

George and Paul Hadl Heimler

George and Paul Hadl Heimler were born on February 9, 1938 in Budapest, Hungary. They were two of three children (older sister Eva was born in 1931) born to Irene and Sandor Hadl. In the 1940s, Sandor took over his parents' furniture manufacturing business. The Hadl family led a comfortable life in Budapest.



Paternal grandfather, Hugo Hadl, holding Paul (on left) and George (on right), in Budapest in the factory building he owned, late 1938. (courtesy of the USC Shoah Foundation)



George, Eva, and Paul, in their home in Budapest, 1941 (courtesy of the USC Shoah Foundation)

George has few memories of before the war. He does recall getting into some mischief with his brother: To help extinguish fires caused by bombing raids of Budapest, each home had piles of sand in front of them. One day George and Paul decided to fill Sandor's car with the sand! Sandor made sure they knew never to do that again. George also remembers wearing the yellow star and hurrying to the basement during the air raids.

The Hadl family spent one or two weeks in a ghetto before being loaded onto cattle cars and transported to Auschwitz in July 1944. Walking along the selection platform, George recalls his mother asking the SS guard to slow down because she had three children in tow. When the guard saw that Irene had twins, he pulled her

and her three children from the line, separating them from Sandor. That was the last time George and Paul saw their father.

Irene and her children lived together in a children's barrack (Kinderlager). Irene cared for many of the children in the barrack, helping them dress in the morning and wash with a bucket of water and a dirty rag.

Paul and George were always taken together to the building for experiments; doctors experimented on Irene separately. George remembers doctors drawing blood frequently, causing him to faint. Afterward, the twins were given a special-flavored drink, a "treat." The brothers were too young to understand that they were selected for a special purpose.

After liberation, Irene and her children eventually made their way back to Budapest, where she worked hard to put the family's life together. She rekindled the family furniture business, and they lived in a small apartment and cooked on a hot plate. In 1946 they returned to their home. Irene married a childhood friend of Sandor's named Imre Heimler, whose wife and children had perished during the Holocaust. Imre adopted Paul and George in 1948. At about that same time, communists took over the government, and industries in Hungary—including the parents' furniture business—were nationalized. The government took over the land and the factories. Under the communist system of classification (worker, peasant, intelligentsia, "other"), Irene and Imre were considered "others"—those who had owned the means of production and could not be trusted. As an "other," George knew he would not be able to get a higher education.

George stayed in Hungary until October 1956. He had just graduated from high school, and although he was a straight-A student, he was denied admittance to universities. George realized that he and Paul had no future in Hungary, so they decided to emigrate to the U.S. to live with Irene's parents, who had moved to New York in the 1920s.

Before leaving, George had registered with a youth organization in Vienna that helped Hungarian refugees, and through this he earned a full scholarship to Harvard. George arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1957 and found a summer job at a shoe manufacturer. He began his classes at Harvard in September 1957. Paul settled in Chicago in June 1957, worked during day, and attended the Illinois Institute of Technology in the evening. After George graduated, he moved to California and worked as a computer programmer. He met his wife Nancy on a blind date and married her within a year and a half. They have a son and daughter.