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UC SAN DIEGO

I am Lubo

A Hidden Life

May 08, 2019

1 hour, 16 minutes, 33 seconds

Speakers: Lou Pechi and Janice Steinberg

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time	Transcription
00:00	[The Library UC San Diego]
00:04	[A Holocaust Living History Workshop Event]
00:09	[May 8, 2019 / I am Lubo: A Hidden Life – with Louis “Lubo” Pechi]
00:10	<p>Susanne Hillman: I'm delighted to welcome all of you, so many of you, to today's program. I'm Susanne Hillman the Program Coordinator. First of all, I would like to thank our sponsors, the UC [University of California] San Diego Library, and Jewish Studies; without their support, needless to say, we would not be able to continue our work. We have quite a full program tonight, which I think is only fitting in view of the fact that we are honoring Lou and Estelle Dunst. They deserve a full program, so I will limit my remarks to two points. First, please note that our next and final event of the academic year will be on June 5th. We will welcome a world-renowned historian Christopher Browning to campus and I hope you can join us. We will shortly hear Dr. Erik Mitchell, the Audrey Geisel University Librarian providing a proper introduction to this event. He will be followed by Janice Steinberg who will introduce today's speaker, Mr. Lubo Pechi. Do I say that correctly, Pechi? Pechi? Okay. After Mr. Pechi's talk, Professor Deborah Hertz will provide closing remarks. Bob Gerard will then lead us in raising a glass in honor and memory of Estelle and Lou Dunst. I hope you will all be able to join us for that as well. As you can see, there are quite a few parts to this program; so without further ado, I would like to ask Erik to come to the podium.</p>
01:37	<p>Erik Mitchell: Uh, thank you so much Susanne, and thank you, all of you, for being here. It means a lot for the Library to be part of this program, and we're really honored to have you here with us tonight. Um, I wanted to uh, start tonight uh, by taking a moment to recognize the families and those affected by the senseless act of hatred uh, that occurred at uh, Congregation Chabad in Poway just recently. So, maybe take a short moment of silence. [pause] Thank you. Um, as Susanne mentioned, Lou and Estelle are amazing supporters of this program, and I'm honored to be introducing the program tonight - or introducing someone who will introduce the program - because this program honors a man who could have lived a life consumed by anger and resentment, Lou, after his horrific experiences during World War II. I never had the pleasure of seeing Lou speak. I understand he was an engaging speaker, and a dynamic speaker, and one who really dedicated his life to communicating the experience he had and helping others understand the impact of the Holocaust, and how to live a good life influenced by peace, compassion, and love. I understand that by the time of his death in 2015, at the age of 89, he had spoken to thousands of school children, community members, dignitaries, and judges, sharing his personal story and helping us all remember. After Lou's passing, Estelle remained incredibly committed to this workshop, and she established an endowment in her husband's honor to continue his legacy and his tolerance.</p>

- 03:38 Erik Mitchell: Estelle's gift and on behalf of Lou, helped ensure that this, this program would sustain and grow, and we're really honored to have a Dunst lecture every year as part of our Holocaust Workshop. Lou's endowment also helps fund ongoing access to the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive and we're one of just three universities on the West Coast to have access to this incredible archive, and it's an amazing resource for our UC San Diego students and faculty. This archive um, well it, we all know the archive well. It helps ensure that uh, people can gain access to incredible stories of the Holocaust and, which includes Lou as well. So Estelle's generosity didn't end with her death, and we're really fortunate that her commitment to the Holocaust Living History Workshop continues. And so, after her death, Estelle even grew Lou's endowment more. And so, we're honored to to recognize that tonight, and I'm really glad to have uh, Estelle's friends and supporters - the Gerards - here with us to help us remember Estelle and Lou. So with that, I think I'll seed the podium. Uh, it's my pleasure to introduce Janice Steinberg who will present tonight's featured speaker. Janice earned her MA [Master of Arts] in Social Ecology from UC Irvine and is the award-winning author of the novel *The Tin Horse* published by Random House.
- 05:19 Janice Steinberg: Wow, there are a lot of you here. The German army occupied Croatia in April 1941. By the end of that year, two-thirds of Croatia's 37,000 Jews have been sent to camps run by Croatian fascists; most of them killed on arrival. During the next two years, Germany deported many of the remaining Jews to Auschwitz. Out of 37,000, only 7,000 survived. Lubo Pechi was one of the survivors. He has a powerful story to tell and no one can tell it better than he can. I wanted to share just a little about the Lubo Pechi that I met a few years ago. Lubo and his wife Lenore live a few blocks from me in Bankers Hill, and I think we met through a tai chi class, but it may have been because Lubo and my husband are both playwrights. Although Lubo and Lenore moved to San Diego in retirement, this is actually where they met; that happened in 1960 after Lubo got out of the Air Force. And it must have been a really whirlwind courtship because they were married two months later on Lenore's birthday at Congregation Beth Israel, in the building that is now Ohr Shalom
- 06:46 Janice Steinberg: Before serving in the US [United States] Air Force, Lubo was in the Israeli Air Force, which he may get around to talking about but he may not, because by the time he was, was in his 20s he had enough life experience for most people's five lifetimes. He also, in multiple countries, and languages, and I think that he speaks enough languages for ten people. Um, he claims not to speak Hungarian but I introduced him to a Hungarian friend last year, and he immediately started speaking Hungarian to her. He's an alumnus of San Diego State. He got a BS [Bachelor of Science] in Physics there. He initially worked doing circuit design and when he was at Rohr Industries, he was involved in wiring the trains for the BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] system in San Francisco. So the next time you ride on BART, you're on Lubo's circuitry. After doing engineering for 15 or 20 years, he got

tired of working with equipment; he wanted to work with people. And you will see, he is the most gregarious upbeat person. It's hard to imagine you, just in a room doing nothing but dealing with equipment. He got an MBA [Masters in Business Administration] from Pepperdine University and got into sales and marketing, running world sales for power supply companies. He's always been physically active. As a young man in Israel, he did competitive swimming and won some medals. Now, in addition to doing tai chi, he's an avid walker. He's happy to go miles at a time. He's also a man after my own heart; he's a dancer. He remembers dancing as a chocolate soldier as a child in Croatia. Living on a kibbutz during the early days of the state of Israel, he did Israeli folk dancing, and he and Lenore still do folk dancing.

09:01 Janice Steinberg: Um, some of his first published writing was a monthly column for a folk dance magazine he called the column, Dancing with Two Left Feet. A gift for humor and I'd say irreverent humor, seems to be part of the secret of his resilience. Even in his memoir, which grew out of testimony he gave to the Spielberg Survivors of the Shoah History Foundation, there are lively stories of mischief he got up to with childhood friends, and he was he was a real scamp. Um, he got into all kinds of trouble. Um, I want to say a word about the title of his memoir, *I am Lubo*. This kind of memoir title anyone might choose, but for Lubo Pechi there's a unique significance. As I'm sure, he'll discuss - I'm, this is your water - I'll get you another one. Okay. During his first several decades he had to assume, excuse me, he had to assume multiple identities, not only as a boy taking refuge with a Catholic family in Croatia. Oh, thank you. But when he came to the US in the 1950s, he had to hide the fact that he was Jewish. In one situation after another, he had to go by a different name than the one he was given at birth. Calling his memoir *I Am Lubo* is a profound act of claiming an identity that others tried to snuff out. I am so honored to introduce Lubo Pechi.

11:13 Lou Pechi: Thank you very much. After this uh, we're over. Uh, you heard the speech. Uh anyway, I'm, I'm really thrilled to see all the people here. It just makes me feel at home. And as uh, Janice said my name - I'm Lubo and Lubo in Croatian means love. Ľubomír is my original name, Lubo. And after the invasion of Croatia by the Germans, I had to hide, not only my name, I had to hide my religion, and I had to hide my identity, but I was surrounded with love. There were so many people that sheltered me and gave me, gave me uh, they surrounded me. They protected me and my book is dedicated to the people who sacrificed their life. They gave their life, their, their security, to save my life. And thanks to them, I'm here today. So what, what, what are, what am I going to talk after Janice pretty much said everything that I was planning to talk about? I, I want to talk about first of all where and when the book takes place, so you know the geography, you know where it is. Then I want to, would like to talk about what the book is all about, and uh, how I wrote this book. And of course, why did I write it? So let me start, let me start with where everything, everything happened.

- 13:08 Lou Pechi: I was born in Zagreb, Croatia - which is the capital of Croatia. My parents pretty much came from uh, well somewhere from Hungary into, into Brod. It's called Slavonski Brod, Slavonian Brod, and right across the river is the Bosnian Brod, and there was a river across it, and it was one city, okay. They all got along fine. Uh, and my my grandparents lived in Belgrade, so we were talking about Belgrade. And uh, I lived, I lived, basically my life was in three continents, four countries, and seven cities. So Belgrade, Brod, Zagreb uh, that dual city across here from Croatia to uh, Fiume. Rijeka means a river; Fiume means river in Italian. Uh, there was a river here this was the border. Uh and then Treviso, we'll talk about it. Venice, Rome uh, back to Zagreb. And I didn't put Israel there. I lived in Israel seven years. I was there for the grand opening in 1948, uh young, young, 14-year-old youngster. And eventually came to the [United] States. So let me - all this traveling though, I always wanted to get an education but because I changed, I changed countries, I changed languages, I changed, I was never stable enough. But I got the best education that somebody could get because I lived with people. I lived different countries. I saw different customs. I, I saw a lot of new things happening. And one of the things that I got out of my travel, I found out that people, all people, are the same. We all look for the same things. We have the same needs. We go on the family, we want peace, we want love. I don't care who you, where you, who you talk - in every country that I've seen it. I've seen the same thing.
- 15:33 Lou Pechi: So what is this, what is this book about? Uh, this is my family. Okay, this is me uh, just looking at the, smiling at the birdie that the photographer is going to show me, and my mom [Piroska Petrich] - young, young woman - and my dad [Stjepan Peci]. We had a very peaceful family in, in Zagreb uh, vibrant life. We participated in Jewish Community Center. We weren't very religious, but the high holidays were always celebrated. And uh, I want to share my uh, my family with you. Okay, this is, this is my extended family, from my grandfather uh, his wife and uh, I want to just point couple of people to you. This is, this is my uh, my mom's, my Aunt Roška, and her young son Srećko. And I want you to look at this young, good-looking young boy because we'll encounter it later on in my story. And then this is my Uncle Larry and my uncle uh, Mark [Sidon]. And who do you think this is? That's my mom. Why is she, has her head shaven? Well because she was a tomboy, and she would run around in this little town, in Brod, with other, with, with, with her brother - a little bit older brother - and get in trouble all the time. And I think that's where I inherited a lot of the same uh, feeling. Uh, luckily I um, she is, she's here a little bit uh, this is her. And I, we weren't religious but we did celebrate uh, holidays and my favorite uh, holiday was Purim. And here he is, my uncle Larry, and my grandmother - all dressed up as Esther - and my Uncle Mark, and there is my mom with the hair.
- 17:57 Lou Pechi: Now, I loved Purim because I loved, my hero was Popeye, and I loved spinach because I wanted to be as strong as he was, and I would eat it all the time. But as I said, we, oh and then also I, our life was very nice. I, I performed as it, one

- of the chocolate soldiers, as Janice mentioned, and we had, we, if you look at this you can see that we were pretty well off. Uh, I don't know if you noticed I, I just noticed when, when this got a little bit bigger - my mom's alligator bag. So, well-dressed, tailored suit, and I had a bicycle. Well, kids in those days didn't have bicycle, that was, I was pretty privileged kid. And we vacationed on the Riviera. This is Juan Les Pins, in France, and my mom, my mom, and uncle uh Milan and Erica and they, I call that hey I called all the adults Uncle and Aunt. So they were, they were for good friends that went there, and myself, going to the beach.
- 19:20 Lou Pechi: And the only only thorn in my life was my Austrian governess, and I don't have to tell you much, all right. You look at her face, you could tell. But you know something - I can thank this lady of speaking, learning German. By that time I was trilingual. I spoke German because she talked to me all the time in German, and I learned German. She also uh, taught me how to eat properly, how to behave properly, and if I didn't I would get a little bit on the, on the rear end. Uh but, uh, oh and and then so and then I also went to a uh, British kindergarten, Montessori kindergarten. So, I learned, I was trilingual when I was like four or five years old. Um now, um all of this, all of this came, came to an end April 1941. Uh, we went, uh for the, for the Easter holidays and, and uh, Passover we went to visit my uncle, uh Larry, uncle Mark and my grandfather in Belgrade. And in the morning of 1941 uh, the Germans bombed Belgrade. So while, while I, while I show you a brief video - and I hope it works - uh, I'm going to read that little chapter from my book of how I was uh, what, how I saw the, the happening.
- 21:12 [One day 70 years ago Belgrade was awakening on a nice April morning not suspecting...DESTRUCTION]
- 21:12: Lou Pechi: [reading from his book] I sit up and listen. A strange buzzing sound like a nest of angry hornets is coming from the outside. I wonder, what's making all that noise. I put on my slippers and run to the balcony. I grab the cold railing with both my hands and look up. The early morning sky is clear. The strange sound is coming from the horizon where the blue meets the gray outline of the city. It is filled with black specks moving toward me. The tiny dots get closer and grow bigger. They start to resemble flocks of blackbirds in the V-formation of migrating geese. As they get closer I realize that they are not birds but shiny airplanes. I never saw so many airplanes. Where do they come from? What are they doing? One of the planes tilts his wings and, like an eagle spotting its prey below, dives over the ground. The others follow, accompanied by the ear-speeding shake of the sirens. I cover my ears and run back. I collide with the open arms of Uncle Latzi [Ladislav Sidon]. I feel safe in his big warm waters embrace. What's the matter Lubo? What is going on? The planes are falling from the sky. They're screaming for help. They will crash.
- 22:43 Lou Pechi: And the bombing, when the bombing was over, the beautiful city of Belgrade was destroyed. Seventy thousand people in this small town. This was a

not not a very large city in those days. And this picture that I got off the internet actually looks to me like, like the the house that we lived because, when we came out of that house after the bombing that I could see the the other building like a, like a dollhouse with with the things hanging out, the bathtub hanging out, and a horse was on the street. So, everything came to an end at that date, for the peaceful life was totally over. As you can see the the Germans invaded Croatia from the north. They came from Bulgaria from the south, from Romania, and the Italians - the fascist Italians - came and and captured the whole coast of Croatia. Well uh, what happens when, when you know, when there's a bombing? Everybody travels. Everybody has to go somewhere else. They want to get home. My mom and myself, we wanted to get back to our apartment and so we got on the train.

24:14 Lou Pechi: My mom, my uncle pushed me through the window to save some seats. And I still remember sitting with my foot out, saving her space, and people are coming in and says - move kid, move. I said, no, no my mom is coming. I was crying. So finally she came, we took the train, and we were thinking, and everything everybody settled nicely in the compartment. We started exchanging food, you know, everybody had fried chicken and we're having a good time. Suddenly the train came train came to a stop. Uh the, the conductor came by said, the train is not going any place; they bombed the bridge. So my mom took me and we got off, and she questioned some, found out that there is a ferry going across. There was a ferry across the river, and she paid some money, and we went over the ferry, caught a freight train. Eventually, we got back to Zagreb, and the train stopped uh, very close to our house - not in the main, main station. And so we walked back home, came to the door, she knocked on the door. Our, we had a, we had a governess, we had a housekeeper, the housekeeper came says, madam, I'm so sorry but I had to give your, your bedroom to two German soldiers. And my mom said that's okay. It's not your fault. You did the right thing, don't worry about it.

25:47 Lou Pechi: My mom had the bandana, she was all worn out from - she says, can I use your bathroom? So she went in the bathroom put a lipstick on, cleared her hair, and came out and and met the soldiers. There were two German officers, and we spoke German, so we started communicating. They were family men. They were on the way to, to Greece and they even apologized. They said we're sorry. We, we're family man. I have a son about your age, a little kid. And, and my mom was petrified; she never had anybody in her, in her apartment. And I was all excited because they had the gun, guns. And so I said, just a minute. I ran to my little toy chest, I rummaged around, I got my own gun. I said I have a gun too! And the, the soldiers looks at it. He says, ah that's no gun. He says, here. And he gave me his rifle, and I almost dropped the thing. And he says, ah you are not ready to be a soldier, here. And he takes his hat and puts it on me. And my hat, the hat fell over my face, and then everybody started laughing. Anyway, the soldiers left and that is when, when everything started, started. That's when things happened. And people

always ask me, oh, so what, did they round you up and put you on it, on the train?
No everything was very gradual, and let's see.

- 27:26 Lou Pechi: Oh okay, so the first thing, the first thing is - and I always, I, I've been presenting this to the kids in high schools and junior highs - and I said, uh what do you think the Germans did as a first thing when they occupied? And I'm going to ask you, what do you think? The first thing they did is they had to register the Jews because they didn't know who was Jewish. Once they got them registered, then they issued orders that no Jews could go out on the street after 10 o'clock. But they had a problem, they couldn't tell who was Jewish. Okay, so what do they do? I I, you, and I do this with the kids. When I'm with the kids I said, okay now, I know, can you tell me around here, look around? Do you know who's Jewish? Who is Jewish? And they look around at each other and they said - you could tell what's going on in their mind - they, they really realize that, that they're all the same. And then I take this sign here, and I'll explain to you in a minute, and I put it on somebody. And I said, okay can you tell me now who is Jewish? Okay, so what did I do when I put this on a person? I put a tag on him, put a label on him, and I teach him about being a bully. When you put a label on somebody, you don't have to have this sign. You could say they're fat, they're ugly, they're different color, they have different eyes. And what I'm trying to project is that we're all alike, but when we put labels on people we are different, and suddenly when you're different it's, you push people away. And so, it's very important for the kids not to put labels on people.
- 29:28 Lou Pechi: Now, what is, what is this sign? And I have to tell you the story about this sign. This is a sign that my mom saved all these years. Now she traveled with a suitcase. Where did she? You know, you carry just what you have to have. She saved this, and she gave it to me when she was about 90, 90 years old. [She] says, I want you to have it, and so I've had this. And what this means is the, the Ž, actually it's a zhe, pronounced. It's a z with the v, v on it. It means Jew. Židov is Jewish, Jew in Croatian. Now do you know how much this sign is worth, was worth then? Almost 32 ounces of gold. We had to buy, my dad had to buy the, two of these signs. Okay, and when he came home he said, told my, my mom, you have to wear it when you go out because otherwise you could get shot. And I was so jealous that the adults could wear this sign. I went to my room and got my crayons and I made my own sign. And I said, look, I have a sign too. And my dad got furious. He just ripped it off. He says, you don't have to wear this, and I started crying of course because I did not understand.
- 30:52 Lou Pechi: So what did, what do they do next? So now you couldn't go out on the street. They confiscated the cars. They started confiscating the radios, and the young people - 18 years - had to report. And actually, this, if you look at this young man, remember that that kid in the corner, Srećko. He was 21 years old, going to university, had a girlfriend; they were going to get married. Here he is volunteering. All these guys are volunteering. They're carrying their their suitcase to help our

- country. Look at this guy here. That's the fascist, Croatian fascist soldier already, with the gun there. Okay, so they took the 18 years old. Then they issues orders that the Jews could not travel, only Catholics could travel. Well, my mom found out that you could go to Italy, and uh, the Italians wouldn't turn you back to the Germans. And she says, all right, we'll go to the church. So my mom and my dad went to the church; I went with them. They converted to Catholic just to get that piece of paper, and I converted 10 minutes later. So my piece of paper said, father and mother Catholic, and I was Catholic. So I became, suddenly, I became Catholic. My mom and dad uh, they went uh, they went across the, cross the river here and I - just in honor of my mom uh, who I just visited a couple a couple of days ago at the, at the uh, cemetery, Rosecrans - she tells me the story of crossing, crossing from Rijeka to Fiume.
- 33:00 Lou Pechi: First they wanted to take the, go across the bridge. Well, there were soldiers on this side of the bridge, wouldn't let them across. So she said, she said, well let's see, went to the dock and found one of the fishermen and says, can you take us across, go, go out to the ocean? He says, no problem for a couple of thousand dollars. And she said, here was July, June or July, I forget what they want but it was hot. She wore her uh, fur coat which was lined with dollar bills, hundred dollar bills, you know the lining. The heels of the shoes, my dad, I remember, I remember see, I remember seeing him do it - put the coins, gold coins, in the heels - carve the heels and put, put some wax so they wouldn't rattle. They're sitting there. My mom said she tell me she's sitting in this boat and the guy's rowing. She says, and I'm, I'm shaking. I'm freezing. And he dropped them off on the beach, and he says, and there are these people swimming, and they're looking at this crazy woman with a suitcase and a fur coat walking in the sand on the other side, on the Italian side. Well they uh, oops. They went to Treviso and were interned which Italians called internati di guerra or they're interned because of the war. And I'll continue the story with that because I want to go back to what happened to me.
- 34:39 Lou Pechi: So let's leave them for the time being in, in Treviso and they sent me, and they sent me to - I'm pushing the wrong buttons, anyway - they sent me to Brod where my uncle uh Štefko [Kierhoffer] and my aunt... Uncle Štefko was a tailor. He was Catholic, my aunt married him, my father's sister - that's my father's family - married him and they lived there. They had two, two twins, a boy, and a girl - Hansel and Gretel. Hanzi and Greta, they were 14. I was about seven at the time and I became a good Catholic boy. I went to catechism, and I went to the first grade. And I want to read to you, I want to read to you just a brief passage in the, in the first grade. And that's what, that's my uh, uh that's my, uh first communion in Brod, a picture of that. But I want to read to you how I felt in the school because at that time they, they were just finished, they finished taking away the kids the, the 18-year-olds, the older men, and the women. The only people that were left were older people, and handicapped, and kids. So the kids were still going to school. So

in my first grade, I had Jewish kids there, but nobody knew that I was not, that I was not Catholic. So let me talk to read to you this little part, passage.

- 36:30 Lou Pechi: [reading from his book] The schools, the schoolhouse, in a two-story gray building with a wide staircase leading to the entrance, is only a few blocks away from our house. Aunt Babuš [Elsa Kierhoffer] comes with me and enrolls me in the office on the first floor. As she leaves, I don't hug her goodbye. I'm a big boy now and too embarrassed to hug her in front of other children. I climb upstairs and enter my assigned room, 2b. A large blackboard and a crucifix hang on the wall in front of the children sitting in rows of small school desks. The teacher is a nun, like the kind I used to see near the cathedral in Zagreb. This one looks stern in her black habit and bright white starched wimple as she points to an empty seat. You sit there, she announces. We start our class with a prayer. Since Jews are not allowed to say the Lord's Prayer, all Jewish kids get up and stand against the wall. She points to the wall, several boys and girls get up and line with their backs against the wall. I feel as one of them and want to join them, but I remember that I'm not allowed to let anyone know I'm Jewish. I sit tight in my seats. From the corner of my eyes, I watch the sad faces yearning to be the same as the rest of the children and not outcast, not rejected, not defective. Can they read my mind and tell that I am Jewish? I fear one of them will say, he's Jewish. He should stand with us against the wall. I feel, in fear or shame, I avert my eyes. We all bow our heads, our hands clasped, and the nun leads us in prayer. I bury my head in my hands as I mouth the sounds, pretending to know the word of the prayer.
- 38:29 Lou Pechi: So, as I said, I went to first grade and started second grade, and everything was going, going very well until one evening while we were having dinner, there's a knock on the door. My uncle says, who is this? And he said, police. Open the door. So he goes, opens the door and uh, and there were two policemen, plain clothes. He says we're here to, we have a warrant for arrest for Lubo Pechi. And he says, well he's only seven years old. No, we don't care. We have uh, orders for his arrest. And so they took me. And my aunt offered, she said, I'll go in, in his place and, as a hostage. He says, no. We have our orders. They take me to the jail and uh, the first thing, the first thing that they did when I came there, they shaved my hair off. Uh, this way they could know if I was running away, I guess, and they put me in a cell with all the women. They were older women, and and some handicapped women. Uh, they didn't put me in the men's uh, cell. And the women there made a little bed for me with the blankets that they had, and I fell asleep. And, and here I want to read to you some more, okay.
- 40:09 Lou Pechi: [reading from his book] The next morning I wake up and find a backpack with some of my belonging next to me. Aunt Babuš has brought it to the police station during the night. Someone announces that there is a parade going on outside. Everyone's scurries and crows crowds the window. I try to elbow my way to the front but I'm too short to reach the bars. Please, let me see the procession, my

cousin Greta is marching. I want to see her, I plead desperately. A woman picks me up and I grasp the iron bars with my two small hands, straining to keep my head above the casement. In front of the procession, several big boys carry colorful church flags. Four men follow and carry a platform with Mother Mary in flowing blue robes clutching infant Jesus. Behind them bleeding, Jesus stretched on a wooden cross, stiffly stares with his blind plaster eyes. I see my cousin Greta in a white dress among the marchers. She looks up and spots me in the window. Our eyes lock, tears stream down my face. I want to shout, Greta, I want to be with you in that parade. I want to be with my friends. I grip the bars in rage. My knuckles turn white. My face contorts in silent angry scream. Help, but there is no sound, terrified, afraid, ashamed of being in jail. Embarrassed by my shaven head, I cannot utter a sound.

41:48 Lou Pechi: I would, this is while, while I, I used to tell this story and I would say I was in jail, and my cousin was walking, and uh. It took me years to get to that, re-experiencing the feeling, until I was able to let it, let it out on myself. I kept it buried because it was, it was so painful to me. And once I have, once I was able to get that that feeling of, of a frustration and rage, it was in my 40s. It expressed itself in totally different ways, and I had to have some therapy and, and work through it till I, I was back again, experiencing it, so that I could let go of it. So uh, uh my, uh my uncle was a tailor in the town, and he was friends with the chief of police, and he managed somehow to, to talk me, to uh talk to chief of police to let me go. He says, you can wait another couple of weeks uh, till we get things straightened out. Anyway, he arranged, my aunt was frantic to also get me out. She went to Zagreb to try to arrange things and the next, two days later - I was still two days in the, while they were collecting all the rest of the people - I was in the jail.

43:31 Lou Pechi: [reading from his book] So one day uh, a big man in uniform, an insignia on his shoulder, enters. In a deep loud voice, he looks at me, are you Lubo Pechi? I nod, my voice failing me. Take all your stuff and follow me. He takes me to another large room. Another heavy-set bald man in police uniform sits behind a large desk. He looks important. His large mustache, the same as Toma's, my barber in Zagreb, who I, always frightened me. Sit down on the chair, he says in a stern voice and points to the lonely chair in front of a desk. Do you know who I am? I shake my head from side to side, unable to speak. Okay now, listen to me very carefully and do exactly as I say. I'm the chief of police and I run this place. My spies are everywhere and if you don't do exactly what I tell you, they will report it to me and I'll come after you. Now, after I leave, you are to count to ten. Do you know how to count? I nod my head up and down. I can't hear you. My voice barely audible, I say, yes, sir. I'm ready to cry but thanks to my cousin's words za inat - to be brave and strong no matter what. I said, okay. And he says, okay. After you count to ten, you're to get up, take your belongings and slowly walk out of the police station. When you reach the end of the block you're to start walking faster. Do not run. Just walk as fast as you can and do not look back. He winks at me and he says, good luck kid, and leaves the room. I count to ten as fast as I can, one, two, three, four,

five, pick up the backpack and slowly walk through the, to the exit door at the end of the block. The streets are deserted with most people ready to sit down to their evening meals. I pick up the pace and start to run to the house and I reach the home out of breath, still trembling with fear of walking alone during the night through the streets. My Aunt Babuš embraces opens the door and before I could utter a sound embraces me. She begins to sob uncontrollably.

46:01 Lou Pechi: And after that, I want to, oh yeah, after that actually an, a lady, a German lady [Milica Miller] - she was, she was I think later on, from what I understand, she was convicted - she came and picked me up to take me to take me from, from Brod, from Brod to, to Fiume, to cross over to Italy. And she, in those days passports, you know, didn't have, just had a picture of the child and a stamp on it. Well, she had a son about my age and, I don't know if they paid her or not, or she did it out of her own. I really don't know that, that part of the story, but she took me on the train and I became Vlado Miller. I had another new name. I was Vlado Miller, her son. She took me to the to Fiume, to Rijeka, and my parents were not able to travel because they were interned. They couldn't leave the town, so they sent a priest to pick me up. And when he picked me up, he started quizzing me about the religion, and there's this little seven-year-old, eight-year-old Jewish kid telling him all about uh, about the - he kept asking me, do you know this prayer? Do I know this? I said, yes, and I. He was just in seventh heaven. Anyway, he took me across and I finally joined my uh, parents. Uh, oh I'm going backwards. Okay, oh there they are, all right. So we were interned. Uh, this is uh, one of the family friend, my Uncle Mark; there's my mom; there's my dad, and we had to report to the chief of police every Sunday to make sure that we're still there.

48:09 Lou Pechi: Now Italians being Italians, we show up there on a Sunday, he serves us espresso. We have a little a cup of coffee. My parents have a cup of coffee. I kind of play around and uh, made it a pleasant. Uh, we talk about politics, or whatever it was they were talking about, and I would play with it. One day we show up, one Sunday we show up, and he says, I have some good news for you. He says you're free. And we said, wow, what, what happened? He says, well General [Pietro] Badoglio revolted against [Benito] Mussolini and deposed him and he signed the peace agreement with the Allies who were coming up the up, the uh, up to Italy. They were, I think, in Sicily and they were getting, working their way up the, up the boot of Italy. And so we went home. We celebrated, you know, great. And my mom said, well, you know something? We, the Allies are going to be in Venice any day. The fleet is going to just sail in and we're going to be liberated. So we moved to Venice okay. And there I am, in the middle of the war feeding pigeons, having a time of my life. And uh, we used to go to this cafe. There was a cafe with a table here. We would sit there and have coffee almost every day, waiting for the Allies to come. They're not coming. One day we come come to the same piazza, we look across the way, and it's full of German soldiers drinking coffee and having a good time. And so, we retreated back into the alley, in one of the alleys, and my mom

said, something is wrong with this picture. What happened is, the, the Germans re-invaded Italy and deposed Badoglio and, and went all the way out past Rome.

50:14 Lou Pechi: So what do we do now? Well, my mom being always, she was, always knew what to do even though it might not have been totally straight. Being a tomboy, I think, taught her a lot of a lot of lessons to be a little bit, have a little bit of larceny. So she said, well if the Allies are not coming here, we're going toward them. So she and, and uh, just to make it different, so they wouldn't look suspicious she and, and um, and the friend went to Rome and rented an apartment. And we moved, we moved uh, from, from Treviso, from Venice all the way to Rome. And we were in Rome, we stayed in Rome almost two, almost a year and a half. And we got false papers, and the apartment we rented was actually rented from a fascist who was, who knew what was happening. And he escaped to Switzerland when Badoglio was overturned, and rented the apartment through a lawyer, and we stayed in an apartment. We were liberated when Rome was liberated. And you can see here, me wearing the the Yugoslav tag and the American soldiers that liberated us. And here's my dad, and my mom, Fred, Fred, Fred my, my cousin Fred and myself. My dad, after the liberation, my dad volunteered to be in the Partisans, and this is in Split. Uh, he went across the, from Bari to Split and joined the, the Partisans. And speaking German and being very handy with mechanical things - he was running the motor pool for this for the Partisans. He was running the repair shop, hiring all the Germans, German uh, or hiring - just taking the German prisoners that had any skills on how to fix cars, and since he could communicate with them, he would, that was his job.

52:38 Lou Pechi: After the war, my parents separated, unfortunately, uh, the stress and the marriage took its toll. And somebody that helped was my stepfather Frank [Petrich], who was actually born in Croatia but he was in San Diego. His father was a fisherman with the tuna fleet here, and he brought him when he was eight years old to San Diego. He went to school here. He went to San Diego High, graduated, went to USC [University of Southern California] on a football scholarship - which tells you was a good-looking tall man, white navy uniform; he was in reserve. He was in Rome and he heard my mom speaking Croatian to our friends. And he says, what are you doing here? And so she told him, but my mom just went head over heels over this good-looking man and that's how she came, she made, they got married by the way. They were married in the Vatican. How did they get married in the Vatican? Because, you know, he was a famous uh, he was a liberating Officer. So he was a celebrity and my mom had still had the documents that she was Catholic. So there she was. She married him, and she was a war bride and came to the States. Uh, and my dad took me back to Croatia, and I went to school - to junior high - for three years. The Croatian, he had a kind of an important position, and they wanted him to join the Communist Party and he said, I really don't want to do that. And at that time Israel was declared a state, 1948, and all the Jews from Yugoslavia were allowed to immigrate, one of the few communist countries. You

know, the Russia, in Russia they wouldn't let them leave the country. [Josip Broz] Tito, in Yugoslavia said, you've suffered enough. You can do - you want to go there, you can go there. You can take everything you want. You can sell everything you want. You can take all your possessions. And we went.

54:56 Lou Pechi: I took the boat Kefalos from Croatia to Israel. The worst trip I ever took. We hit the storm. I don't think I went to the bathroom once because whatever I ate came out. Uh, so here I am, uh, in Israel. The first job that I had was picking oranges. Well during the war, we didn't have any oranges; we didn't have any bananas, you know, we really didn't have much food. I think I ate more than I picked and uh, my dad put me in the kibbutz. This is, this is Kibbutz Sarid, which was a socialist kibbutz. Okay, my [unclear] was the part of the socialist, and this is the barracks that they built up for, for the kids, and I was with the kids. Uh, Bulgarians, and then Romanian kids came, and then South American kids came, and I was still there. Because as soon as they, their parents got settled, they would pull this out of the kibbutz. And I worked on the farm. I worked in the, on the fields, and I had some good friends - Shimon and Nathan. Shimon was from Bolivia, Nathan was from Venezuela and I spoke Italian, by that point fluent Italian. They spoke Spanish. I kept saying things in Italian. They would respond in Spanish and laugh at me because it sounded funny. After about three months, they quit laughing at me. I was speaking Spanish. And this is, this is the kind of barracks that we lived in uh, and worked in the fields. Um, there was a big performance in, at Sarid - I think it was their 25th anniversary - and I played, um I played, uh, uh Jonathan and Eliezer, one of the Maccabeus brothers. Uh, uh, and, this is the whole cast.

57:16 Lou Pechi: So, and I was uh, I was not happy on the kibbutz because my dad decided that he couldn't find any work in Israel. He just couldn't do what he was supposed to, and a friend of his had a business in Italy. And so he says, I'm going to Italy, left me behind again and went to Italy. So I was in, in the kibbutz for two years, or three years - two years I think - and uh, just not happy. My Aunt Roška the mother of uh Srećko. Srećko was killed in the, in the concentration camp Jasenovac; her husband was killed in the same. She joined the Partisans and eventually came to Israel. That's my old, my mom's oldest sister and she wrote to my mom. She says you got to get this kid out of here. He's not happy. He's not, not going anywhere. You need to, you need to get him to the States. And so my, I, she also enrolled me or said, you you join the Israeli Air Force because for one year I could go to it, to, to a technical school and learn how to fix all the instrumentations on the, on the airplane. And so, that's, that's I am in the Air Force, and I saved the Israeli Air Force sign to prove that I was there. And that kind of brings me, brings me toward, toward the ending. I can tell you what happened here. I came, I came to the States after a lot of trouble getting out of Israel, and I'll tell you this story. I don't know how much, how much time do I have?

59:04 Susanne Hillman: [unclear] two minutes.

- 59:08 Lou Pechi: Two minutes. Okay, I came to San Diego - a few minutes because I want to have some time for questions - I came to San Diego when I was just barely 21, and because I didn't have a high school diploma, I didn't have a security clearance. I did have a trade. So I tried to find jobs but I couldn't get them. I joined the American Air Force. And after the Air Force, I came back, went to college, met this lovely lady here. As you heard, we got married and family life began. So I want to thank you so much. Uh, there's a lot of things I want to tell you but, you know, time is short. I hope you can read the book. I said I was going to talk about why I wrote the book, how I wrote the book, but I'm running out of time. So you'll have to ask the questions later, and thank you very much. [applause] Yes.
- 1:00:12 Susanne Hillman: Please wait until you get the microphone, because we are recording this.
- 1:00:21 Speaker 1: Two questions. What happened, what happened to your dad, and what happened with your mom, who had left you as well?
- 1:00:30 Lou Pechi: Okay. Well, I joined my mom in San Diego and so actually, after I wrote the book, I wanted to write her point of view because I, you, you've heard mine. I was, I was a kid. I, you know, things, things look differently. So I started writing *Pirry [A saga of love lost and found]*, my second book, to get her opinion. But my character kept bouncing in her stories, so I took myself out and I wrote about her three loves. One she met when she was 18. She met a Croatian nobleman - young, young nobleman - and took him to Brod to meet her, her father, my grandfather, and he says absolutely not. He's not Jewish. My grandfather was religious so they moved there, from Zagreb to, to Brod, and kind of arranged the marriage with my dad, which wasn't - as you can, you know that ending - wasn't very happy. And then she met Frank, my stepfather, in Rome and that was the love of her life and came to San Diego. Uh, my father, sad story. He never recovered. He always wanted to get back what he lost and was always working on that. Even though he was an excellent mechanic and he could have been, made money in, in Israel like, like nobody else, if you open a garage. But no, he wanted to be, you know, the, the office manager. His life went down, down, down, and very tragic. So that's uh, that's the end of the line book that I wrote about my dad. I didn't even put myself in it but it's, it's probably 90 percent true. Same with my mom. It's, it's true. Yes, does that answer your question? Any other questions? Yes.
- 1:02:35 Speaker 2: I'd like to hear about how you survived psychologically and what how you lived with that damage and all the terrible things that you saw.
- 1:02:46 Lou Pechi: Well most of the, most of my experience was, was I, I, I lived in a kind of a cocoon okay. My aunt adored me. My Aunt Babuš adore me. Štefko considered me his. His, he vouched his kids to get me out of the jail. When I testified for the for the Yom HaShoah, when I reached there I, I realized how much he loved me. I broke out in tears as I was telling the story and suddenly I just, it just came. So my

cousins Greta and, and, and Hanzi - they they adored me. I, I was, I was, you know, sheltered. But the traumatic part of it - how did I survive the traumatic part - was when I was in jail when I was shaven when I was frustrated that I couldn't be there, that I couldn't do this, and I couldn't even get it out, because if I did I would endanger my, my uh, my cousin. And I would, as I said, I would tell this story just like I said like, like you, like uh, movies uh, silent movies. No sound okay, no emotion. It showed up in my marriage. I was ready to go back. Where did I want to go? I wanted to rent an apartment. And if you looked in the apartment, there were curtains on the wall, on the, on the, there were high, high windows. There were curtains over it. What do you think was behind those curtains? The bars. So I had to go. I had to re-experience that frustration that I can't be out there. I can't even shout because my head, she's shaving. I'm ashamed of myself. I had to, I had to re-experience that emotion. Once it came out I was able to say, okay, because I was at that time, I was an adult so I could deal with that. But it took, it took, it took its toll, and it was because it was in here. You have to let it out. You have to, you have to be yourself.

1:04:58 Speaker 3: You were so strong through all of this, that you were able to keep it to yourself.

1:05:04 Lou Pechi: I am, I am strong. But I am, I was very lucky. Poor Lou [Dunst], you know, he went through, through, he had to go through the concentration camps. I, I avoided that. Even the lady that took me across the border, she sheltered me. My, I, when I went from one sheltered place to, to another, to, to another, to my family. I lived up to a name, thanks to [unclear] By the way - side joke - I asked my mom, why did she name me that? She says I don't remember. I said, ah come on, come on, it was your boyfriend, wasn't it? Ljubomir it is, it's a, it's actually a, it's a Serbian name but, I don't know. Yes?

1:06:00 Speaker 4: As a young boy, how aware were you of the extermination going on in the Jews at the time, and and how did you feel about that?

1:06:07 Lou Pechi: I wasn't, I wasn't that aware of it. I mean, I, I saw it happening but again I was in this cell with women and, and they were taking care of me. They were sheltering me, even in the jail. I was, actually I was safe. This is, this is what's, I was safe in the jail when you think about it. I mean except that I had the bars, I felt safe there. It's, it, I know it's hard to comprehend, but that's that's, that's, that's how I felt. Yes?

1:06:46 Speaker 5: So you, you led a your young life as a Catholic - I mean you sort of had some influence - young Jewish, then Catholic. Did you, was there ever a time in your life where you decided to go back to becoming a Jew? Was that important to you? Did it, did you think about it?

1:07:11 Lou Pechi: I was always a Jew, was always - I got the speaker here - I was, I was always a Jew. When, when, you know, who can take this? I, I'm that clay that, that was passed on uh, from generation to generation, from my Hungarian-Jewish great-grandparents. I was Catholic because I had to live. It was more important to live than what, where you pray, what you, how you pray, what you do - survival. And I know that a lot of people in, in the camps some of them survived. I don't know how, and there's hundreds of stories, mine is just one out of 16. I, I have heard writing the book, I've heard so many stories. I have a friend in Israel, okay, and his story is very similar to mine. He lived in Sarajevo, where my dad was born by the way, and his family put him in a convent with, with uh, uh, with uh, other kids. Uh orphanage, it was a convent orphanage. He's the only one that survived, and if you, what happened, he was sent to Israel all alone. He was in the kibbutz and if somehow, he found a relative, and he had started the family. You should see the picture. There's 20 siblings, you know, kids and everything. He's a sculptor and what he's doing is making sculptures of his life in Sarajevo, and making all the people there, and putting the names of, of the survivors. He lost everything. I was lucky. I was lucky, okay, and I'm lucky to to be here. Yes?

1:09:22 Speaker 6: A very quick question, and a gentleman asked if uh, you were aware of what was really going on? You had told me that, when you were in jail and let out, the train came the next morning?

1:09:41 Lou Pechi: No, no, no. It was, I was let out six o'clock in the evening. The train for, for Auschwitz, left at midnight. So six hours, a difference of me being here or being up there, in smoke. Yes sir?

1:10:02 Speaker 7: When you speak in front of a youth group, or a class, school, how do they respond? Do they get it? If so, what do they get?

1:10:13 Lou Pechi: I hope they get it. What I do with with the kids, all right, and, and I've, I've been aching to do it. I don't do it before adults because you're a different audience. They're still, they're still kids. So I tell him, I tell him, I'm actually, I'm, I'm a time traveler and I'm materialized here in the, in the body of an 85-year-old man. But actually, I'm a seven-year-old kid and I wanna, and, and if I can time travel - you can't try time travel into the future - but you can find time travel into the past. So I wanna take all of you back with me to that time. So close your eyes and when you open your eyes we're going to be 1941 Croatia. And as I, as I demonstrated what I do with the, with the thing, I tried to convey to them that we, we are all the same. We're the same. We have the same genes, the same, you know, you, you know the DNA? You know, with the DNA you can, you can, we're all the same. We might look differently. We might act differently. We speak different languages but, as I said, we all have the same feelings inside ourselves, the same desires, the same. Same like anybody else. I don't care what, what, what you look, you still have the same desires.

- 1:11:42 Susanne Hillman: We have one last question and then Professor Hertz will provide concluding remarks.
- 1:11:47 Speaker 8: Did you ever witness the parades of the Jews when they were walking on the streets? Of like, when they would take them out of the concentration camps to the next place, with the parade? The death march, yeah.
- 1:12:10 Lou Pechi: Death marches, no. I was, I was lucky. I was, I was, I was hiding in open, oh you know, openly hiding. They didn't know I was, I was Jewish - most people. I mean, somehow the police must have figured it out. So I didn't, no. I, I don't know. I really don't understand your question, so you have to. Did I see it happen? Not, not, not really. As I said, I was sheltered. I was protected. And it's the people that protected me, you know, they were, they were risking their lives because if, if they were caught, they would be arrested. So I, I'm thankful to the people. That's why I dedicated my book to the people that risked their lives to protect mine. Well, thank you
- 1:13:14 Professor Deborah Hertz: So I'm somehow not surprised because my friend Janice Steinberg is a connoisseur, and a collector of history, and as a novelist, and obviously astonishing people who are here in San Diego. So uh, what was very notable about these wonderful, this wonderful talk was the combination, I thought, of modesty and bravery. And I think that's a very rare combination. So I was very touched by that. I'm really sorry that Lou Dunst or, and, and his indomitable wife Estelle wished that they could be joining us. Lou had an amazing story of multiple rescues from near-death experiences. Twice he was taken for death and in the second of these episodes, on May 6, 1945 - two days ago by anniversary - his brother pulled him from a pile of the dead in Ebensee, Austria and the American Army liberated that camp later the same day. So that's kind of a parallel in the other direction to those six hours that Mr. Pechi just described. One of his admirers noted when he passed on September 8, 2015, that if he had not told his story so many times over he would have been consumed by it. And I think there's a parallel there too.
- 1:14:32 Professor Deborah Hertz: One could immediately sense this. If one asks Mr. Dunst - and Susanne will remember when we first met him - about what had happened to him, his voice never faltered but the level of detail was so overwhelming that anyone but a dedicated researcher and chronicler could never follow the narration of his journey. We in the Holocaust Living History Workshop are grateful for the community of Lou Dunst admirers, who would sit in the front row for months and years, including Judge Norbert Ehrenfreund, who, who interviewed Mr. Dunst and the filmmakers - I don't know if they're here - Albert [Robert] Schneider and Alberto Lau who have created interviews and the film recounting Dunst's remarkable redemption. And redemption is the word for Mr. Dunst, as an articulate survivor,

who always talked about how he went from being an atheist to believing in God; something my students were always amazed by.

- 1:15:23 Professor Deborah Hertz: Let me close uh, by hazarding some very modest reflections on the role of Holocaust education after the tragedy here in San Diego at the Chabad Shul in Poway last Saturday. We should not assume that education about genocide and hatred will prevent or even reduce the race and religious hatred so apparent in the daily news from Sri Lanka to Pittsburgh to black churches in the South and mosques across the United States. But we must nevertheless doggedly pursue the path of historical study in the existential hope that explaining evil and recounting acts of goodness will aid all of us in the difficult tasks ahead, as we build a world of compassion, tolerance, and equality. It has been said that as long as we keep using the name of a beloved deceased person they remain alive. Lou and Estelle, you are alive to us and we thank you for your good deeds. Good night.