THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ABSENCE OF HUMANITY PROJECT (AOH)

MEMOIRIST: ANDRE STEINER
INTERVIEWER: UNKNOWN
DATE: DECEMBER 2, 1996
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GEORGIA

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Video 1>

INTERVIEWER: I’m here with Mr. Andre Steiner. It is December 2, 1996 at 10:30. Mr. Steiner, can you tell us about your experience in Slovakia and how you spent your years there?

ANDRE: My experience in Slovakia is so complicated that I don’t think that I should even try now to explain to you right in a few minutes that we have. In a nutshell, I would say that after a very successful five years of being an architect in Brno, after the Germans occupied the Czech lands [in 1938] . . . being from Bratislava, Slovakia, I had the opportunity to leave Brno and go to Bratislava, where a friend of mine [architect Endre Szönyi] and I edited an art magazine called Forum. That was a reason that I told myself that, “Let’s go back again where the German danger was not so great like it was in Brno.” Because Slovakia was basically an independent state where they had been not under occupation. It was only, I would say, under control of the Germans instead of an occupation. We felt a little bit freer, especially in the first few years. Even the Jewish community felt freer, compared like it was in the Czech lands. I continued to be an architect in Slovakia, together with my friend, architect Szonyi. Why I wanted to mention that [was] because, through him, I was smart enough to work for the state resort places in Piestany.

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1 Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic and the historical capital of Moravia.
2 The Munich Agreement of September 29-30, 1938 had permitted Germany to annex the Sudetenland. With Germany’s support, the Slovakian parliament proclaimed Slovakia independent on March 14, 1939. The next day, German troops occupied Bohemia and Moravia, declaring it a Protectorate, and Hungary seized the remnants of sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The Slovak Republic fell under the leadership of a Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso. His right-wing party (called the Hlinka [Slovak: People’s] party) established a fascist, authoritarian, one-party dictatorship, strongly influenced by the separatist Catholic clerical hierarchy in internal policy and closely allied with Nazi Germany.
3 Bratislava is the capital of present-day Slovakia and is situated on the border of Austria and Hungary.
4 When Czechoslovakia was annexed and occupied by Germany and Hungary in 1938, hundred of Jewish refugees fled to Bratislava. According to a census of December 15, 1940, there were about 88,951 Jews in Slovakia.
5 Forum was a monthly magazine on architecture, interior design and art edited by Andre Steiner and Endre Szönyi in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia from January 1931 until 1938.
6 In Slovakia, Jews were not under direct German rule but were subject to a regime that strove to follow National Socialist ideals. Between 1939 and 1940, the government passed a series of anti-Jewish laws that increasingly disenfranchised Jews, separating them both economically and socially from the rest of the country.
[Slovakia], which was, by chance, very important in the future development, which I had the opportunity to do for the Jewish community.\(^7\) Is that partly what you . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Then, when the Germans first started coming in and setting up camps . . .

ANDRE: No, the . . . A little bit later . . . I think in a year or so after I was working with architect Szonyi for Pieštany, the so-called UZ \([\text{Ustredna Zidov}]\) was organized by the Slovaks—not only by the Germans but by the Slovaks—to be in charge about the concentration of Jews in different work camps, which we, at that time, didn’t know what the real purpose was because at that time we didn’t know that there were some deportations were going to be organized from there.\(^8\) I was \(\text{working}\) as an architect employed by the \(\text{Ustredna Zidov}\) for the building department. As an architect for the building department, I was charged to meet with the Slovak authorities and build up the camps in Sereď\(^9\) and Nováky,\(^10\) and this third little camp in Vyhne,\(^11\)

\(^7\) Piešťany \([\text{Slovak: Piešťany}]\) is a popular spa town in western Slovakia.

\(^8\) The \(\text{Ustredna Zidov} \) \([\text{Slovak: Ústredňa Židov, or ÜŽ; Jewish Center}]\) was a Jewish institution organized by the Slovak government in 1940 to run Jewish affairs, similar to the \(\text{Judenrat} \) established by the Germans in occupied territories. The Jewish Center was headed by a starosta \([\text{Slovak: elder}]\), who was assisted by a council. The starosta was Arpad Sebestyen, who unhesitatingly obeyed the Slovakian authorities. Under increasing pressure from Germany, the Slovakian government adopted “The Jewish Code” in 1941, which established labor camps for Jews. Between March and October 1942, the Slovak authorities concentrated over 58,000 Slovak Jews in labor and concentration camps. In September 1941 there were some 80 centers for forced labor in Slovakia, employing 5,440 Jewish men. At the end of 1941 many of these centers closed, and the Slovakian Jews—including women and children—were concentrated in three labor camps located within Slovakian borders – Sereď, Nováky and Vyhne. Deportations soon followed.

\(^9\) Sereď \([\text{Slovak: Sereď}]\) is a town in southern Slovak Republic. In the winter of 1941-1942, a team of Jewish craftsmen was sent to a military camp near the town to prepare the camp for Jewish labor draftees. During the spring and summer of 1942, the authorities began using Sereď as a labor camp and 300 Jewish trained professionals were transferred to Sereď in order to set up a cement factory and a carpentry shop. During the summer of 1942, five transports took 4,500 Jews from the Sereď camp to Poland. After the last transport, the volume of production was expanded, and the camp profitably supplied manufactured goods both to the civilian market and to government agencies. Prisoners produced furniture, concrete pipes, wooden toys and many other products. Conditions for the roughly 1,300 inmates in the camp also improved; workers could get passes to leave the camp, classes were held for children, a pool and athletic field were available for their use, and a variety of cultural activities were permitted. Many Jews left to join the partisans when the camp was opened during the Slovak national uprising in August 1944. However, after the Germans put down the uprising, Sereď was taken under their control. From October 1944 to March 1945, 13,500 Jews were deported from Sereď to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Soviet army liberated the camp in April 1945.

\(^10\) Nováky \([\text{Slovak: Nováky}]\) is a town in central Slovakia. In late 1941, Jews were brought to the town and a labor camp began operating in mid-1942. Nováky, one of the largest labor camps in Slovakia, housed 1,600 Jewish prisoners in a former military building. Most were skilled craftsmen and carpenters who worked in workshops. The workshops in Nováky began operation in March 1942, at the same time as the deportations began. The products they produced were high quality and made the camp an economic success. The conditions at the camp were not bad: food rations were adequate, the prisoners ran their own school, medical clinics, and welfare institutions, and cultural activities such as drama, religious studies, and sports were allowed. In fact, the camp even had a swimming pool. An
which I didn’t have to build anymore because it was an abundant resort place. In Sered and Novaky, that is how I became involved in the Jewish battles, because before that I was a completely secular Jew who didn’t have too much to do with the Jewish community. This was my entrance into the Slovak Jewish community affairs.\footnote{12}

**INTERVIEWER:** Then after the camps were set up . . .

**ANDRE:** After the camps were set up, the deportations started.\footnote{13} The deportations were all the time under the [premise] that we are going to go to Germany to work.\footnote{14} Now, that being a plan and a little bit accustomed to positive thinking instead of negative thinking, I told myself: What if I would convince the Slovak authorities that instead of sending the Jewish very skilled workers to Germany, why not try to do something in Slovakia, and make them work in a profitable way here in Slovakia instead of send them to Germany? I still don’t remember how . . . because after I

\footnotetext{11}{Vyhne is a spa town located in the mountains of central Slovakia, near a nature preserve. It is known for its thermal swimming pools. In 1940, a camp was erected within an abandoned medical facility to house 326 Jewish refugees from Prague who had been imprisoned in Sosnowiec, Poland. When deportations of Slovakian Jews began in the beginning of 1942, the Jewish Center asked the Slovak government to establish camps where Jews could work and be spared from deportation. Vyhne soon became a textile factory that began producing goods. The conditions at the camp were not bad: the prisoners received adequate food rations, the children there had a school, and the inmates were even allowed to leave the camp from time to time. The camp closed during the Slovakian Uprising in August 1944.}

\footnotetext{12}{Many of the employees in the *Ustredna Zidov* [Slovak: Jewish Center] collaborated with the Nazis and some of those working at the center opposed the way the organization was run. Together with Jewish leaders not associated with the Jewish Center, they set up their own semi-underground agency called the “Working Group.” The group members were of different ideological and religious persuasions, and included Zionists, Orthodox, and assimilated members. Gisi Fleischmann and Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel were the leaders of the group. They worked together with Andrew Steiner, Tibor Kovács, Oskar Neumann and Rabbi Abba Frieder. They were supported by a larger group of public figures and activists in the various youth movements. Through a variety of methods including bribery, the Working Group led the efforts to rescue the remaining elements of the Slovak Jewish community from deportation. Partly as a result of their efforts, the deportations were stopped in October 1942. The Working Group played a major role in getting the camps Sered, Novaky, and Vyhne designated as labor camps so that their Jewish specialist workforces would be safe from deportation. All three camps employed both men and women, who, in return for their work, received shelter, food and clothing. Some institutions were set up in the camps for their benefit.}

\footnotetext{13}{In March 1942, Slovakia signed an agreement with Germany that permitted the deportation of the Slovak Jews. Between March and October 1942, 58,645 Jews were deported in 57 transports from transit camps in Zilina, Novaky, Michalovce, Sered, Poprad, Spisska Nova Ves, and Patronka—a temporary camp that had been erected in an abandoned factory on the outskirts of Bratislava. German authorities killed virtually all of the deported Slovakian Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Lublin/Majdanek, Sobibor and other locations in German-occupied Poland.}

\footnotetext{14}{Initially, the Slovakian government believed the Slovakian Jews were being sent to Germany as laborers. Contact was established at a very early stage between the deportees and the Jews left behind in Slovakia. As a result, the Jewish organizations in Slovakia and other neutral countries soon learned that the German authorities were actually murdering the Slovak Jews in German-occupied Poland. The Slovakian government, who was increasing under pressure from the Vatican and others who had heard the reports, halted deportations in the autumn of 1942. By then, nearly three-fourths of the entire Slovakian Jewish population had already been killed.}
told that in the leadership of the UZ that I’m going to speak with Dr. [Izidor] Koso, who was at that time the chief of presidium, that he should give us permission like that. That is why or how, I would say, that Steiner had a list, not only [Steven] Spielberg had a list of . . . What’s the name of this . . .

INTERVIEWER: [Oskar] Schindler.  

ANDRE: No, not only Schindler had a list—Steiner had a list. I went to Dr. [Izidor] Koso and explained [the idea] to him. He said, “Okay, give me a list. Who are those whom you would like to employ in these work camps?” He asked me again, “The first condition that I would give you the permission to do that, you will have to guarantee me that it’s not going to cost us—the Slovaks—anything, that you will be completely self-supporting.”

Now in connection with that, I would have to tell you something: How it is I really believe in coincidences. Now, what was a coincidence: Here I was [with] the idea to set up some work camps in the different places where parallel to the work camps concentration for deportation was going on, too. Now how should I start this? I had a friend in a building company who was that time involved in building some housing development where there was a need for around a thousand wooden staircases. I heard about it, that the man had the difficulty to get that done. I told myself, “That would be a very fine opportunity.” I would concentrate in cellars all the carpenters and woodworkers—Jewish woodworkers, give that list to Dr. Koso, and receive permission that all these professionals should be sent with their equipment and with their machinery to cellar. There we would put up a woodworking shop. I went to this friend of mine who was in charge of all the building of this, and told him that I would be very willing to organize the cellar in a way that we start out to do for [him] these wooden stairs. But for that he

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15 Dr. Izidor Koso (sometimes also Kesso or Kosso) was the Director General of the Slovakian Republic’s Prime Minister’s office.
16 Steven Spielberg (born 1948) is a Jewish American director, producer and screenwriter. In 1993, Spielberg directed and co-produced Schindler’s List, based on the book by Thomas Keneally of the same name.
17 Oskar Schindler (1908-1974) was an ethnic German born in Svitavy (Zwittau), Moravia (present-day Czech Republic). During World War II, he was a Nazi party-member who became a factory-owner and is credited with saving the lives of the almost 1,200 Jews he employed.
18 In 1942, a number of buildings in Sered, Vyhne and Novaky functioned as a concentration camp to serve the deportation policy, separated from the work camp by boundaries, and supervised by armed guards. When the deportations had ceased in November 1942, Sered, Vyhne and Novaky housed some 2,200 Jews. On May 31, 1943 the other camps were formally disbanded and the remaining "work Jews" were concentrated in the camps at Sered, Novaky, and Vyhne.
said, “Okay, but what kind of guarantee are you going to have that you are able to do that? You have all the machinery that is needed and so on what is necessary to that?”

Again a coincidence: At the same time there was what you call [unintelligible; 8:44; sounds like “Dunajska Velte”], a big exhibition. The framework of this exhibition in Bratislava, a Swiss firm had the most modern woodworking machinery on exhibition. We needed to go down with one of the leading cabinetmakers, looking at this machinery. He said, “Andre, if we would be able to buy this and install it in cellars, I can give you the guarantee that, in time, we would be ready with the thousand staircases.” Sure enough, I went back to this friend of mine. I told him, “Listen, I need 600,000 crowns,” because that was the price of the machinery.19 “Give it to me. I am going to buy the machinery there, install it in cellars immediately, and start now to fabricate for you the staircases.” You know anytime what happens: Nothing goes completely straight and easily. He said, “Andre, I cannot do that. I cannot give you so much money without a guarantee of the UZ that you are buying, first of all, the machinery, and you guarantee that you are going to deliver the staircases.” No again.

I went back to the UZ, submitted it to Dr. [Tibor] Kovacs, who was secretary, the whole idea that we need at least a letter of guarantee from the president of UZ, who refused.20 Here I was again with the big promises, and partly the successful permission to do that, and the UZ now was not willing to give me the letter of guarantee. In cases like that, it’s better you don’t speculate too much legality or no legality. I told my friend Kovacs, “Tibor, I tell you something: You know where the stamps are and everything from the UZ.” He was general secretary of it. “We are going to write a letter of guarantee and I’m going to sign for the president. The hell with it. What can happen? We are speaking about it not about legalities. We are speaking about it about saving human lives. Whether I have the legal right or not, so what? I’m going do it.” He said, “Fine.” We wrote a letter of guarantee. He took the stamp from the Ustredna Zidov. I

19 The Slovak koruna (sometimes also called the “Slovak crown”) was the currency of the Slovak Republic.
20 Dr. Tibor Kovacs was an assimilated Jew, who worked in the welfare office of the Jewish Center in Bratislava, primarily on matters having to do with labor. He was also a member of the Working Group. When the deportation of whole families from Slovakia began, Kovacs sat as the head of the Appeals Department, and attempted to impede the arbitrary deportation of families who had received deferrals. In October 1944 Kovacs himself was targeted for arrest. He was warned and went into hiding. After the war, he was the main witness in the trial of Dr. Anton Vasek, of the Slovakian Ministry of Interior, who was in charge of the deportation of Jews of Slovakia to their deaths. Kovacs committed suicide in Czechoslovakia in the 1950’s.
signed for the president and took this false letter of guarantee back to my friend. Based on that, he gave me the 600,000 crowns.

Taking the 600,000 crowns from him, we went out to the [unintelligible; 11:50; sounds like “Velte”], bought the machinery—everything that was there from the Swiss firm. I think Lurvinger was his name. He was the leading cabinetmaker. [We] took the whole group of Jewish cabinetmakers and carpenters. Two weeks later, we had this wonderful modern equipment in cellar. Now all that we had to buy was wood to be able to make the staircases, but now we had already the credibility that we are doing something, so we received from a Jewish woodman—not a woodworker—who sold construction wood. He delivered us all kind of wood we needed for the staircases.

Two months later, the 2,000 staircases had been fabricated and found in a superior quality, because the work was not only . . . first of all, it was done by outstanding machinery and most of the people who did this, the work, had been not carpenters but cabinet makers. We delivered to this UZ now, for this building company, superior staircases. Now that success was reported to Dr. Koso. That was the reason that he . . . that we proved that we can do something, what we promised, and he gave us the permission to build it up a little bit beyond that.

INTERVIEWER: In doing so, you went on to build . . .

ANDRE: By doing so, though certainly that was a so-called, what I called the “Steiner List.” I had an understanding with Dr. Koso and Pecuch21 and [Dr. Anton] Vasek22—who had been in charge about the camps—that all those who are being sent in, not for the case of concentration and to be sent out, that they would be exempt from deportation. That was, at that time, such a guarantee that a lot of professionals took that possibility and went into the cellar. We had not only cabinetmakers and carpenters, but we had a number of different other professions.

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21 Pecuch was deputy chief of the Slovakian Republic’s Ministry of the Interior.
22 Dr. Anton Vasek (1905—1946) was a Slovakian lawyer and politician who worked for the Slovakian Republic’s Ministry of the Interior during World War II. In April 1942, Vasek was put in charge of a new department, known as Section 14, which was responsible for the deportation of the Slovakian Jews. Nicknamed “The King of the Jews,” Vasek was known to accept bribes to keep Jews from deportations. After the war, Vasek was arrested by the Soviets and sentenced to death by the Czechoslovak People’s Court. He was hanged in Bratislava in July 1946.
In Novaky, for instance, another friend of mine, Dr. Mandel,\(^23\) took the opportunity and organized . . . they had very fine sewing machines. He made it full on . . . he had a list, too, and asked for women to be sent to Novaky. Each woman had to bring at least one sewing machine. Suddenly from nothing, in Novaky, we could set up a huge, big, I would say nearly a factory, for making shirts and different other textiles under the leadership of Dr. Mandel, where we concentrated hundreds and hundreds of women and hundreds and hundreds of sewing machines. That was the busiest of the work camps in Novaky.

Then suddenly, we had a number of what was Vyhne. What are we going to do with Vyhne? Again the coincidence: An uncle of mine, Dr. Biss, who was a chemist, had a very fine chemical factory, and it was taken away from him in the process of Aryanization in Slovakia.\(^24\) I told my uncle, “Why don’t you liquidate everything what you can here, and take as much as you can from what you have in your factory to Vyhne, and put out and organize a chemical factory in Vyhne?” Sure enough. Dr. Biss went to Vyhne and organized a chemical factory. We had [unintelligible; 16:10] on the list.

Sered had a very fine woodwork factory and he started to do wonderful high-quality furniture. In Vyhne, we had a high-quality chemical factory. In Novaky, we had a high-quality textile factory, basically. All what we did now, after we added, as we went along, according to the type of people who came into the whole . . . we had been simply wound up in a year with nearly a hundred different other little shops and produced anything what the professionals could produce. That really . . . the skillful marketing scale from Jewish boys. They had been sending out from all of Slovakia the salesman! Suddenly we became, really, a very, very successful sales organization, too. We made enough that all three factories, all the camps, became self-supporting and made it possible Dr. Koso, Dr. Vasek, and Pecuch . . . all those three had been very proudly pondering if they could do it and considering if there’s a very, really a positive contribution to the Slovak economy.

\(^{23}\) It is unclear who Andre is referring to, however, there was a survivor named Louis Mandel who later published a pamphlet documenting his experiences in Slovakia during the war called “The Tragedy of Slovak Jewry in Slovakia,” which can be read at https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Slovakia/Slovakia.html.

\(^{24}\) The Slovak Parliament passed a bill in September 1940 making it possible for the government to acquire Jewish industrial and commercial enterprises in a process known as "Aryanization." Aryanization meant the dismissal of Jewish workers and managers of a company and/or the takeover of Jewish-owned businesses by non-Jewish Germans who bought them at bargain prices fixed by government or Nazi party officials.
INTERVIEWER: That, in turn, stopped the deportations?

ANDRE: Stopped the . . . Why I am bringing it up now is because most of the books and most of the interviews . . . They even spoke with me and even though all the time asked for the Europa Plan. Europe Plan was . . .

<End Video 1>

<Begin Video 2>

ANDRE: . . . a very interesting, I would say, undertaking, and a very daring one, because through [Dieter] Wiscliceny and the Slovaks, we had a feeling that we had succeeded to stop deportations in Slovakia. After we stopped that, we had a feeling . . . the Orthodox Rabbi Weissmandel came up with the idea: “Andre, why don’t you go to Wiscliceny and propose to him the same type of closing and finishing deportation, not only in Slovakia, but now finishing deportation in Europe?” We would try now to get the money. We decided before the [American

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25 The Europa Plan was a large-scale rescue plan devised by the semi-underground Jewish organization Pracovna Skupina [Slovak: Working Group] in Bratislava, Slovakia. The plan was to essentially pay the Germans a ransom to stop the deportation of Slovakian Jews to Polish concentration camps. Negotiations began in November 1942 and lasted through August 1943. The group paid Nazi SS officer Dieter Wisliceny at least $20,000 in advance while they attempted to raise more money from many different Jewish and non-Jewish groups around the world—in particular the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Unfortunately, Heinrich Himmler ordered the negotiations to cease and Jews from Slovakia continued to be deported.

26 Dieter Wiscliceny (1911—1948) was an SS officer and deputy to Adolf Eichmann in the Jewish Affairs Department of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA). By 1940, he was acting as advisor on Jewish affairs to the Slovakian government, and took part in the deportation of Jews from Slovakia, Greece, and Hungary between 1942 and 1944. During that time, Wiscliceny accepted bribes from the Slovakian Jewish underground and led the ultimately failed negotiations known as the Europe Plan. After the war, Wiscliceny was sentenced to death and hanged in Bratislava in 1948.

27 The deportations of Slovakian Jews stopped in the autumn of 1942. Most members of the Working Group believed that they had succeeded in putting a stop to the deportations from Slovakia thanks to the bribes they had paid Wisliceny. The pause in deportations lasted for two years, during which time negotiations took place for the so-called Europa Plan—an ill-fated attempt to save all the Jews in Europe by paying ransom. The pause was really only a respite for the 24,000 remaining Slovakian Jews and deportations began again in the autumn of 1944.

28 Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel (1903—1956) was an Orthodox rabbi. In the spring of 1942, at the height of the deportation of the Slovakian Jews to their deaths, Rabbi Weissmandel and his colleagues in the so-called Working Group (an underground Jewish resistance) made an attempt to save the Jews of Europe. Rabbi Weissmandel was one of the initiators of the idea of paying a ransom to the SS in order to put a stop to the deportations to Poland. In 1944, the deportations from Slovakia to Auschwitz resumed. In October 1944 Rabbi Weissmandel and his family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Rabbi Weissmandel managed to escape from the deportation train and survived in hiding near Bratislava, but his wife and children were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. After the war, Weissmandel immigrated to the United States.
Jewish Joint Distribution Committee] or from the Swiss [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee] representative, if we are able to do the deal.  

Now nearly everybody speaks about this Europa Plan as an interesting part of the Holocaust history, but Europa Plan was not successful. Here were the three work camps, which I had organized, very successful, and to the end of the war. We succeeded to concentrate there something between 4,000 to 5,000 people. At least, as I think the time that the Slovak Uprising came, where we could open the doors of the camp and everybody was on his own and could go out in the private Slovak life. There was around, I would say, 3,000 to 4,000 Jewish people who could save their life based on these work camps. Here was something that a group of Jews—not only Andre Steiner because I couldn’t do it by myself . . . but I successfully . . . assembled a number of very highly skillful architects, workers, and business leaders who helped me to organize their camps and helped me to save that way around 3,000 or 4,000 Jewish lives.

INTERVIEWER: That’s great. That’s a great story.

ANDRE: That is, in a nutshell, the story of the work camps in Slovakia.

INTERVIEWER: Now in the Spielberg movie, there was a story about one of the higher echelon people and the bribes they were asking for . . .

ANDRE: No, see, it was not only . . . bribe was, I would say, two types of bribes. We had the dollar bribes with Wiscliceny. We had the Slovak crown bribes to Dr. Vasek. Here was Dr.

29 The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (commonly called “the Joint”) is a worldwide Jewish relief organization headquartered in New York that was established in 1914. During the Nazi era they tried to get Jewish refugees out of Europe. When war broke out they helped thousands of Jews in Poland with shelters and soup kitchens, hospitals, and educational and cultural programs. When the United States entered the war in 1941, the Joint shifted gears since it was not allowed to operate legally in enemy countries. They used international connections to channel aid to Jews in conquered Europe. The Working Group was in contact with the Joint through Swiss representatives.

30 The Slovak National Uprising or 1944 Uprising was an armed insurrection organized by the Slovak resistance movement during World War II. Groups including the Communist Party, Slovak nationalists, and a group of Slovak army officers hoped to overthrow the pro-Nazi government of Jozef Tiso. On August 28, 1944 German troops invaded Slovakia to suppress the country's Partisans. At that point, the uprising erupted. More than 2,000 Jews also participated in the revolt, including underground fighters from the Jewish labor camps at Novaky, Sered, and Vyhné. In October the Nazis sent in thousands of soldiers to destroy the rebellion. On October 27 the uprising headquarters were crushed, signaling the end of the uprising.

31 In June 1943, there were more than 3,000 Jews in the work camps at Novaky, Sered, and Vyhné and some 650 Jewish forced laborers in various other labor centers. The Working Group's bribes of Slovak officials, which led to the opening of the work camps is therefore believed to have saved as many as 4,000 Slovak Jews from certain death.
Koso, who we all the time said, “Under no circumstances try to bribe him with dollar and thing like that.” Dr. Koso . . . we had been bribing him, telling him that we are doing something good for the Slovak Republic. The bribe of Koso was through his wife, but that is such a completely different story that I don’t want to go into that.\(^{32}\)

The other type of bribe was the excellent quality of furniture. I started with my little group of architects who had been assembling, designing furniture for the state resort places in [unintelligible resort town; 3:40], and the state resort places in [unintelligible resort town; 3:41], and even the Center for Journalism in Bratislava, and told them, “We are going to design for you this furniture and Sered’s going to fabricate it and get it to you.” That was the other type of bribe. By bribing high-quality furniture and high quality other different items, which could be, could distribute to bribe the Hungary-Slovak authorities right now.

We concentrated with these bribes all of the time into places where we knew that we could add something to make the lives of the work camps easier. For instance, one of the big questions was a kosher kitchen in the camps.\(^{33}\) Weissmandel, the Orthodox rabbi, that was a very, very important question for him. He came to me to ask me, “Andre, why don’t we make a kosher kitchen in camp?” I really was starting to laugh about him. I told him, “Listen, if you are not satisfied that we organized something, a life-saving surrounding . . . Now you want to complicate it even with a religious question of kosher kitchen or no kosher kitchen. As far as I am concerned, I couldn’t care less.” He said, “Okay, Andre, you don’t care, but we—the Orthodox Jews—care tremendously, and for us it would be very, very important. Even if there’s money involved and bribes involved, go ahead and do it.”

Now I had to go back again to Dr. Koso and ask him to make again a kosher kitchen, because Rabbi Weissmandel really . . . I have to mention here . . . he had tremendous influence on me. He was, for me, I would say like, I was not very religious at that time, and religion was not very important to me. Here I was exposed to a man for whom religion was tremendously important. He was really like a prophet. If he looked at me with his warm eyes, he told me,
“Andre, don’t be afraid. Go to Koso. You will see he will permit it.” Sure enough. Best of this, my experience, the human experience with Rabbi Weissmandel, it gave me the strength to go to Dr. Koso and ask him, “Dr. Koso, here I am faced with that question. I know that for you it is not important. For me it is not important. For them, it is important. And the more satisfied we make these inhabitants now—humanly and even religiously—they will work even better.” Dr. Koso gave me permission and told me, “Go back to Dr. Vasek and Pecuch,” who was in-charge about the camps, “and tell them that I gave you permission to organize kosher kitchen.” Here we have been next to the life saving of the three camps, it became even religion saving, too. We succeeded to make their life more satisfactory. That is the story of the kosher kitchen in the camp.

INTERVIEWER: How long did this go on for? This went on for two or three years?

ANDRE: That went on . . . the whole camps went on till the Slovak Uprising. The bribery went not to [unintelligible; 7:38], not only to the highest Slovak groups [but also] the Slovak [Hlinka] Guards, who had been in charge about the security of the camps, had been bribed by us, again with Slovak crowns and with different things which we produced in the camps. One of the conditions with the bribes was that the time that the uprising came, we made all the three camps, the Slovak camp security, to open the gates and let everybody go on their own. That way, I can say that the three camps had been a life-saving entirety, because after the Slovak Uprising came, everybody could go out. Now they had been on their own and saved themselves as they could. But the basic saving devices were these three working camps. That’s why I consider that if anybody comes to interview me, forgot about the details which are very interesting [of] the so-

34 The Hlinka Guard was the militia maintained by the Slovak People's Party in the period from 1938 to 1945. It was named after Andrej Hlinka. In 1942, the Hlinka Guard helped the Nazis capture Slovak Jews and deport them to extermination camps. However, the guard discontinued its participation in those activities after the Vatican representative in Slovakia denounced the deportations. After the 1944 Slovak National Uprising, the SS took over the guard and used it for its own purposes.

35 Although the work camps in Sered, Novaky, and Vyhne were successful in preventing the deportations of an estimated 4,000 Jews who were employed there between 1942 and 1944, it is not known how many of those survived after the Slovak Uprising in the autumn of 1944. The camps were dismantled during the uprising and the Jews who had been held there escaped. Some Jews chose to join in the fighting, while others hid or assumed false identities as Aryans. A minority escaped to Hungary. After the uprising, German forces entered Slovakia, and together with loyal Slovakian forces, put down the uprising. Approximately 12,600 Jews were concentrated in Sered and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Theresienstadt, and other camps in Germany. An estimated 3,500 were also killed fighting with partisans or after being caught in hiding. Perhaps half of the Jews deported out of Slovakia during and just after the uprising ended in October 1944 survived. In all, between 70,000 and 75,000 Slovakian Jews (over 80 percent of Slovakia’s total Jewish population) are estimated to have died during World War II.
called Europa Plan and my dealings with Wiscliceny and so on. Basically those have not been too successful. But here is something that a group of Jewish boys created for Jewish people, and organized Jewish life, and became successful.

INTERVIEWER: It’s amazing how the story parallels that of Schindler’s.

ANDRE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I guess over the years we’ll find out that there were even more circumstances in different areas where that . . .

ANDRE: Sure, because now after Professor Bauer in Jerusalem wrote a book about Jews for sale . . .

It’s a very interesting book, it’s not too far . . . I think [it was published] around two years ago in 1994, where he describes the different other possibilities in different other countries in Europe where, through bribing, they had been able to buy Jews because Jews were for sale, and nearly everywhere where the Germans were, bribe was possible.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you’d like to recount?

ANDRE: No, I think . . .

INTERVIEWER: I think that was great.

<End Video 2> INTERVIEW ENDS

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36 Yehuda Bauer is a leading Holocaust scholar who published a book called *Jews for Sale: Nazi Jewish Negotiations 1933–45* in 1994. In the book, Bauer presents multiple instances that took place between 1942 and 1945 where the Germans were willing to exchange Jewish lives for money but Western reluctance or a lack of money being raised often caused negotiations to fail.