important part of the government, and all the functions. Not at once, but

slice by slice. And there was an election, where they were cheating, and with cheating they accomplished—they got twenty percent of the vote. And the way they were cheating, there was a special absentee ballot, and they went from one town to another, and they were voting several times with the absentee ballot [coughs]. So somehow I felt: that's not for me, and I don't want to be—I was always afraid of being closed in, to do what the others do. I wanted to be always on my own, and that was my idea all the way through the German era, as I said before, to join the smallest group, and try to be an individual and not to try to be a group, not to go with a group. So I cannot tell you exactly why.

SIGRIST: How long had your parents been in America? When did they come over? You said in '47.

GODA: They came in '47, really to visit. But really, they came with a little, that-sized suitcase, nothing else. So anyway, they had to fly, because of the weather, or I don't know why. They had to fly from [unclear] Hungary, so they couldn't take anything with them. And my father wanted to come back. He didn't know how to speak English, and when I told him, "Father, why don't you learn a few words?", he said, "Ah, everybody knows Hungarian in New York." [Laughs] You know, so that was his attitude. And he wanted to come back; he was very successful there, and of course. Anyway, they came in '47, and they wanted to come back, to go back. And I had a full corrugated box of correspondence with their friends, because they didn't know what to do, especially my father. He wanted to go back, and my mother doesn't want to go back. They bought their ticket back, going back, and that go on for months and for months and for months, until their friends were—I don't know how you say this in English. They had to move out from Hungary to a small little town. That was one of the Communist's decisions, that the middle class cannot stay in Budapest; they have to move out. So until this point he wanted to go back. And then slowly, slowly, he was convinced not to go back, and by the time I came-- [phone rings]

SIGRIST: We're going to pause for a second. [Tape off/on] Okay, we were just talking about the fact that your father suddenly began to realize that he should stay where he was.

GODA: Very difficult. It was awful difficult, because he didn't speak the language, and he had very little money. And you know, to start a new career at his age—it wasn't easy.

SIGRIST: Well let's get you to America.

GODA: Yeah, okay.

SIGRIST: You extended your visa. You got it extended to Switzerland and—

GODA: Not the visa. I extended my passport, and January 11<sup>th</sup> was the last train. Last train, with the old passport, I came out. And I went skiing for six weeks, or four weeks. I don't know. I went skiing. I love skiing.

SIGRIST: Where did you go skiing?

GODA: In Switzerland.

SIGRIST: So when you left from Budapest to go to Switzerland, your intention was to not go back to Budapest?

GODA: I had—no.

SIGRIST: No.

GODA: No, I just had the intuition that: get out. I had no decision; I had no visa. I had no nothing. I knew that I wanted to go skiing, so I went skiing. And I skied for, I think, six weeks. And then, I decided to get, after all, a student visa for U.S. But in order to get this, I had to be enrolled in a university here, which my parents did somehow, in University of Miami, but I had to take an exam for English, which I didn't know. So I went to Basel, where the examination was given, and I wanted to study there. But the Swiss, being very unfriendly people, they kicked me out in a couple days from Basel, because [unclear], near the border, blah, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, they wanted to send me back to Hungary, and I wasn't willing to. Finally I got an idea to go to the French part of Switzerland, where they are much more lenient than the Germans. So I went to Lausanne, and I stayed there for almost three months. And in the meantime, that's where the interesting story starts! My uncle had a close friend here, in Washington, who was obviously awfully influential guy. And I just found his obituary. And he was a friend of Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and he was very close to Herbert Hoover; he was actually in the FBI. And he managed to get me a regular visa, not a student visa, based on that in 1939 my parents applied for a visa for me to come to the World's Fair, which is possible. I don't know if it's true or not, but it's possible, because they were making some tablecloths for the Hungarian restaurant here at the World's Fair. So it's a very good possibility. Anyway, it took a lot of doing, and I have some interesting correspondence about this, because in order to get a visa at that time, for a Hungarian, it took seven years waiting, if you know, for a visa number. Plus, you had to convince the Consul wherever you were—I happened to be in Switzerland, so in Zurich—to give me the visa. And he managed both. He got me a number from the State Department. He wrote a letter, which I might have here, to this consul in Switzerland, to give me the visa. And in no time, I got the visa!

SIGRIST: How did that feel, when that finally happened for you?

GODA: Well [laughs], I don't know! I don't know! But very shortly afterwards, I went—and I had to fly, actually, from Switzerland to England, because I couldn't get a visa through France, if I can recall. They didn't give me one. And then I took a boat to New York.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship? Do you remember?

GODA: [Pause] Yes, S.S. France.

SIGRIST: And what port did it leave from?

GODA: It left from England, Le Havre I guess.

SIGRIST: And what were you bringing with you to America? What did you pack to take to America?

GODA: Well, I had my skis probably [laughs], and a small suitcase. Nothing else. I don't think I had anything else. As a matter of fact, if I recall correctly, yes, it got lost. It got lost somehow.

SIGRIST: Your luggage got lost?

GODA: Luggage, yeah, luggage got lost.

SIGRIST: Were you traveling alone, or were you with anybody else, friends or anyone?

GODA: No, completely alone. Completely alone. And I remember, I recall an interesting story that in Europe I couldn't stand being in the same room with fish. I hated it. And when I came on the boat, everybody was sick; I wasn't. And I was sitting at a big table all alone, and the waiter came, and he brought beautiful fish, and he said, "Why don't you try? Why don't you try?" I said, "Look, new country—I try it." I didn't like it, but I tried it! Anyway, that's where immigration starts. I arrived in New York.

SIGRIST: How long did it take to get across the Atlantic?

GODA: Mm, probably a week. That was a fast boat; that was a big boat.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the ship? Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship?

- GODA: Well, I traveled third class, but I managed to find my way to the first class, so I spent really my time on the first class. And I remember meeting nice people, a nice girl, and I was—I had a good time.
- SIGRIST: Were there entertainments supplied to the passengers?
- GODA: Yes, I'm sure there were entertainments. I don't remember specifically, but in the first class, you had everything, even at that time.
- SIGRIST: But you weren't sleeping in the first class?
- GODA: No, I was sleeping in the third class, but I didn't get sick, because I walked a lot, and I stayed up in the air, on the top. So I managed not to get sick.
- SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when—
- GODA: Oh, yes!
- SIGRIST: Did you know what that was, and understand?
- GODA: Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely.
- SIGRIST: Tell me what happened once you got into New York.
- GODA: Once I got into New York, there was a very jovial, nice Immigration Officer, and I was very happy to see him. And he asked me for his paper, and I saw, when I got my visa I had to get some x-rays, because of my previous health history, at the Consulate in Zurich. And I showed it to him, "Here it is." "Oh no, that's no good! You have to go to Ellis Island." So, they took me to Ellis Island. It's a very short story, by the way, and I remember that there was a big room, and when I had to go to the men's room, somebody came with me, locked, opened, closed, whatever. And then they put me into the hospital, and the hospital—they tried to take my temperature, and they gave me this little thermometer in my mouth. I didn't know what to do with it, because in Europe you use the thermometer under your arm! And this, I almost chewed it! And they were mad at me that I don't know how to use it! Anyway, I arrived probably on a Friday. I don't know exactly, but I think it was a Friday, and I probably spent a day or two at the hospital. And Monday morning my uncle came with probably a little cash, and in ten minutes I was liberated.
- SIGRIST: Did you know what Ellis Island was? When the Immigration Officer said, you know, "You're going to Ellis Island," I mean, did you know what that was?

GODA: Probably not. Probably not. But I was very happy seeing New York; that I know, and the Statue of Liberty.

SIGRIST: Was there anything else about the Ellis Island experience that sticks out in your mind? Some other people who were there, or--?

GODA: Unfortunately, nothing. The only thing, you know, I stayed a very short period of time, and I remember this problem with a nurse who couldn't believe that I cannot take my temperature [laughs]. And otherwise, you know, I was lucky to get out quickly, because people were staying there for a long time.

SIGRIST: The uncle who came to get you—was this the uncle who had been in America for thirty years?

GODA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you really don't know this man at all? You've never met him before?

GODA: Oh yes, he was in Hungary. He was in Hungary in 1946.

SIGRIST: I see.

GODA: He spent a summer with us.

SIGRIST: Where did he take you?

GODA: When I came from Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Yes, where did you uncle--?

GODA: A five cents ride on the subway [laughs], that I remember! But where? I think up in the Bronx; I'm not sure where I stayed. But then he went to New Jersey, and he bought a brand new car when I arrived. A beautiful car it was! And they stayed there for a while, and then they moved to Washington D.C.

SIGRIST: Is that where your parents were, in Washington?

GODA: No, no, they were together.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of how you felt when you saw your parents? Because you were, you know, you're a young adult at this point.

- GODA: Nothing, nothing I remember of. I mean, I haven't—it wasn't such a long period of time that I didn't see them, and I had constant correspondence with them.
- SIGRIST: Tell me, for instance, in your first month in America, things that struck you as being unusual, or things that you really liked. What made an impression on you when you first got here?
- GODA: Well, I had a not so happy impression, that I traveled up to the Bronx on the elevated highway, elevated subway, and that wasn't pretty. That wasn't pretty at all! You know, you see the top of the houses, and the things outside, the ladders outside, and all these things. So it wasn't a nice view at all! I really don't remember—oh yes, I walked on Broadway, very impressive. The Times Square was awfully impressive because of the lights around you in the day. And suddenly I met some people from the boat in Times Square. Otherwise, I don't remember specifically what impressed me.
- SIGRIST: Well, and of course, I mean, you'd been to major cities before.
- GODA: Yes, yes.
- SIGRIST: So it may not have been all that new. Talk to me about learning English, and that whole process.
- GODA: Okay. Well, that comes to another stage of the whole thing. I went to Washington D.C., and I went to an Americanization school there, where there was a lady, an older lady, who obviously was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, and at least very fond of her, because every day we read an article, because she was in Paris at that time, on the NATO, or not NATO, UN Delegation, or something like this. Or UNESCO, I don't know. And there was an article in the *Washington Post* every single day about which she wrote. [Coughs] And we read it, but I didn't learn much there, because you know, you hear the other accents, and it was just fun!
- SIGRIST: Was it specifically for adults, or were there children at the school?
- GODA: I think it was for adults; I really don't remember. But that brings up the next phase of this whole thing, which is even more interesting. I went out with this girl who's father was a Congressman, and I decided—I was very lonely here—to marry her. And the law at that time, the Immigration Law, was that you had to marry the person outside of the country in order to apply for a visa of them. So we decided that she's going to come to Paris; I'm going to go to Paris, and we are going to get married and then apply for a visa. But, I was drafted. I got Four-A on the Selective Service. And [unclear] I just pulled out a letter. I went for an exam, and in the meantime

there was a guy writing articles in all the Washington magazines, and I wrote to him, because he was expert in Selective Service things. And I wrote to him something, which I don't remember what, but he answered me, and here is the letter what he answered, which I haven't seen for a good number of years. But it is, Associated Press. You read it, because probably you read it better than I do.

SIGRIST: Well why don't you read it out loud for us on the tape? Mr. Goda is reading this response letter that he received at that time.

GODA: Okay, so I asked him to look into my matter, so I can go over to Paris and marry this girl. And then he wrote me back [reads]: Dr Mr. Goda—that is November 1<sup>st</sup>, obviously, 1948. No, '47--'48. [Reads] Well, you certainly did have a problem, but it appears you can now relax and count on getting to Paris to marry your girl. I have it, unofficially, that you did not pass your physical. Of course, even if you had passed it, you still had a chance, but God knows how much [unclear]. Now, will you do me a small favor? Will you, as soon as you get to Paris, call the American Embassy, and ask to speak to Miss Julie Barnes of the European Cooperation Administration, and when you get her on the phone, tell her that Major Nile has an urgent message for her, and that she is to write me immediately. Miss Barnes is an old friend of mine, and I will appreciate more than you know if you will do this favor. Now Thomas Nile, good luck to you. That was a very important thing, because I had a contact immediately to the American Embassy. But that comes also later. So I wanted to marry her, and that was the only way to do it, to go to Paris. So I decided after this letter that I can go, and bought a passage on a freighter to go over, but luckily there was a longshoremen's strike, and the whole East coast was closed except Baltimore, and they called me in a hurry that I can go with the Holland America Line first class [laughs] if I want to, for the same hundred dollar fare, or whatever it was! Anyway, I had a fantastic trip over to Holland, and but before this, since I went to this Americanization school, and we read Eleanor Roosevelt's article, and in this, Mrs. Roosevelt said that the French children have no soap to clean themselves. So the class decided that we are going to send the French children soap. So they decided this, and they decided also to write a letter, and everybody, the whole class, signed it, and I was the one who took it to Mrs. Roosevelt. So I said, "Okay, I'm going to take it." So [pause] I went, and arrived to Paris, got married—wait a minute, no, we didn't get married. I went to Mrs. Roosevelt's office. There was a Mrs. Thompson there who was her secretary, and I got an idea from this guy who helped us who was a friend of Roosevelt that—he gave me the idea: why don't you ask Mrs. Roosevelt to be your witness? You have nobody in Paris; she would be a wonderful witness for your wedding! So that's what I did. And then when the wedding day came, I got a telegram from her, that "Sorry, I am busy, blah, blah, blah, but wish you the very best, and if you need anything—". I

think I have the telegram here somewhere. Anyway, we got married, and I sat down, and in my poor English I wrote a long letter that I want to go back because I want to continue my studies, and in January the classes start, and blah, blah, which wasn't true, but I wrote it [laughs], and sent it to her. Nothing happened, and then I got a letter, and I think it's here. "Immediately come to the Consulate." And then by that time, I contacted this woman, so I had a contact already. So I went into the Consul's office, and I had very good eyes at that time, and I saw my letter on his desk! And it was true that that was my letter, with probably a few lines on the side from Mrs. Roosevelt. And within a couple weeks, I got the visa for my wife. At that time, there was a three year waiting period for American citizen to bring out his wife, and I got it in two weeks or so [laughs].

SIGRIST: What was your wife's name?

GODA: Katherine Gyorki, that was her maiden name.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it?

GODA: G-Y-O-R-K-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

GODA: So I married her in November, and Christmas we were skiing in the Alps [laughs], and in January we came out, and started our life.

SIGRIST: Did you go back to Washington?

GODA: No, no, by that time my parents rented an apartment in Forest Hills, and we stayed with them for a short period of time, and I started working, and my wife started working, and we rented an apartment in Cypress Hills at that time.

SIGRIST: Cypress Hills? Is that in Queens?

GODA: That is on the border of Brooklyn and Queens, actually in Brooklyn. At that time, it was a good area; today I don't think it is.

SIGRIST: Tell me about getting the first job in America, and how you went about doing that, and any difficulties you had once you got it?

GODA: That's a good question. Well, my first experience was in Washington, you know, because I stayed in Washington for several months during the summer of 1948, and I went to an advertisement. And I don't know how much they paid, probably a dollar an hour or something like this. And I got

the job, and I said to the person who hired me that in the fall I'm going back to school. Ha, he kicked me out like hell!

[End of Tape Two, Side A/Start of Tape Two, Side B]

SIGRIST: What kind of a job was that that you saw the advertisement for?

GODA: Well I learned during the war tool and die making.

SIGRIST: Oh, uh-huh, tool and die making.

GODA: Tool and die making, in Hungary. You know, during the '38-'39 period, I worked for three years in our own factory, and I learned this. So I don't know what the job was; I don't remember, but that's what I was shooting for. So I learned. And then when I got to New York, I know that I was walking streets, and then I saw a sign that there's a machine shop, or something like this. I went in and asked. And it happened to be I was walking on Queens Boulevard, and I went in and—that wasn't my first job, that was probably a second job—and it turned out to be a Hungarian guy. And he said, "Okay, I'm going to hire you. How much did you get?" I said, "A dollar thirty-five an hour." "Oh, a dollar seventy-five? Okay." So I learned the important lesson here, you know? He misunderstood, or I said it wrong, I don't know. But anyway, I got the job, and ah, it was very difficult. I got one after the other, and I got a little more here, and there. And then finally I got a scholarship from Free Europe, which was actually a CIA-run operation, again through connections, and they paid my tuition for graduate school. And I went to NYU, and I got a master's degree in industrial management, which then changed everything, of course, because when I got my degree, I could get an engineering job, which—in the beginning it wasn't easy, but in 1950—I think '55 or '56, I got a very good job, and from then on I kept on getting better and better positions.

SIGRIST: Was there something about being in America that you didn't like, or something that was very difficult for you to adapt to?

GODA: Not really.

SIGRIST: You mentioned you had been lonely, being here.

GODA: Well, I was very lonely at the beginning, when I was in Washington, I tell you, for several reasons. First of all, 1948 was one of the warmest, hottest summers, and at that time there was no air conditioners anywhere, except for the Library of Congress, which was not even air conditioned, but some kind of ice-cooled thing. And I spent most of my time in the Library of Congress, doing nothing. And we were sleeping on the edge of the Potomac because of this tremendous humidity and heat. They closed

the government offices for a long period of time. Every time it was over a hundred degrees and a hundred humidity, they closed. It was a miserable, miserable summer! And beside then, I went down to, when I arrived—I'm going a little back, pedaling back—when I arrived to Washington, I had to go down to Miami, because actually I was enrolled in the University of Florida, Miami, I don't know. And I took a train down, and then I arrived in this heat, in the summer—it was the spring, rather, and I didn't speak the language. And I was there for a day or two, and I said I had enough, and I came back [laughs]. The heat was the one which I didn't like, the heat and humidity.

SIGRIST: So that made a big impression, just how hot--?

GODA: Yeah, that was really the worst part of everything. Otherwise I had no problems and no dislikes or special likes.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father, of course, wanted to go back to Hungary, at least initially, but your mother didn't. Why did she like it in America so?

GODA: She was much more progressive than my father, first. Secondly, I was here. And probably she saw the things coming more than my father. My father successful there, and he wasn't here. So they finally bought a launderette, and they are running a launderette to make a living, which was a very tough business at that time.

SIGRIST: Right, and of course, as you say, they had come from, you know, a good business in Budapest.

GODA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you ever return to Hungary?

GODA: Oh, many times.

SIGRIST: When was the first time you returned to Budapest?

GODA: I divorced my first wife in '50—I think '54, no, '56. And we had a daughter. And then I remarried in 1960, and I married a Hungarian girl who came during the Revolution. And her mother was living in Hungary, and as soon as possible, we went to visit her, which was in, I would say probably in '68 or so, something like this. And from then on, either we brought her out, or we went every single year.

SIGRIST: What did it feel like the first time you went back to Budapest? What did it feel like to be there?

GODA: Terrible, terrible. First of all, they took our passports on the train, and we were shaking like this, that we were afraid they are not going to give it back. That was a full Communist regime at that time. But we had a legal visa; everything was legal. Very scary, very scary—so scary that in the hotel room we were not talking; we were afraid everything was bugged. It was quite unpleasant. For example, I wanted to rent a car, and sure enough, they brought me a brand new car, and about three or four people came with it, and I had to drive to see—they wanted to see that I can drive. And finally they let me have the car, and it turned out that it was the—the license plate on the car was the Hungarian Secret Service license plate [laughs]. But anyway, I had the car, and I used it. But we were so scared. You know, they weren't used to renting. Anyway, the first time it was very scary. Later on, no. Later on, no.

SIGRIST: What was the name of your second wife?

GODA: Veronica, and her maiden name was Lamendorfs.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

GODA: L-A-M-E-N-D-O-R-F-S, Lamendorfs.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned you had a daughter by the first marriage?

GODA: Susan.

SIGRIST: And did you have any children in the second marriage?

GODA: No, only one from the first marriage.

SIGRIST: I see. Was your wife—you said her mother was still living in Hungary?

GODA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was she living in Budapest, or was it outside?

GODA: Yes, Budapest.

SIGRIST: Did you ever bring your wife's mother to live in America?

GODA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes? What year did you finally bring her over to live?

GODA: No, just for several months.

SIGRIST: Oh, but she never actually came here to live? Just visit?

GODA: No, not for good. Not for good. She was staying with us here. I'm here for thirty-four years, in this apartment.

SIGRIST: In this apartment, wow! Well, let me ask a couple final questions.

GODA: Sure.

SIGRIST: One is: at this point in your life, when you look back on this life, what are you the most proud of in your life?

GODA: Well, that I married my second wife, and the relationship with her for thirty-four years. Unfortunately she died a year ago.

SIGRIST: Oh, I'm sorry.

GODA: And she was very young and very beautiful. So I think that was [unclear], one of my. Secondly, I was making out very well, financially. And I had a manufacturing plant, and I was doing extremely well, and my wife became a stockbroker, and she was doing very well.

SIGRIST: So you had a good life together?

GODA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What personality traits in you are inherently Hungarian?

GODA: Oh, I'm tough, I think. You know, I have developed the cancer, eleven years ago, and I'm fighting it since then. It didn't bother me too much, but it's something I have to constantly concern with. Because I managed to survive the average; the average is about seven years. And so far I am eleven and a half. Meantime, you know, my wife got cancer, and she died. So life was very tough for me health-wise in the last few years, especially I developed another rare disease three years ago which is terrible. So that's—right now my problem is health, to try to survive, and try not to get an infection, and things like this. And now that I am alone, it's more difficult.

SIGRIST: But that Hungarian toughness kind of holds you?

GODA: I think the toughness pulls me through. The toughness pulls me through. I have lots of friends; they are very helpful, and my daughter is fantastic! And I have a grandson, four and a half, beautiful little boy. Picture is over there.

SIGRIST: And what's his name?

GODA: Ben, Benjamin. And they live down in Maryland, so I don't see them very often, but occasionally.

SIGRIST: Before we end, I was wondering if you could speak some Hungarian for us on tape?

GODA: About what?

SIGRIST: Well, I realize this sort of puts one on the spot. Is there a poem or something that you could recite in Hungarian, or—I just want to get, you know, a minute or so of you speaking Hungarian on tape. We should have recorded the telephone call that you had [laughs] and were speaking it!

GODA: [Hungarian]

SIGRIST: Thank you. What does that mean?

GODA: Thank you?

SIGRIST: No, what were you saying?

GODA: Oh, I was trying to recite a poem that I like, which is about peace and peace and peace, by a well-known Hungarian poet, who wrote this before the wars. Unfortunately, I don't remember exactly the text, but I haven't read it for many, many years [laughs].

SIGRIST: Who was the author?

GODA: Nehi Babits.

SIGRIST: B-O-B--?

GODA: B-A-B-I-T-S, Babits. He's a well-known poet. So--

SIGRIST: Well Mr. Goda, I want to thank you very much for letting us—

GODA: Paul, you are welcome.

SIGRIST: --talk to you like this. We've been at it for quite a while.

GODA: Yeah.

EI-586/GODA

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with George Goda on Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1994, here in Manhattan. Again, thank you.

GODA: You are very welcome.

[End of Interview]