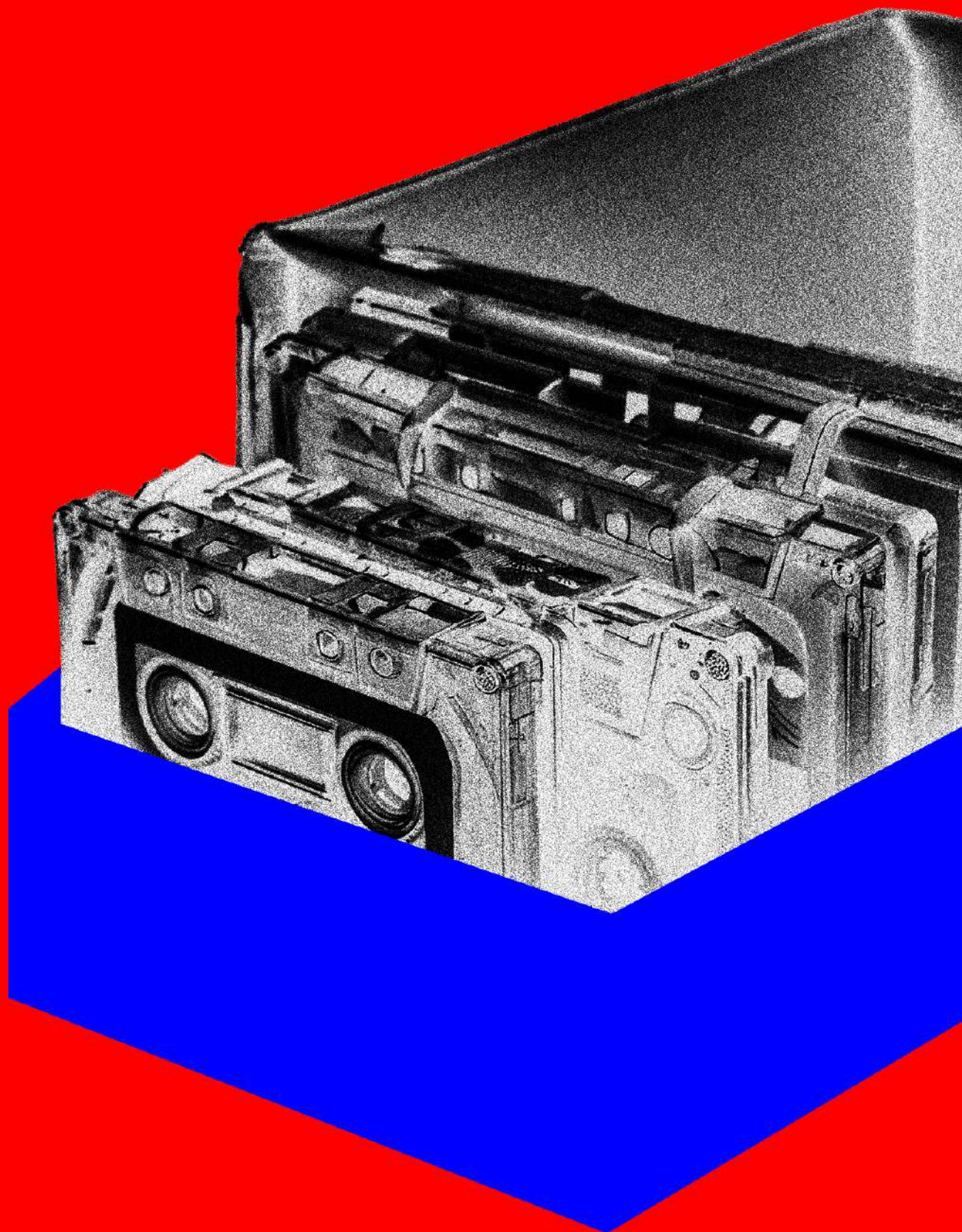


*Casey Rodarmor*

# Transcript\_



This is pretty nuts. I was poking around in the storage area of my house, and I found a huge cardboard box filled with letters and audio cassettes and dust. Everything was Danish, German, and English, but mostly Danish. The name Max Rasmussen was everywhere, so I think it was all his stuff. I had to get a tape player at best buy to play the tapes, but surprisingly, they all played fine. One of them was an interview, in English, between Max and a man named Hans. I listened to it a few times, and I don't even know what to say. It's transcribed below.

RASMUSSEN: Can you say your name and age for the recorder?

CSEMEGI: Hans Csemegi. 62.

RASMUSSEN: That's an unusual name.

CSEMEGI: Yes, it is, my parent were immigrants to Germany, and they wanted to give me a German sounding name.

RASMUSSEN: And where were they from?

CSEMEGI: Hungary.

RASMUSSEN: Can you tell me a little bit about your life before the war?

CSEMEGI: In many ways I had a very normal childhood. My father was an immigrant, but he was a natural with machines, so he found work easily. We lived very comfortably, all things considered. My mother's cousin and her family came to Germany around the same time, so I knew how other immigrants lived.

RASMUSSEN: Did you speak German growing up?

CSEMEGI: Yes, and Hungarian with my parents.

RASMUSSEN: When did you find out you were a Jew?

CSEMEGI: Not until I was seventeen. My parents kept it from me. But I found a box of letters in my mother's closet one day. I found out that my grandfather was actually a kosher butcher, imagine that...

RASMUSSEN: How did you feel when you found out?

CSEMEGI: I felt disgusted. I was a German, you know. I read the papers, I saw the newsreels, and I knew that Jews were the lowest of the low. I couldn't believe that I was one of them. I also knew right away that this was the worst thing that could happen to me. Kristallnacht was only a month away, and already the writing was on the wall.

RASMUSSEN: How were you sent to the camps?

CSEMEGI: One day they just found out. It was my father, someone had gotten suspicious where he worked, because he didn't look at all German. For that matter, I didn't look at all German, but I was so German in my manner that nobody gave me a second look. But he still had an accent. He was foreign. Our whole family; me, my sister, my mother, and my father; were told to report for processing one morning, and we were stuffed into trains to the camps that very afternoon.

RASMUSSEN: What happened to your family?

CSEMEGI: My father was killed before he even got onto the train. He was always a stubborn man. They divided the men and the women up, and my sister and my mother went to a different line. He started arguing with a soldier, and I think he put his hand on his soldier in anger, or something. And the soldier shot him. He was right to argue, I never saw my mother or my sister again.

RASMUSSEN: <coughing> Sorry.

CSEMEGI: After that I knew. I KNEW. That I was going to die like my father. I remember watching him fall, and I knew that one day soon I was going to hit the ground like he had, a corpse on the cobblestones. Eventually I was loaded onto a train. It was full of people, packed in like cordwood. I was screaming out, until I got tired. It was hot and wretched. Eventually we got to the camp, but some didn't even survive the train ride.

RASMUSSEN: And how was the camp?

CSEMEGI: At first it wasn't so bad. It was a prison, but the officer who was in charge of our division had just been reassigned. He had had sex with a female prisoner, another Jew, and it had gotten out. It was a scandal. So for weeks nobody was in charge, and we just sat around. It was terrible, but mostly because it was so boring. Eventually though they found someone to put in charge of us. His name was Göring, and everyone was afraid of him, even the other Nazis. He put us to work.

RASMUSSEN: What kind of work?

CSEMEGI: Carrying stones.

RASMUSSEN: Carrying stones?

CSEMEGI: Yes.

RASMUSSEN: Just that? Did you build anything?

CSEMEGI: No. Or... I don't know, we didn't, but some other prisoners might have. We just carried stones up a hill. I don't know what happened to them afterward. It was horrible. I didn't know what hell was like, before then. We only got a little soup and bread to eat, and even then only sometimes. We would have been starving to death anyway, but we starved more quickly because we were carrying stones for fourteen hours a day. We were so delicate, like baby birds that had fallen from the nest, and we just started to die.

RASMUSSEN: Did you think you were going to die there?

CSEMEGI: I was convinced. After I saw my father die, I knew my life was over. After two weeks of carrying stones, I thought it was just a matter of time before I fell down in the work line, never to get up again. But then the music started.

RASMUSSEN: Music?

CSEMEGI: Yes, music. I didn't know what to think. Every night when I lay down, I would hear music.

RASMUSSEN: Like, just in your ears? Could anybody else hear it?

CSEMEGI: No, only me.

RASMUSSEN: What kind of music was it?

CSEMEGI: It was, I don't know, songs, all different. No two nights were the same. Sometimes it was singing, sometimes it was from an orchestra, sometimes it was like beeps and blips, but musical. They have music like that these days, but I never heard it back then. I always called it technology music. But anyway... some nights it wasn't music at all, some times it was just noise, like static, or hissing, or just a strange alien drone. I didn't like that so much. The orchestral music was my favorite. I had always loved classical music, you see.

RASMUSSEN: How long would it go on?

CSEMEGI: At least a few hours. I didn't sleep much. But, I didn't sleep much even before the music started. I was so hungry, all the time. I used to just lie there at least half the night, feeling my body eat itself. I felt like I had already died, like a ghost. But with the music I was just in a trance, listening...

RASMUSSEN: Did you tell anyone else?

CSEMEGI: No. I was afraid that it would stop if I told anyone. The music brought color back to the world, and I knew I would die if it stopped.

RASMUSSEN: The music helped?

CSEMEGI: Yes. Every night, when it stopped for the night, I would dream about it. I would fall asleep right away, and just dream of the music. And then the next day, I would think about it, and about the night, when it would come again. Everyone else thought I was crazy.

RASMUSSEN: Why did they think you were crazy?

CSEMEGI: I didn't talk to anyone, I hardly took my eyes off the ground. Everyone else thought that I was one of the ones had died inside, and that soon I would die outside too. But I had this life in me, from the music.

RASMUSSEN: Where did you think the music came from?

CSEMEGI: I thought it was God. Singing to me.

RASMUSSEN: God?

CSEMEGI: Yes. Who else could it have been?

RASMUSSEN: Why was it only you that heard it?

CSEMEGI: I don't know why he didn't sing to the others.

RASMUSSEN: <INDISTINCT>

CSEMEGI: No. But, I wish he did. So many more would have survived.

RASMUSSEN: What do you do now?

CSEMEGI: Nothing, I'm retired.

RASMUSSEN: But after the war?

CSEMEGI: I moved to Denmark, to Apenrade, where they still speak German. Germany had betrayed me, you see. I worked as a stonemason. I was never clever with machines, like my father.

RASMUSSEN: Did you ever marry?

CSEMEGI: No. I was too busy with music. I had a record player. It was the first thing I bought after I found work. I didn't even have sheets on my bed, but I bought a record player. I wanted to have music. For years I would listen to records all night.

RASMUSSEN: Do you still listen to music?

CSEMEGI: Always. Less when my son came, since I couldn't afford a nanny, and had to take care of him.

RASMUSSEN: Your son?

CSEMEGI: Yes. I made love to a woman whose house I was working on. Just once, but she became pregnant, and didn't want him. I couldn't let her give him up, so I took him. She didn't want to have anything to do with us.

RASMUSSEN: So you raised him?

CSEMEGI: Yes. And he doesn't like music at all. <laughs> He would cry when I played my records. I hated him for that. But then I found out about headphones, and it was okay.

Eventually, they even started making little tape players, that you could take with you. That was wonderful. I could work all day, listening to music.

<tape ends>