Documenting Wallenberg

A Compilation of Interviews with Survivors Rescued by Raoul Wallenberg

by the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

THE INTERNATIONAL RAOUL WALLENBERG FOUNDATION

Casa Argentina en Israel Tierra Santa

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A Compilation of Interviews

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Contributors

Editor
Daniela Bajar

Managing Editor
Svetlana Platisa-Djordjevic

Proofreader
Marisa Emralino

Volunteers
Dana Adler, Leah Avner, Mikhail Iglin, Maya Joyce, Katie Kellerman, Aliza Klapholz, Davin Larson, Michal Lavine, Adriana Lee, Sofia Lindström, Megan McGee, Anne-Sophie Moreno, Jin Nie, Christine Pacheco, Michael Ragsdale, Vanessa Reuter, Mari Rodriguez, Julie Rogani, Evan Rosenbaum, Jonathan Tabor, Nathalia Terra, Sharon Tobias, Blake Valenta, Vesna Vircburger, Susan Wind, Yeo Young Yoon, Rebecca Zlouf

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Helena Muller

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Raoul Wallenberg

By Jan Larsson, excerpted from ***Raoul Wallenberg's Biography***

There are different versions as to the number of Jews in Budapest that Raoul Wallenberg saved. Some sources credit him with having saved 30,000 people. According to other estimates, the number of people who can directly or indirectly thank Wallenberg for their lives is around 100,000. Regardless of which figure is correct, Wallenberg is undoubtedly one of the foremost heroes of World War II.

Wallenberg did not, however, return home to Sweden as a hero when the war ended. Instead, he was arrested by the Soviet troops who were marching into Budapest. The Soviet government has declared time and again that he is dead. Just as many times, however, new witnesses have appeared to claim that Wallenberg is—or was—still alive, somewhere in a Soviet prison or mental hospital.

Raoul Wallenberg is—or was—a member of one of Sweden's most prominent families. The Wallenbergs have given their country several generations of leading bankers, diplomats, and statesmen. His father, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg, was a naval officer and a cousin of Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg, two of Sweden's best-known financiers and industrialists during the half century beginning around 1930. Wallenberg was born on August 4, 1912, three months after his father's death. His mother, Maj Wising Wallenberg, married again in 1918, this time to Fredrik von Dardel.

Wallenberg's paternal grandfather, Gustav Wallenberg, took charge of his education. The plan was that he would follow the family tradition and go into banking, but he turned out to be more interested in architecture and trade.

In 1930, Wallenberg completed upper secondary school, having earned top marks in Russian and in drawing. After doing his compulsory military service, in 1931 he traveled to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to study architecture. In 1935, he received a Bachelor of Science degree and returned home. But, the market for architects in Sweden was small. Instead, his grandfather sent him to Cape Town, South Africa, where he became a trainee in a Swedish firm that sold building materials. After six months, his grandfather arranged another job for Wallenberg at the branch office of a Dutch bank in Haifa, Palestine (in what is now Israel).

There, he came into contact for the first time with Jews who had fled from Adolf Hitler's Germany. Their stories about Nazi persecution stirred him deeply. Perhaps not only because he had a very humane attitude toward life, but also because he himself had a few drops of Jewish blood. After returning to Sweden from Haifa in 1936, Wallenberg did not continue in banking, but instead resumed his old interest in international trade.

Through his cousin Jacob's network of contacts in the business world, he was introduced to a Hungarian Jew, Koloman Lauer, who ran a Swedish-based import-and-export firm specializing in food. Because Wallenberg had a good feeling for languages and could travel freely around Europe, he was a perfect business partner for Lauer. Within eight months, he was a major shareholder and the international manager of the firm.

His travels to Nazi-occupied France, and to Germany itself, soon taught Wallenberg how the German bureaucracy operated. He had also made numerous trips to Hungary, where he visited Lauer's family in Budapest. Hungary was still a relatively safe place, though surrounded by enemies.

Background to Raoul Wallenberg's Mission

By the spring of 1944, the world had awakened and now realized what Hitler's "final solution of the Jewish problem" actually meant. Bits of information about the Nazi death camps had begun to leak out as early

as 1942, but were considered so incredible that at first, they were not taken seriously by some Allied leaders.

The first authentic eyewitness accounts of what was actually happening at the Auschwitz concentration camp reached the Allies in May 1944. Hitler's plans for the annihilation of the entire Jewish population in German-occupied countries became widely known. Hungary, which had joined forces with Germany in its war against the Soviet Union beginning in 1941, still had about 700,000 Jewish residents as of early 1944.

When the Germans lost the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943, Hungary wanted to follow the example of Italy and ask for a separate peace. At that point, Hitler summoned the Hungarian Head of State, Miklós Horthy, and demanded continued solidarity with Germany. When Horthy refused to accept these demands, Hitler ordered the occupation of Hungary, which began on March 19, 1944. Soon, the deportation trains began carrying Hungarian Jews out of their country to the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps in southern Poland, where certain death awaited them.

The Germans began by shipping out Jews from the Hungarian countryside. But, the Jewish inhabitants of Budapest knew that their fateful turn would soon come. In desperation, many of them sought help from the embassies of neutral states. The embassies issued temporary passports to Jews who had special ties with these countries.

The Swedish Legation in Budapest managed to persuade the Hungarian authorities to treat the holders of such temporary passports it had issued as if they were Swedish citizens. They were thus exempted from having to wear the Yellow Star that identified them as Jews. In a short time, the Legation issued 700 passports—a drop in the ocean compared to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were in danger of deportation. The Swedish Legation requested that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm send more staff immediately.

Meanwhile, the World Jewish Congress was holding a meeting in Stockholm. The most important item on its agenda was to organize a rescue action for the Hungarian Jews.

In 1944, the United States had established the War Refugee Board (WRB), an organization whose task was to save Jews from Nazi persecution. The WRB soon found out that the Swedes were making serious attempts to save Jews in Hungary. The WRB's Stockholm representative summoned a group of prominent Swedish Jews to discuss names of suitable people who could travel to Budapest and initiate a major rescue action. Among the participants was Raoul Wallenberg's business partner, Koloman Lauer, who served the group as an expert on Hungary.

The group's first choice was Folke Bernadotte, chairman of the Swedish Red Cross and a relative of King Gustav V. When Bernadotte was not approved by the Hungarian government, Lauer suggested that his own business colleague, Raoul Wallenberg, be approached. Lauer particularly emphasized that Wallenberg had already made many trips to Hungary while working for their jointly owned company. Some members of the group objected that Wallenberg was too young and appeared to be inexperienced, but Lauer persisted. Raoul was the right man, he argued—quick-thinking, energetic, courageous, and empathetic. Besides, he had a well-known name.

Soon, everyone in the group had approved the idea of approaching Wallenberg, who accepted the offer. By late June 1944, he had been appointed first secretary of the Swedish diplomatic mission in Budapest. His brief was to initiate a rescue action for the Jews. Wallenberg was very eager to travel to Budapest, but first he wrote a memo to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He was determined not to let himself be buried in diplomatic protocol and bureaucracy.

He requested full authority to deal with anyone he wanted, without first clearing the matter with the Swedish ambassador in Budapest. He also wanted the right to use diplomatic couriers outside of normal channels.

His memo was so unusual that the matter was referred all the way up to Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, who consulted with King Gustav V before informing Wallenberg that his conditions had been accepted.

Wallenberg's Rescue Actions

When Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest in July 1944, time was already running out. Under the direction of Adolf Eichmann, the Germans had deported more than 400,000 Jewish men, women, and children. They had been transported out of Hungary in 148 freight trains between May 14 and July 8. When Wallenberg got to Budapest, there were only about 200,000 Jews left in the capital.

Eichmann was now preparing a plan to wipe out the entire Jewish population of Budapest within a 24-hour period. In a report to Berlin, he had written that "the technical details will take a few days." If this plan had been carried out, Wallenberg's trip would have been in vain. Eichmann would have implemented a "permanent solution of the Jewish problem" in Hungary. But the head of state, Miklós Horthy, received a letter from King Gustav V of Sweden containing an appeal to stop the deportations of Jews. Horthy summoned his courage. He sent a note back to the king, saying he had done everything in his power to assure that the principles of humanity and justice would be respected. The German deportations were cancelled. A train carrying 1,600 Jews was stopped at the border and sent back to Budapest.

Amazingly, the Germans approved the halt in the deportations. The reason may be that during this period one of the top Nazi leaders, Heinrich Himmler, was playing a high-stake game. Germany was losing the war. Himmler apparently believed he could negotiate a separate peace with the Western Allies. He may have hoped that he could improve his negotiating position by reducing pressure on the Jews. So in Hungary, Adolf Eichmann could do nothing but bide his time.

The head of the Swedish Legation in Budapest at the time was Minister Carl Ivar Danielsson. His closest deputy was Legation Secretary Per Anger. Wallenberg became head of a special department, which was in charge of helping the Jews.

Wallenberg did not use traditional diplomacy. He more or less shocked the other diplomats at the Swedish Legation with his unconventional methods. He successfully used everything from bribery to threats of blackmail. But when the other members of the Legation staff saw the results of Wallenberg's efforts, he quickly gained their full support.

Wallenberg's first task was to design a Swedish protective passport to help the Jews in their dealings with the Germans and the Hungarians. Wallenberg had previously learned that the German and Hungarian bureaucracies had a weakness for external symbolism. So, he had the passports attractively printed in blue and yellow (Sweden's national colors) with the Three Crowns coat of arms in the middle, and he furnished them with the appropriate stamps and signatures. Of course Wallenberg's protective passports had no value whatsoever under international law, but they commanded the respect of those they were designed to influence. At first, Wallenberg only had permission to issue 1,500 such passports. But, he managed to persuade the Hungarian authorities to let him issue another 1,000, and through promises and empty threats to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry he eventually managed to get the quota raised to 4,500 protective passports.

In reality, Wallenberg managed to issue more than three times as many protective passports. His staff grew to several hundred people. They were all Jews, but by working for Wallenberg they were exempted from wearing the demeaning Yellow Star.

In August 1944, the Hungarian head of state, Horthy, dismissed his pro-German Prime Minister, Döme Sztójay, and appointed General Géza Lakatos to succeed him. The situation of the Jews improved substantially. Because of diplomatic pressure—orchestrated and greatly amplified by Raoul Wallenberg—Adolf Eichmann lost his position of responsibility for "solving the Hungarian-Jewish issue."

Wallenberg now thought that his department at the Legation could be phased out and that he himself could return to Sweden. He believed that the Soviet troops, who were successfully invading Hungary, would soon march into Budapest.

On October 15, Miklós Horthy announced that he was seeking a separate peace with the Russians. But, his radio speech had hardly been broadcast before the German troops took command. Horthy was immediately deposed and was replaced by the leader of the Hungarian Nazis, Ferenc Szálasi. He was leader of the Arrow Cross movement, which was feared at least as much as the German Nazis for its cruel methods in dealing with the Jews. Adolf Eichmann returned, and was given a completely free hand to resume his previous terror campaign against the Jews.

Raoul Wallenberg struggled indefatigably against the authorities and frequently showed up as an unwelcome witness to their atrocities. In many cases, he managed to save his own Jewish co-workers from the hands of the executioners—his only weapons were his courage and firm demeanor.
Now Wallenberg began to expand the "Swedish houses." These were more than 30 buildings in the Pest district where Jews could seek shelter. A Swedish flag hung outside the door of each, and Wallenberg declared the building Swedish territory. The number of inhabitants of the "Swedish houses" soon climbed to 15,000.

The other neutral diplomatic missions in Budapest began to follow Wallenberg's example by issuing protective passports. A number of diplomats from other countries were inspired to open their own "safe houses" for Jewish refugees.

Toward the end of the war, when conditions were totally desperate, Wallenberg issued a simplified version of his protective passport, a mimeographed page that bore only his signature. In the prevailing chaos, even this worked.

Immediately after its installation, the new Hungarian Nazi government announced that all protective passports were invalid. But, Wallenberg managed to make the acquaintance of Baroness Elizabeth "Liesel" Kemény. She was the wife of the foreign minister, and with her assistance, Wallenberg managed to have his protective passports reinstated.

While this was going on, Eichmann began his brutal death marches. He carried out his promised deportation program by forcing large contingents of Jews to leave Hungary by foot. The first march began on November 20, 1944, and conditions along the 200 km (120 mi.) route between Budapest and the Austrian border were so appalling that even some Nazis protested.

Thousands of Jews marched in endless columns, hungry and in great suffering. Wallenberg stayed with them continuously, distributing protective passports, food and medicine. He alternately threatened and bribed the Nazis until he managed to secure the release of those who had been given his Swedish passports.

When Eichmann began shipping out the Hungarian Jews in whole trainloads, Wallenberg intensified his rescue actions. As the freight cars full of Jews stood in the station, he would even climb on top of them, run along the roofs of the cars and hand bundles of protective passports to their occupants. On one occasion German soldiers were ordered to shoot him, but were so impressed by Wallenberg's courage that they deliberately aimed too high. He was then able to jump down, unharmed, and demand that those Jews who had received his protective passports be allowed to leave the train and return to the city with him.

Wallenberg's department at the Swedish Legation grew continuously, employing 340 people in the end. An additional 700 people also lived in the department's offices.

Toward the end of 1944, Wallenberg had moved his operations across the Danube from Buda to the Pest district, where the two Jewish ghettoes were located. The minimal law and order that had previously

existed were now gone. The Arrow Cross movement, the police, and the German armed forces shared power in an uneasy alliance.

Wallenberg searched desperately for suitable people who could be bribed, and he found a very powerful ally in Pa'l Szalay, a high-ranking officer in the police force who also belonged to the Arrow Cross. After the war, Szalay was the only highly placed Arrow Cross member not executed. Instead, he was released in recognition of his efforts together with Wallenberg to protect the Jews.

During the second week of January 1945, Wallenberg learned that Eichmann was about to set in motion a total massacre of the Jews living in Budapest's larger ghetto. The only person who could prevent it was General August Schmidthuber, commander of the German troops in Hungary.

Wallenberg's ally Szalay was sent to find Schmidthuber and hand over a note which declared that Raoul Wallenberg would make sure that the general would be held personally responsible for the massacre, and that he would be hanged as a war criminal after the war. The massacre was cancelled at the last minute as a result of Wallenberg's intervention.

Two days later, the Russians arrived and found 97,000 Jews alive in the two Budapest ghettoes. This brought the total number of Jews who had survived the Nazi efforts to exterminate them in Hungary to 120,000.

According to Per Anger, Wallenberg's friend and colleague, Wallenberg must be given credit for having saved about 100,000 Jews.

What happened to Raoul Wallenberg?

On January 13, 1945, the advancing Soviet troops saw a man standing and waiting for them alone outside a building with a large Swedish flag above its door. Raoul Wallenberg told an amazed Soviet sergeant in fluent Russian that he was the Swedish chargé d'affaires for the portions of Hungary liberated by the Soviets. Wallenberg received permission to visit Soviet military headquarters in Debrecen, east of Budapest. On his way out of the capital on January 17, Wallenberg and his chauffeur—with a Soviet escort—stopped at the "Swedish houses," where he said goodbye to his friends. He told one colleague, Dr. Ernö Petö, that he was not sure whether he would be the guest of the Soviets or their prisoner. Wallenberg thought he would be back within a week—but he never returned.

In November 1944, Wallenberg had set up a section in his department that, under his supervision, would write a detailed economic relief plan for the surviving Jews. The Russians did not have the same attitude toward the Jews and were probably incapable of understanding a person who had devoted all his energies to saving them. Wallenberg thus considered it important to meet with the Soviet commanders and explain his humanitarian work to them.

The Soviets probably thought that Wallenberg's work had some ulterior motive. They presumably also suspected him of being an American agent. They were certainly also very skeptical of his contacts with the Germans.

Wallenberg and his chauffeur Vilmos Langfelder never returned from Debrecen. According to reliable witnesses, they were arrested and taken to Moscow. They were jailed by the NKVD, an organization now known as the KGB. According to eyewitnesses, Wallenberg and Langfelder were placed in separate cells at the Lyublyanka prison.

The Swedes naturally expected Wallenberg to come home soon. When nothing happened, his mother Maj von Dardel contacted Aleksandra Kollontai, the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm, who told her she could rest assured that her son was in safe hands in the Soviet Union. Around the same time, Madame Kollontai told the wife of Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Christian Günther that it was in Wallenberg's best interests if the Swedish government did not make a big fuss about him. But Aleksandra Kollontai was recalled to Russia, and the matter took a new turn.

On March 8, 1945, the Soviet-controlled Hungarian radio announced that Raoul Wallenberg had been murdered on the way to Debrecen, probably by Hungarian Nazis or Gestapo agents. This created certain passivity on the part of the Swedish government. The new minister for foreign affairs, Östen Undén, and the Swedish ambassador in Moscow assumed that Wallenberg was dead. Most people did not, however, take the radio announcement seriously.

Many observers have drawn the conclusion that immediately after the war, Sweden had a chance to negotiate Wallenberg's release, but that the Swedes missed the opportunity.

In 1965, Sweden's then Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, declared that all attempts to find Wallenberg directly after the war had led nowhere. In fact, Soviet authorities even denied any knowledge of Wallenberg. According to Erlander, between 1947 and 1951, nothing new of any importance occurred. But as foreign prisoners began to be released from Soviet prisons, many new bits of testimony about Wallenberg's fate after January 1945 came to light.

On February 6, 1957, the Soviets announced that they had made extensive inquiries and had located a document that probably concerned Raoul Wallenberg. The handwritten document stated that "the prisoner Wallenberg, who is known to you, died last night in his cell." The document was dated July 17, 1947, and was signed by Smoltsov, head of the Lyublyanka prison infirmary. The document was addressed to Abakumov, Soviet minister of state security.

The Russians said in their letter to the Swedes that, unfortunately, Smoltsov had died in May 1953 and that Abakumov had been executed in connection with purges within the security police. The Swedes were very suspicious of this message, but the Russians have stuck to their version to this very day. According to testimony from various people who served time in Soviet prisons after January 1945, Raoul Wallenberg was imprisoned throughout the 1950s. This of course contradicts the Soviet government's version.

In the late 1970s, the Wallenberg affair was revived. Two pieces of testimony that the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs found very interesting provided the basis for a note to the Soviet government, asking that the matter again be investigated. The reply from the Kremlin was the same as before—Wallenberg died in 1947. On the basis of additional material, which was regarded as reliable, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ola Ullsten sent another inquiry about Wallenberg to Russian premier Aleksei Kosygin in the early 1980s. The reply was the same as always—Wallenberg had died in 1947.

During the 1980s, there was a growing interest in Wallenberg around the world. In 1981, he was declared an honorary citizen of the United States; in 1985, of Canada; and in 1986, of Israel. All over the world there is a strong belief that he is still alive, and people have demanded his release from Russian imprisonment.

After his incomparable humanitarian efforts, Raoul Wallenberg ended up being a lifelong prisoner—a cruel and ironic fate for a man who sacrificed everything to give his fellow human beings a chance to live in freedom. But all around the world, people continue to honor him as a hero, in recognition of his courage and his struggle for human rights.

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

“Wallenberg was responsible for saving so many generations of people who now live all over the world,” said Ester Mejer of Borough Park, Brooklyn, who was only 13 when Raoul Wallenberg saved her from the hands of the Nazis. “It’s so important that people know about Wallenberg’s courage because persecution does not just happen to Jews. This is happening to other nations now, like Sudan, so we must continue the story of Wallenberg to spread the inspiration and courage to do something about it.” For the past five years, the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation has been collecting stories such as Ester’s as part of its “Documenting Wallenberg: An Archival of Testimonials” initiative with this goal in mind.

Judith Saly, who met Wallenberg when she was in her 20s and in hiding on the outskirts of Budapest, remembers, “The worst thing was that if you hear often enough that you are inferior, you will believe it. While growing up you hear that there is something wrong with being Jewish… So here comes this Swedish gentleman from a distinguished family… and [he] is risking a lot by taking on this task. And that gives one back some of this feeling that maybe we are worth saving… So that was a very important message that his mere presence gave us.”

Survivors from around the world have been raising their multilingual voices to this cause. It is the goal of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation that these stories be preserved as memories of the past, and reminders for the future. By publishing a selection of these testimonies available to libraries, archives, schools and the general public, the IRWF hopes to inspire future generations to follow Raoul Wallenberg’s humanitarian example.

Countless people collaborated with the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation to make this project possible. Familiar with our “Documenting Wallenberg” initiative and knowing that many of their clients were originally from Budapest, Nachas Health and Family Network invited us to their facilities. Armed with a camera and assisted by volunteers, IRWF staff had the opportunity to interview 13 survivors who were in Budapest between 1944 and 1945 during the day-long visit.

Two of the interviews were conducted by Spanish artist Felix de la Concha as part of a larger series he has done with Holocaust survivors while simultaneously creating their portraits. When realizing that Raoul Wallenberg had been instrumental in the survival of two of his subjects, Mr. de la Concha contacted the IRWF and donated a copy of the audio interviews. We are extremely grateful to him for thinking about our organization and for authorizing us to include his interviews in this compilation, as well as in our “Documenting Wallenberg” project.

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation thanks the many volunteers without whom this project would not have been possible. Dana Adler, Leah Avner, Mikhail Iglin, Maya Joyce, Katie Kellerman, Aliza Klapholz, Davin Larson, Michal Lavine, Adriana Lee, Sofia Lindström, Megan McGee, Anne-Sophie Moreno, Jin Nie, Christine Pacheco, Michael Ragsdale, Vanessa Reuter, Mari Rodriguez, Julie Rogani, Evan Rosenbaum, Jonathan Tabor, Nathalia Terra, Sharon Tobias, Blake Valenta, Vesna Vircburger, Susan Wind, Yeo Young Yoon, and Rebecca Zlouf researched, conducted, transcribed, and edited many of the interviews with Wallenberg Survivors. The IRWF wants to express its tremendous appreciation to Marisa Emralino, who proofread the manuscript from back to back with patience and expertise.

Finally, the IRWF is indebted to the many Wallenberg Survivors who opened their homes and their hearts to share their stories with us. Their testimonies will ensure that the legacy and heroism of Raoul Wallenberg will never be forgotten.

As “Documenting Wallenberg” is an ongoing project, the IRWF welcomes new testimonies. Contact us if you or someone you know was saved by Raoul Wallenberg or survived the Holocaust in Budapest. Each year, the IRWF receives countless requests from local schools and community groups for educational

materials about Raoul Wallenberg and other Holocaust Saviors. As the project gathers more testimonies, they will be able to use this material to spread the legacy and values of Raoul Wallenberg.

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation
34 East 67th Street
New York, NY 10065
USA

Tel: (212) 737-3275
Fax: (212) 535-6262

E-mail: irwf@irwf.org
Website: www.raoulwallenberg.net

Interview with Agnes Adachi

Q: When where you born?
A: My birthday is October 26, 1918.

Q: What was your first name and last name when you were born?
A: Agnes (back in Hungary, they called me Aggie) Mandl.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: In Budapest, Hungary.

Q: Where did you grow up? Even though you were born in Budapest, were you raised there? Did you travel?
A: I was brought up in Hungary. There, when your family is well-to-do, they immediately get you a German-speaking governess, and they got me one from Austria, from Innsbruck. I couldn't speak Hungarian, but I could understand a little bit. Then, later on, Papa got me a French mademoiselle from Switzerland who was with us for 14 years, and an English professor from England. By the time I went to junior high school, I spoke Hungarian, German (but not German-German, Austrian-German), French, and English. I also grew up as the only Jewish child in a Protestant school because my father said that it was the best school in Hungary, and he didn't want me to think only in one way. There, I also learned about Judaism.

Q: What do you remember about your school?
A: We had the most fantastic Protestant priest who had six daughters and three sons, and he had a church. I was the seventh daughter, constantly in their house. One day, he said to my father, "Arnold, do you listen to BBC? They just said that anyone who is not of Jewish religion can be saved. And I want to save my seventh daughter." Papa looked at him and asked, "How do you want to do that?" He replied, "I want to baptize her. Let's go to the church." So we went to the church. The protestant priest told me that if I wanted to go back to Judaism after the war, I could, but right now I should be a Protestant child from their church. Papa loudly cried, "Arnold, stop screaming! Down in the basement, it is full of Jews and gypsies. If Nazis come, they will kill us all." Usually, the Catholics didn't help in Hungary. They rather took the people and gave them to the Nazis, except [Angelo Giuseppe] Roncalli, the wonderful person from Italy. He wanted to help Raoul. Later on, he became a Pope.

Back in Hungary, when you spoke many languages, you could become a scout. As a scout girl, I was asked to go around and help foreigners, to show them Budapest. At one point, I had 20 Swedish people. [In this position,] I was corresponding with the whole world. Later on, I went to Switzerland.

In 1939, there was a Jewish Zionist meeting and most of the people [attending] were from Poland. On September 8, suddenly, the radio blared, "The Nazis [have] just overrun Poland." I stood there like a stupid little girl and said to myself, how wonderful it would be to help these people! But how could I do anything in 1939? In 1943, on my father's birthday, I went back to Budapest and the Hungarian Nazis were already there and doing horrifying things; it was very hard. We had to wear the Yellow Star.

One morning, in 1944 or 1945, the mail brought us a letter from the Swedish legation. I wondered what they wanted from me. I opened it up and it said, "Would you please come up? We have to see you." I thought I could not go—how would I go with the Yellow Star? But, the Christian boyfriend of my cousin brought me there, in a Mercedes-Benz, with the German flag on it. He also wore the Nazi uniform. In the embassy, we met Minister [Carl Ivan] Danielsson, who explained to me that the Swedish King wanted to bring protection to the family, friends, and contacts of Swedish people stuck in Hungary. The young Swedish man with whom I was corresponding, Toto (one of the people from the group of 20 Swedes I met while being a scout), tried to protect me, and so they wanted to keep me in the embassy. I felt funny—I wanted to stay, but how could I just leave my parents? They were at my grandmother's house, with my

mommy's sister and her husband (who was a Christian, and he helped me all the time). They sent someone from the embassy to pick up my things, and Mommy and Daddy gave them all my clothes and things like that. I stayed three weeks at the embassy, but I was not the only guest. We had a German-Christian woman who was married to a Swede, and a wonderful German girl with two little boys, also married to a Swede.

One day, Mr. Danielsson decided that we should have some food outside. So there we were, out in the garden, eating delicious fruits, when suddenly I looked up. First it just looked like big birds flying, but then I saw something falling out of the birds. I screamed, "Let's get inside, they are bombing us!" Sure enough, the Nazis were bombing. My cousin's friend came back with the Mercedes and said, "Aggie has to come home. Every day, the Nazis come to our house and her name is still on their list. The whole family could be killed if she is not there." So, I looked at Mr. Danielsson and asked him to let me go. He told me, "Yes, you can go home, but not with [your friend]. You can take the bus, and one of our diplomats will go with you because I want him to see where you are; which house." So I went down with him, and he wrote up our address and said, "Aggie, call us every day when they allow you to get out." Sure enough, two weeks later when I called, he said, "Aggie, you have to come up at once, but you don't have to stay here." So, my friend took me up there again, and there was Raoul Wallenberg.

Q: Did you know who he was at this point? Have you heard of him?
A: No. It was very funny because he was 32 years old, and I looked at him and I said, "Oh my God, such a young man. Look at him; and he wants to come and help people." He already heard about me and I became the first hostess for the whole delegation. The King also said that they had to give real passports to all the people who were still stuck in Hungary. This one was a real passport. Per Anger, who at that time was a first secretary, made 800 of these papers and he gave them to the people, but nobody could travel out of Hungary.[1]

Q: Was this a real document or a forged document?
A: No, this was a real document, a real passport. That's why we could also get the visas on it. Raoul's first question was, "We have to save over 200,000 people, but you only gave out 800 passports?" Raoul said that they had to do something else to help people. That is why he made the Schutz-Pass.

Q: What was the Schutz-Pass?
A: The Schutz-Pass was a security pass. It wasn't a passport. You couldn't really travel with it anywhere. It said—in German and in Hungarian—that the Swedish embassy was giving this security paper to such persons, and that "he and all his belongings are protected by the Swedish government." Even the Nazis somehow allowed him to put these out on the walls in Hungary, even if they not always helped. But Raoul always found ways to help people. There was never a way he would say no.

Q: How did he come up with the idea of a Schutz-Pass?
A: Well, he thought the passport alone was not enough, and he said this one with the picture on it should be, and we should take care of them. Somehow, they allowed him to do it.

Q: How were the Schutz-Passes manufactured?
A: Well, we had some machines to do it at the legation. We could do things there, you know. But it was fantastic; he immediately made the Schutz-Passes for my mother, my father, and my aunts and everybody. So, at least they had five of them. And this was my paper to say that I worked for the embassy.

Q: In your book, *Child of the Winds*[2], you write about how you helped delivering the passes.
A: Oh, yes, that was a fantastic thing. Our office had to move a lot, and one time we were over on the Buda side, in a very beautiful villa. We had to deliver these Schutz-Passes to people by a certain time in

[1]Ms. Agnes is referring to the Provisoriskt Pass, or Schutz-Brief—a document that granted Swedish Citizenship and that was sent directly from Sweden by relatives or associates, or was issued at the Swedish Embassy. This document preceded the Schutz-Pass as ideated by Raoul Wallenberg, which did not provide citizenship and was not to be used to travel.
[2] Adachi, Agnes. *Child of the Winds: My Mission with Raoul Wallenberg*. Chicago: Adams Press, 1989.

the afternoon, around 1 o'clock. Raoul arrived and said, "I have to tell you something fantastic," and we all listened. "Could you believe that the German Headquarters are in the next villa?" We were all shocked, but we had to keep on working. Suddenly I said, "Raoul, I am finished." When he asked me how many [I made], I told him, "500." He said, "Oh my God, Aggie, good luck." And I went out; it was very cold since it was December. And suddenly, I remembered that we were not allowed to be outside at all. It was forbidden to be out on the street; a curfew. I was cold but I walked, thinking, "I have to deliver all this." Afterwards, when I went home, I lay down and suddenly woke up and said to myself, "Oh my God, I could have been killed. We are not allowed to be out in the street." But, I did it, and I delivered all those passes.

Q: In what other ways did Raoul Wallenberg rescue people?
A: What Raoul did was incredible. First of all, he found a lot of Christians, Jews, doctors, and nurses who were anti-Nazi and he opened a hospital. We were very lucky that people who lived on the Pest side gave their apartment houses to Raoul, and we could house the people saved by the Schutz-Passes there.

There were about 35 safe houses and sometimes, two families had to stay in every apartment because we didn't have enough space. On the Buda side, very rich aristocrats gave us their villas.

Q: Were there empty apartments or did the owners allow people to coming in?
A: They let them all come in so everything was full. We had an orphanage too—we had 79 children. They learned a lot from Raoul because he was so fantastic. He was constantly asking, "How can I help people? How can I help people?"

One day, we had a young, pregnant Canadian woman whom we could not take to the hospital because she was Jewish. Raoul told the doctor, "Well, come to my apartment. You can work on her there." He lay down outside on the floor while the doctor was working, and when the child was born, they woke him up outside in the cold, and he became the godfather of the little child. And he did this all the time, nonstop. He also had a fantastic mind to learn everybody's names and he sent people out to learn all the Hungarian Arrow Cross's people's names—not only their names, but also in which offices they were working.

Q: What was the Arrow Cross?
A: The Arrow Cross was the Hungarian Nazi Party. They were even worse than German Nazis; horrendous people. So one day, around 12 o'clock—I still don't know where he got all these medications, or food from—Raoul came to the hospital and when he arrived, there were three little boys standing there; seven-, eight-, and nine-year-olds with guns. Our Raoul didn't believe in guns, knives, or scissors. He always said, "If you are angry with someone, scream; never touch." And this was the first time we ever saw him touch. He kicked those guns down from these three kids; everybody was standing there with their hands up; sick people in the beds too. He said, "Get out and bring me your officer." And the kids really ran away because he was so angry. The officer came and Raoul looked at him, "Simon, you took 30 minutes to get here." And this man said, "How do you know my name?" He said, "I know everybody's name and I am very, very angry that you sent three little kids in here to dare to kill our people." He also told him that somebody was looking to kill Simon because he shot a German officer, who died in their hospital. Simon left without a word. The doctors looked at Raoul and said that they never had a German officer in there. Our Raoul sat down on the floor, hysterically laughing, and said, "Of course not, but that is how I saved you all." This is how our Raoul was. Moreover, he spoke every language perfectly without accent; he spoke German, French, Italian, and Spanish. People said he also spoke Russian, but I am not sure it was true.

Q: Were the hospitals actual health facilities, or did Wallenberg turned homes into hospitals?
A: No, there were such big houses and we could make hospitals out of them. I don't know where he got the blankets, beds, and everything you can think of; he could always find things.

Q: Wallenberg was also involved in creating an orphanage.
A: Oh, every day [Raoul] took time, even if it was for 10 minutes, to go there; he would tell the children stories and sing with them.

He also saved Vera Goodkin.[3] She was from Czechoslovakia and her father was a doctor. She was only 7 years old. One day, her family wanted to run away and a man tried to help them. But, he took them to the wrong place, and her mother had to go with the child to one camp while the father went to another. It was horrifying, but Raoul, who had heard about these camps, sent Red Cross delegates—because they spoke all those languages too—to these place and they screamed at the Germans, "How dare you take these people? This is outrageous and we want these children! Give us the children!" [Vera's] mother pushed her out. When she was in the Red Cross car, the [delegates] said that Raoul would be so proud that they were bringing a child. Because he was a doctor, her father was able to escape a few weeks later, and to save his wife too. They went to Hungary where she had family, who told them to see Raoul, because he needed doctors. When they went and introduced themselves, the father said, "I understand that you need a doctor, but I only have one problem. I don't have my little daughter." And Raoul gave him a big smile and said, "I have your daughter." And that's how they got together. Raoul was a person who could do everything.

Q: I read about how Wallenberg would get on the top of the cattle trains and just start screaming, "Here are my people," and give out these documents.
A: Well, you see, he took not only Schutz-Passes, but also marriage licenses and car licenses with him. On their way to the train station, he would scream at the people, "Anybody who was has my papers, would you please get out!" About 100 people got out from the street, and he gave them all kinds of false papers, then brought them back. And he did the same thing going to the train stations. The first thing he did was with the Hungarian police. If you gave them drinks, they got drunk like hell. So, [Raoul's] car was full of Hungarian vodkas. He got the Hungarian police very drunk and then he said, "Come on, I need your help." First he went up to the top [of the train], but there was a young man who said, "Raoul, get down. The Germans want to kill you up there." So he came down and he yelled at the police, and he said, "Open the door!" And again, he was full of all kinds of papers and he gave out many licenses and everything. And again, he brought back 100 people to Budapest.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg got these papers?
A: That, you know, we still don't know; just like the food and medications, he got everywhere. There were people helping us. We had the Swiss Red Cross and the Portuguese Red Cross too. And, as I told you before, people like Roncalli from Rome. He was incredible. But then, 1945 came and the Soviets arrived, and it was horrible.

Q: Wallenberg was also crucial in saving people from the Danube River.
A: Yes. In 1944, we knew that the Soviets were coming and it was the first time in 40 years that the Danube was frozen. So, Eichmann decided that the best way to kill people was to take them down there—not just Jewish people but the nuns, the priests, the gypsies—wrap three together, and shoot the person in the middle. When Raoul learned of this, he said, "What will Eichmann think of next? Outrageous!" He turned around in the office: "How many of you can swim?" I put my hand up. Then he said, "Let's go!"

We stood at the Danube and we synchronized; whenever he shot, we jumped in. We saved almost 80 people, because we felt for the rope [and untied them]. What we did was pull the rope. When we got to the hospital, Raoul's first question was, "Did you save a young person?" One of the other diplomats said, "Raoul, we only felt the rope, look around in the beds." A nurse just gave me a shot against my pneumonia, and I looked at him and said "Raoul, you are always telling us to save the young. I am young too; what do you want me to do?" He said, "Aggie, it is so easy!" It is? "Yes, prejudice has to disappear; I am color-blind and religious-blind. I only know two kinds of people, the good and the bad, and I have a dream. I want the young people around the world—regardless of color, religion, or nationality—to hold hands and make peace."

I forgot to tell you before that there was a big camp [ghetto] where Jews lived. Raoul called the German Headquarters—he spoke perfect German without an accent—and said, "This is Lieutenant Kraus. I want to speak to General Schmidthuber." So naturally, since Lieutenant Kraus wanted to talk, he came, and

[3] For an interview with Vera Goodkin, please refer to page……

Raoul changed immediately. He said, “I am Raoul Wallenberg, and I have to talk to you. I understand you are a very highly-decorated World War I General. How can you take it to your heart to kill 70,000 people in there around you?” His answer was, “Eichmann told me so.”

So now, Raoul had to lie. Eichmann could have stood right there, but Raoul said, “Eichmann? Didn’t you know Eichmann left Hungary? I had lunch with him yesterday.” That was a complete lie. Schmidthuber said, “Oh, I didn’t know that.” So Raoul said, “I’m telling you, if you don’t release these [people]”—the guns were already standing there to kill all these people—“if you don’t, then you’ll be the first general to be hanged.” He released them, but was hanged anyway.[4]

And he also said, “I saw a lady, an old lady, coming. She still had the Yellow Star on her, and she was carrying a lot of food in a little basket. I told my friends to stay here for a minute because I wanted to talk to her.” He went to her and said, “It is so wonderful to see you alive. My name is Raoul Wallenberg,” and the lady pulled out the Schutz-Pass from her pocket and she said, “Raoul, it is because of you that I am alive!”

And do you know that this happened to Per Anger and me, too? Per Anger later on became a consul in Austria; that was in 1956, when Hungary was standing up against the Soviets. People ran away also. Per Anger talked first to the Swedish Government: “Would you allow me to do what Raoul did with the Swedish Red Cross?” They said yes. When he called up the Government in Austria and he asked, “Would you allow these people to come in and be in a hospital or in a hotel and then go to their country?” They said yes. So one day, Per Anger saw an old lady coming toward him and she said, “Per Anger, you saved me from the Nazis and now you’re saving me from the Russians.”

This happened to me when I was already in the [United States]. I got pneumonia and I went to see my doctor, who is Hungarian. Suddenly on the steps down, an old gentleman came to me and screamed, “You saved my life, you saved my life!” I looked around to [see] whom was he talking to, because I forgot about the war. He came to me, sat down on the floor, and kissed my hands. I asked, “Sir, who are you?” He said, “You don’t remember me?” It turned out that he came once at 3 o’clock in the morning to the legation in Budapest. I was the hostess and when I opened [the door], he was there with four papers and pictures. He said, “Please, please, could we have these four Schutz-Passes?” Though we had already closed, he pleaded with me, so I brought his papers to the minister and said to him, “Do you have five minutes? All you have to do is sign them and we will do the rest.”Evidently, his whole family was saved, and he was the brother-in-law of my doctor. So it happened, but we didn’t remember the people, you know.

Q: When did the Soviets come to Hungary?
A: They came in 1945, and we all thought that it would be alright. But, the Germans went to the Buda side and were fighting for days. One day, I got a phone call from a couple I knew well, who said, “Aggie, can you help our little daughter? Would you please take her to the nuns so that she can live?” I picked up the little girl, and on the streets, there was still shooting from both sides like crazy. I was holding her hands and telling her stories, and I kept our heads down. We made it all the way to the nuns, who took her in. A couple of days later, [the couple] called me again and said, “Aggie, could you pick her up again?” I had to be like Raoul—if he could do it, I could do it too if people needed something. There was nothing else I could do. And sure enough, I went back over the window, they gave me the baby and I took her back to her parents.

We didn’t know that [the Soviets] were worse. We thought that they were only coming to clean out the Nazis, and then they would go. But they were worse than the Nazis. They picked up little children from the street and took them all the way to Siberia, and nobody ever heard from them.

[4]As per the testimony of Pál Szalai—an Arrow Cross officer who worked in conjunction with Raoul Wallenberg to save people—to the People’s Court, Wallenberg wanted to speak with General Schmidthuber personally, but was advised to send a message instead. Szalai asked for an audience to whom, invoking Wallenberg’s name, he delivered the message, “Unless he prevents this vile criminal act, he will be held responsible and held accountable not as a soldier, but as a murderer.” As a consequence, General Schmidthuber ordered the abandonment of the destruction of the ghetto.

Raoul went to a Red Cross colleague and said, “Look behind me, I have two Russian officers on the motorbikes. They invited me to go back. I don’t know if I am going as a prisoner or as a guest, but I want to give you all the money I have, just in case, so you can give it to the hundred thousand human lives we saved. So I can go and give the money, I will keep $1,000.”

My uncle was a Russian too, but not a communist. He didn’t believe me—he said that I was lying, and that not a word I was saying was true; such a man [Wallenberg] never existed. Many people said that, that they didn’t believe a word. It is a pity.

Q: I understand that other members of the legation were taken as well.
A: When the Soviets arrived, one of Raoul’s lawyers came over in a boat—because all the bridges were burned down—and said to me, “Aggie, the Russians took the whole legation,” but he didn’t tell me that Raoul wasn’t with them. There were 13 people [including] Raoul, but he didn’t tell me. He said that the Romanians were now allowed to repatriate, and also, that Romania was the only country in all of Europe that still had a Swedish Embassy. “You have to go there, talk to [the ambassador], and get the Swedes and the other twelve people.” My parents naturally refused right away, but I turned around and said, “They saved 100,000 human lives; how can I say I am not going to save them?” Then I turned to [Raoul’s lawyer] and said, “But Paul, I am not a Romanian.” He came back the next day with false Romanian papers. Also, the Hungarians told us to be careful because the Soviets might pull us off the trains and take us to Siberia, or bring us back to Hungary. Anyhow, I had to help, we had to. As I said, I didn’t know that Raoul was not with them.

So, I went to the train station and I think half of the people there were not Romanian either, but we got in. After two days of travel, we suddenly stopped and were told to get out. So, we left and we slept over in a school, on the floor. The next morning, they woke us up, and we had to get back onto the train. This time, we rode a cattle car. We had big boxes—we sat on them and they said, “All of you, I want to tell you one thing. When we get to the Romanian border, the Russians will be drunk like hell, and they will have a big light. They’ll come and open the door and they will kill you; so please, hide under the boxes. Don’t cough, don’t cry, don’t do anything.” Sure enough, we suddenly stopped, and we heard them singing. They opened the door, searched with the light, and closed it again. And we kept on going…. We arrived in Romania, believe it or not!

I had to go to Bucharest, so I got on another train and there were two Russian officers sitting there. One smiled at me and said, “Why are you going to Romania? Do you speak some German?” I said yes, and he said, “I am a Russian Jew, and he is a Christian. We are going to Israel, and are running away from the Communist country.” I was shocked, you know. He asked me, “Aggie, where are you going in Romania?” I said that I didn’t know, so he told me, “We will give you an address, it’s a Jewish place.” We stayed in contact. Eventually, when they finally left Romania, they went to Budapest and they helped my parents. They brought them out of Hungary to Slovakia.

Q: What was the purpose of going to Romania? Where was the legation?
A: I had to find the Swedish Embassy. I met the ambassador and we talked about the legation. He was a wonderful man who tried to take care of me all the time. Then one day, he finally called me and said, “Aggie, they are arriving—the whole Swedish legation, plus the other people who were with you living there.” So, we were sure that Raoul was coming. But, when they arrived, Per Anger took me in his arm and told me, “Raoul isn’t here…. The Soviets took him and we never got him back.” So I said, “But that’s impossible, we have to have him.” So…it was crazy.

Finally, they said, “We can leave tomorrow—the 12 people, plus the people we saved.” They put all the legation members on the train, but then one of the Russians turned around to us and said, “Niet.” We couldn’t go. We almost screamed and Per Anger looked out the window and said, “Aggie, we will take care of it; somehow, we will get you after us.” We had to all stay there. There were about eight or nine of us; we were all there, and so it was tragic. Eventually, we got word that we could leave to Bari. If you remember, Bari was the place where all the international military was, there in Italy. So we were going with a small Canadian military airplane. We had to sit where the bombs are usually placed, on the side. When we arrived to Bari, we got off and I said, “Oh, my God, now we are free.”

They gave us some food, which we hadn't had for a long time, good food and all that. Then, we were supposed to be paid for a hotel, but instead, they put us in a big truck. It looked like we leaving town and I turned around and said, "What do they do? They are taking us out of here!" Someone told me, "No, Aggie, you are crazy. I'm sure we are going to town." But we didn't. We went to a camp that was once a Nazi camp before, but now the Nazis had left.

We went in and saw a man [who] was with the famous British spy organization, Scotland Yard. Because we only spoke German when we arrived, he went to the heads and said, "They are Nazis running away." So that's why they took us to this horrifying place. It was terrible—we had to sleep sort of outside; it was cold and bad. Once, I went outside and suddenly, and a little British officer came with a gun. I said, "But couldn't you call the people from Scotland Yard?" He replied, "They are playing golf." Then I said, "That's not good; we have to tell them that we are not Nazis, and we have to keep going. We have to go to Rome." I put my hat [on] and he wanted to shoot me. Suddenly, I asked myself, "Am I crazy? The Nazis didn't kill me, and I'll let a British, who is on my side." So, I pulled my hat [off] and that was okay; he didn't kill me.

They finally said that a British soldier could take us all the way to Rome. The Norwegian Red Cross head called and said, "Aggie, we are taking you to Denmark and to America."

Q: So you came to America thanks to the Red Cross?
A: No, we went with this fantastic Norwegian Red Cross Head's car. What was more fantastic was that the driver was a Nazi prisoner, and none of the people wanted to speak German, except they told me, "You speak to him." I said, "If he would find out that I am a Jew, he might kill us all." But I went with him and everything was written up, "Don't go there, there is no bridge; don't go there." So I had to tell him all of these things, you know.

When we arrived in Denmark, there were this Hungarian guy and this German lady whose husband was Swedish; just the three of us. We had to go to Sweden finally, so we were supposed to go on this same little boat like the Danes went in the old times.

Q: Could you tell us about your stay in Sweden? What did you do there?
A: I met Count [Folke] Bernadotte. He was a great Swedish count; he went to all the camps, brought people to Sweden, and opened hotels and hospitals for them. He told them, "You can stay here until you can go back to your own countries, and we will feed you and dress you, and everything." In any case, he asked me if I would come to all the camps and talk to the people about Swedish literature, and the Swedes and Raoul Wallenberg's work. That is what I did in every language, because I spoke German, and French, and Italian…so it was important. It was the most fascinating work I've ever had. I also met people who were incredible.

Q: So these were people from different countries?
A: From different countries, yes.

Q: So some of them were staying and others returning to their countries?
A: Some of them were lucky enough to leave.

Q: What happened to the Swedish legation members while you were making your way to Sweden through Europe?
A: When this train from Romania arrived in Sweden with no problems, the first thing Per Anger did was to call the Prime Minister and say, "I want to help you find Raoul."

Per Anger kept working very hard with me, corresponding for years. When [Mikhail] Gorbachev came to office, he decided to invite Raoul's half-sister, half-brother and Per Anger to come to Sweden to try and find Raoul. Sure enough they went, and did you hear the name Sakharov?[5] He was a Russian Jewish

[5] Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov (1921–1989) was an eminent Soviet nuclear physicist, dissident, and human rights activist.

man who received a Nobel Prize; he was there too. He turned to them and he said, "The KGB[6] today has no idea what to do, so maybe I can help you. I will talk to them." So a young man at the KGB said, "Sure, where do we start? What do we do?" And Sakharov said that there is one big room in the Kremlin with every prisoner's belongings in it. If you find the key to the room, we can find something about Raoul Wallenberg. So the KGB listened to him, and they found all his things and $1,000, which they never took away from him.

Q: What motivates you to keep going and enjoying life?
A: It's because—as I told my parents—if I had a brother, I would have liked to have one like [Raoul] because he helps everybody. My room is full of his pictures. I helped name a Wallenberg school.

Q: Can you tell me more about the school?
A: Yes, it is a normal P.S. 194, located in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. At that time, we had a wonderful Swedish ambassador who helped me with it.

Q: How is this school different from any other school?
A: Well, I am teaching them like Raoul taught me: color blind, religious blind. You will not believe how the children learn. When I come, I give them awards because they are helping their communities and they know that. The first few years we only gave 10 for New York children and 16 for children in New Jersey. The last two years, we had 40 children in each place. They are fantastic children, what they do in their community.

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg walks in the door, what would you say to him?
A: Brother, thank you for being here. But he will probably not recognize me. He is 94[7] years old.

Q: Do you think he is still alive?
A: We are now able to read all the previously censored documents. About a year and half ago, I got a call from a historian telling me she was at the FBI, reading a letter from a Russian woman claiming that Raoul was alive; that he was married to a Russian woman who is allowed to be with him. He was in a mental hospital in the Gulag. When he was alone, he would draw this beautiful monument. The doctors claimed that they built this monument outside the hospital. I don't know the name of the hospital. It is one of over 2,000 mental institutions in Russia. She claimed the monument is out there. This was a year and half ago.

Q: When you were working with Wallenberg, did he tell you what motivated him to act as he did?
A: No, he just said, "Isn't it wonderful to help those people?" and my answer was yes. He helped my parents too. He did not have to do it; he could have stayed home.

His family members were bankers. They also made guns. But, Raoul did not believe in guns or banking. His grandfather sent him to a bank in Africa, but after one week, he wrote back and complained that he did not like it. So, he was sent to Israel, where he met the refugees from *Kristallnacht*. After meeting with them, he wrote to his grandfather again, asking him to bring him home. His grandfather suggested that he go to America to learn architecture and about democracy. He went to Ann Harbor, Michigan. I spoke to some of the people who went to college with him. He helped children at the time, helped everyone.

When he went back to Sweden, he couldn't build because the Nazis were already all around. He became partners with a nice Hungarian Jewish man who was in business. When [Franklin] Roosevelt decided to create this American Refugee Board, he sent his Ambassador to Sweden looking for someone who could help the Hungarian Jews. That is how he received diplomatic papers. He was also funded to run those houses for the refugees. But in the end, nobody came to help. Not Roosevelt, not [Winston] Churchill, no one. Isn't that terrible?

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[6] The KGB (abbreviation for Committee for State Security—in Russian, *Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti)* was the Soviet Union's foreign intelligence and domestic security agency from 1954 to 1991.
[7] Raoul Wallenberg was born in August 4, 1912.

I do feel I was very lucky. God listened to me when I was in Switzerland in 1939, and I decided I need to help people. God always tried to keep me alive…. Raoul was right. It does not matter what color or which religion you are. If you are bad, you are bad.

Interview with Agnes and David Adler

Q. What is your date of birth?
Agnes: My date of birth is April 29, 1930.

David: July 28, 1928.

Q: What is your maiden name?
Agnes: My maiden name is Marie Georgina Agnes. Agnes was my Hungarian name, which I also used when I came to [America]. I dropped my middle name, Georgina. It was a very common name in Hungary. If you were a girl they called you Georgina, and if you were a boy they called you George. However, it was not so common in this country.

Q: Where were you born?
Agnes: I was born in Budapest.

David: I was born in Dunaföldvár. It is a small town about 90 kilometers south of Budapest.

Q: Did you grow up in Budapest?
Agnes: Yes, I lived there until the age of 6. I was at home and I didn't go to kindergarten. My mother raised me by myself because my father didn't want to expose me to the Hungarian kindergartens; they were not very good in those times. When I turned 6, she sent me to the Scottish Mission of Hungary for school; it was the best school in the area. They accepted Jews and they had two foreign languages in the curriculum: German and English; you learned those foreign languages from the age of 7, which was very important. It was sort of a private school.

David: I grew up in the town in which I was born, Dunaföldvár, on the shores of the Danube, which runs also through Budapest. In 1928–1930, there was a big depression; it was an outcome of the American depression. My father lost his store, so he reestablished himself in another profession. He became a vendor for fairs. He knew most of the officials in town so he acted as an intermediary between the officials and clerks on behalf of the peasants, who were uneducated. He helped the peasants get loans. It was a very bad year for them. The crops were not growing as they should, so the peasants were all devastated. That was how many Jews were forced to find other means of support since they were farmers.

I was [in Dunaföldvár] until 1941. At that time, I went with my mother to her parents in Sopron, which was a border town to Austria, four or five miles from the border. Her parents were basically German; they were from Ödenburg.[8] I was there for about a year helping some Jewish middle-class store keepers who were separated from their families due to the war. My father was sent to a labor camp and my older brother was taken by the Germans. Most of the Jewish population was no longer in Budapest; they were all transported to Germany. My mother thought that we should go to Budapest because it had the largest Jewish community. All the Jews who escaped from small towns and villages fled to Budapest, so the Jewish population swelled.

Q: Did you have any siblings?
Agnes: I am an only child.

David: I have two brothers. One died in Auschwitz, the other one is in Rhode Island. He is a big shot in the Jewish community. He was the principal of a Hebrew school and he gives lectures on how he survived Auschwitz.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?

[8] Ödenburg is the German name for Sopron, a Hungarian city bordering Austria.

Agnes: Not quite. I went to religious classes but I went to a non-Jewish school, the Scottish Mission. Their aim was to convert us, the Jews, to the Protestant faith, but the kids all resisted and nobody converted. However, we enjoyed the liberal attitude. They gave us an education and they were very nice to us when all the other schools in the city discriminated against Jews.

David: The Hungarians were very anti-Semitic, almost as much as the Polish. They did not like to have Jews in their classes. I was the only Jewish kid in the middle school. My brother had other Jewish kids in his class, but I was the only Jew in mine for four years. We were Orthodox, my family and my mother's family. We grew up in a little town and there was a Jewish elementary and middle school. It was established by the Neolog Jews—they were more modern Jews who were not Orthodox. There were about 80 Jewish families in town, but there were only about five or six Orthodox families, so we had a small *shul*. The Neolog was a huge temple and the Rabbi was Dr. Schreiber, who became, after the war, one of the biggest rabbis in Budapest. The Neolog temple was his first assignment. I celebrated my *bar mitzvah* in my grandparents' home in 1941. My father wasn't there. He was in the labor camp, and my mother was already in Budapest serving [time at a labor camp], so both my parents missed my *bar mitzvah*.

Q: Was your family religious before the war?
Agnes: My mother was traditional. She was a teacher in the Jewish orphanage. My father was never religious. He was a scientist; he believed only in music and mathematics. He did not go to the Jewish temple except to play the organ.

Q: What kind of activities did you do before the war started?
Agnes: I was a bookworm. I read a lot of books and I was also a student of a very advanced teacher for those days. He was an Indian yoga master. I was his student from 1940 through 1944. I did believe wholly in the principles he taught. He talked about spiritual values and taking care of your soul and body together.

David: She still does yoga daily. I did sports mainly—football and soccer. I only had Jewish friends because the Orthodox Jews did not mix with the non-Jewish population. The Neolog Jews did mix. They went on trips around town and to different forests, sustaining themselves with food they could find. Most of the Jewish families were struck by the economic turn of events, so the kids were underfed.

Q: When did you first notice anti-Semitism?
Agnes: From 1933 on. It started to build up slowly, but by 1939, when the Hungarians joined the Germans, it had become worse. First, with my father, they retired him forcibly and took him to a work camp. At that point, nobody could be unaware of the events. My father really wanted to emigrate in 1939—he wanted to go to Montevideo, Uruguay as a mathematician, but my mother was afraid. She said, "I don't want to leave everything and go to a country where I don't speak the language." By 1940, I was a Zionist because I received a small education while in a Zionist cell, which tried to teach students to immigrate to Israel. I got the idea in my head and I knew that I never wanted to convert to the Protestant Church as they tried to do to us in school. I just hoped, deep in my heart, that one day I would go to Palestine.

Q: Do you recall any specific anti-Semitic events?
Agnes: It went on and on for years. Not in the school, which was the only haven for Jewish children, because the Scottish missionaries accepted all people. They just wanted to give an education to people. But as soon as you went out to Budapest, there were many people who voiced the opinion that Hungary would be better off without Jews. The Jews were very affluent and most intellectuals were Jewish. The doctors, the lawyers, the best businessmen were all Jewish. Budapest's cultural life was based in theater, and business was based on the Jews. They were the first people eliminated in 1944. They took them away to concentration camps, took away their businesses, and most of them never came back.

David: Most of the Jews took partners who were non-Jewish, and signed over the names of the businesses to their partners with Hungarian names. They survived up to a year with these partnerships. For that one year, their businesses survived, but slowly and surely, the businesses were all taken over by

the Christian partners because the Jews were all taken to concentration camps.

Agnes: There were a lot of changes in the Hungarian government. First of all, they were relatively good when General [Miklós] Horthy was in charge. His ministers knew what the Jews did for Hungary. But then the government changed and everything became terrible. They had one thing in mind: to exterminate the Jews.

David: It started when the Germans gave Horthy an ultimatum. They said, “Either you ally with us, or we run you over anyway.” So he sort of agreed and let the Germans through Hungary with the aid of an extreme rightist organization.

Q: Were you aware of the genocide going on?
Agnes: No. They wrote cards from Auschwitz to their families: "Here I am in [the] Schwartzwald[9] and they are treating us well." People did not know; if they had known, they would have resisted. They wouldn't have gone so willingly on those trains. It was very much suppressed.

David: But they worked in forced labor positions, in the war industry for Germany. All the German men were in Russia because of the war, so they needed forced labor. My brother wrote us a card sometime in 1944 from Waldsee,[10] [saying] that he is working and being treated alright, and we should not worry. That was the last card we received from him. My father never wrote us. He was probably too sick. He was only 55. He was born in 1891 but he was already sickly, and he probably did not work at all there.

Q: What were your thoughts, feelings, reactions?
Agnes: I was a rebellious girl. I didn't want to go to the ghetto. All the Jews, in 1944, had to move from permanent residences to Jewish houses. No matter where you were, they collected you and pushed you into the ghetto, which was where the Orthodox Jews lived. I had this feeling that I did not want to go to the ghetto. I felt that there was a real danger lurking there, and I was right in my assumptions.

David: If they could not take the Jews to Germany, they took them to the Jewish ghettos to demolish them there.

Agnes: My mother was taken to the ghetto and I said, "I am not going with you." At night, I looked around, took off the Yellow Star, and started to walk the streets of Budapest, assuming an identity as a non-Jewish refugee. I wandered the streets and every night, slept under a different gate. Then, I went to ask for help from my mother's non-Jewish friend, who was a teacher. She said that she could not help me; she was already hiding two Jews. She gave me some money and said, "Buy yourself some food, and keep yourself out of harm’s way." It was easier said than done.

Q: How did your parents react to the decision not to go to the ghetto?
Agnes: My father was not around. He was already marching to the border of Germany, and he was almost taken to Germany except for one thing that saved his life: he was an actuary. He used to do books for a monastery for 25 years for no money. When the monastery heard, the nun and the priest came and swore that he was not Jewish under the protection of the Vatican. They put him in the ghetto and said, "Now, run and find a hiding place because we cannot do more for you."

Q: How did the quality of life change during the war?
Agnes: It really went down. It was very hard from 1940 on. They gradually took the Jews out of their economic lives and so it became harder and harder to make a living. If you were a doctor, you might be able to still take patients, but if you were a merchant, they took away your store. My father was an actuary and he spent most of his time in a work camp where all the Jewish men were called in. That lasted for about four years. I saw him only three times in those four years. Of course, almost everybody suffered economically. My mother had a very hard time paying rent and finding enough for me to eat and wear.

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[9] The Schwartzvald, or Black Forest, is a forest located in Southwest Germany.
[10] Agnes’s brother was actually in Auschwitz. Waldsee was a made-up name assigned by the Germans to be used in all correspondence. Germans would force prisoners to write cards saying that they are in Waldsee and everything is fine.

We were a middle-class family that was really affected by the economy and what the Nazis forced on us. It did not get better until the occupation of the Russians. That's when I decided to escape Hungary, since I didn't see any future as a Jewish person. It's good that I did that.

Q: Do you remember when the Nazis invaded Hungary?
Agnes: It was March 19, 1944. It was the middle of a show in the children's theatre in Budapest. It was an American play and during the second act, one of the actors came out and said, "We regret to inform the audience that our German brethren took over Hungary, and we have to stop the show." Then people ran out of the theater and everyone tried to get home safely and tried to make arrangements. But who could? It was totally unexpected. The Hungarian government tried to make us feel that everything would be ok.

That's when they captured the Jews, sent them to Germany, and transported them from their apartments to ghettos. Or, they took them on a death march from Hungary to Germany because they didn't have enough trains. They were desperate and they wanted to wipe away all of the terrible deeds they did to the Jewish people and to others in Hungary.

Q: Can you explain what the Arrow Cross was?
Agnes: They were partially young criminals who were in jail and given pardons. There was a semi-intellectual named [Ferenc] Szálasi, who organized the group. He was hanged after the war. He was dangling on a rope in Budapest. I was a kid of 15 or 16 when the Arrow Cross was formed. They were mostly taken from the jails because they weren't being fed by the government anymore. The Germans took them out of jail because they knew that they would be desperate and obedient if they were given a gun and authority. The Arrow Cross went around and robbed anybody, mostly the Jewish stores. They were the law, but they were also the opposite of the law. Basically, the Germans said, "If you kill Jews, all their property is yours." So that's what happened—the Arrow Cross caught Jews, tortured them, killed them, and shot them in the Danube by the thousands. [David's] brother was active by saving these groups when they were taken to the edge of the Danube. He took some of the groups to safety. The Arrow Cross people had no law, no morality, nothing. They just knew one thing: whatever they steal from Jewish houses was theirs. It was a total anarchistic attitude that they had.

Q: Did you have any personal encounters with them?
David: I have a funny story about that. The Germans needed help from only those who had special skills. In the house where I was, there was a young kid, 19 or 20, who worked repairing and fixing automobiles. Somehow, he was not taken to forced labor camp because the Germans wanted him to repair war machinery, tanks, and trucks. They established a garage on top of the hill in Buda. They took this kid there, and didn't let him go until 11 or 12 o'clock at night and then would take him back in their own jeep after the curfew. Once, they didn't take him home and his parents came to me crying, "My son didn't come home, what happened to him? Would you please look for him?" They asked me because I was a rebellious kid. I took off the Yellow Star and since I was in the forced labor group, I had a work permit and could go out after curfew because I could say that I just got off from work. So, I went up the hill to find that workplace of the German group where he was repairing the cars. The Germans looked at me and said, "Boy, this guy has guts. He has *chutzpah* to walk in the streets by himself at night." So they took me and the boy in their special jeep. Of course, my brother gave me a hard time after that. It was like an act of defiance. I said, "Well, I could do it. Why not?"

Q: When did you first hear about Raoul Wallenberg?
Agnes: Only after the war. I didn't know the work that he did, but the people who worked in the Zionist house helped him make Schutz-Passes. That's when I put two and two together and realized that I had met him. I had no idea that I talked to him and sat next to him, and he was the one who sent me to the Swedish bunker. I didn't know all those important people. I was a 13-year-old kid without parents, milling around Budapest, trying to find something to eat and to survive. I think it was providence that put him next to me on that bus. I had no money, no connections, nobody.

Q: Tell me more about that encounter.
Agnes: Once, a Jewish man asked me if I, as a 13-year-old girl, could go to his pharmacy and get his nitroglycerin, which was medication for his heart. I agreed to go and on the bus, I saw this guy who turned

out to be Raoul Wallenberg. He was sitting like any other person. He was in a coat and a fedora hat. I looked at the guy and he had a good face. He didn't look aggressive, just a young, middle-aged guy. I talked to him in German. It took all my courage, because if the Swedish flag he was wearing was a deceptive measure, he could have given me over to the police. Luckily for me, he was who he was. He looked at me and said in Hungarian, "Go to 63 Baross Street and tell them that I sent you." He signed his name—which I couldn't read because it was a scribble—and said, "Go to the Swedish house and tell them that you are a baby nurse and you can take care of the babies." And that's what I did. That was my only connection with him; it was 20 minutes.

Q: Can you describe Wallenberg for me?
Agnes: He wasn't very good looking. He was young and I remember his hat. I also remember his coat; it was blue. I concentrated only on that. It was October and he had this Swedish flag on his lapel, and that's what captured my attention. I thought that maybe he was Swedish. I thought that if I open my mouth and speak in German, and he is German, I am lost. But he looked me over and saw a kid with a pigtail and no star on.

David: There was a time when the Germans were already bogged down near Stalingrad, in late 1944. They desperately needed trucks to ship supplies to the Russian front. They made a deal with the help of Raoul Wallenberg to get 20 or 30 trucks from Jews in exchange for saving Jewish kids and letting them go to England. Two of my cousins are in London still, where they survived thanks to this Jewish *Kindertransport*.

Agnes: [Wallenberg] did so much, but at that time we knew only of the Schutz-Passes. He forced the Germans to accept these letters of protection. He established a few [safe] houses, where they put up the Swedish people.

David: The Germans could not go in because the Swedish, Swiss, or the Vatican people protected it.

Agnes: After the war, when I went back to see our old apartment and I heard about [Raoul Wallenberg], I was surprised that the Hungarian government didn't do much to keep his name. Nobody could ever find out what happened to him. As long as the Russians were in power for 50 years, no one could get the truth. Maybe one day there will be an answer, and we will know what really happened to him. Some people think that he died in 1947, but some prisoners said that 12 years after he was taken, he was still alive in the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow. But nobody knows anything for sure.

David: One of my cousins was taken to Russia after the war. He somehow survived in Budapest as an underground fighter. He was religious. I don't think he ever had a gun in his hand, but he joined the underground. After, the Russians needed people to stock up from the stores, which were all boarded up, and they needed people to go raid these stores to give food and supplies to the Russian advancing army. We were all raiding the stores after the war because that was where the food was. I survived by getting two boxes. One was a box of matches, which was worth more than money, more than anything. I could trade it for food, for sweaters, for earmuffs, or anything. That's what saved me, raiding these stores behind the Russian soldiers. They didn't take me to Russia, but my cousin was taken in one of these raids for young people. He was in Russia for five years. He came all the way on foot from Russia to Budapest. We thought he was gone but he came back, survived, and lived afterward in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Wallenberg wasn't the only one taken to Russia among the young population. Maybe they didn't even know who he was.

Agnes: They knew, of course.

Q: David, when did you first hear of Raoul Wallenberg?
David: I heard from [Agnes]. I was not involved. What young kid is involved with high diplomacy?

Q: What about the Swedish safe houses? Were you aware of their existence?
David: That's a funny story. My mother had a connection with these baronesses. They said that there was a group of Swiss people who established the house, but you could not get in unless you had a paper. She

got in touch with somebody who was a very good-looking man. He said, "I'll get you the paper if you do something for me." My mother was 45 at the time, a very good-looking lady, and she was very intelligent. She got in touch with this guy who was in his 40s or 50s, and he got her a paper. I don't know what she did to get it. That's up to you to think. But that's how we got into the Swedish house.

Q: The paper your mother got, was it Swedish or Swiss?
David: I never saw it. I just knew that we could go [to the house] and we were safe. But, we were not very safe; our house was right on the Danube where the bombs were going off. A guy with an apartment on the fifth floor was killed by a British bomb. That was in December, when it was still under siege.

Agnes: They charged a lot of money for the paper, 10,000 Hungarian pengő. If you didn't have the money, it was very hard to get this paper. Only the most influential people were able to get into this group. At that time, copying wasn't very good, but they tried. The Zionist house copied papers—they originally made 10,000 and then they made it into 15,000. They made papers for those who could not afford it since few were privileged enough to pay for these documents. The Germans demanded a lot of money for their soldiers and pressed the Jews constantly to give them money and merchandise; Raoul Wallenberg just tried to save anyone he could reach.

Q: Who charged for the papers?
Agnes: Intermediaries who got hold of the papers and tried to copy them. Somehow the Germans accepted [the forged ones]. The thing is, people were very dishonest. People betrayed and tried to get money for themselves. But we were innocent; we were children, and we didn't know all of this. I almost got on the train that went to Germany and Sweden, but I didn't because my father didn't have the 20,000 coins. Instead, I went to the Zionist house, where I was relatively safe. But some people fell through the cracks and they were caught. We slept in the entrances of houses, afraid to sleep because the raids came every two or three hours, trying to find "illegal people" who had no papers (like Jews or spies). They would come and line people up in the yard, and if you didn't have papers, they took you to Germany. I was never in the same place for a long time. That's how I met Wallenberg on the trolley bus. If I hadn't met him, I'd be dead. I'm sure.

Q: Can you describe the day-to-day life in the safe house?
Agnes: It was absolutely terrible, I tell you. They put 100 times more people in the house than it was designed for. The house had maybe 50 or 60 people living there normally. They put maybe 32 into every apartment, into an apartment designed for maybe two or three people or one family.

David: Thirty-two people into a room. Maybe 100 people in an apartment.

Agnes: People were starving because there was no place to cook. You had no place to sit, children were crying. People got sick very fast and they tried to get into a Jewish hospital, but everything was dissolving. Everyone knew the end was coming for us; there was a very strong feeling of doom. There was no day-to-day life; you couldn't go out to shop. They gave one hour for Jews in the afternoon, from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., to use your rations and shop. You got a bottle of milk and four slices of bread if there were four in the family. If they caught you one minute after 4 o'clock, you were taken by the police to a detention center. It was a time of fear.

You knew that unless some miracle happened, your life was over. The children were not always aware of this and the teenagers were always looking towards the future. I, myself, had one idea: I didn't want to go to the ghetto. I said to myself, where there are too many Jews crammed together, it's like having dough with too much yeast. A lot of smart people get on each other's nerves. It was not the scene I was looking for. I liked fresh air and walking in the woods, so I decided to get away from this scenario. I said to my mother, "I am not going to the ghetto," and my mother said if I didn't, [the officers] would capture me and shoot me immediately.

When I met Raoul Wallenberg and he gave me the address, it gave me the opportunity to have a roof over my head. They even gave us food: beans and carrot soup twice a day. The babies mostly got milk from nursing mothers. Luckily, I was not there very long, just two and a half months. Later, the Russians

came and occupied Budapest. We could finally get out and try to find our parents, but it was still dangerous because the Russian occupying forces were not nice people. Some were from the Russian Steppes,[11] and they were totally uneducated Mongolians who just wanted to collect watches—20 of them if they could—because they never had watches at home. For them, they were real treasure. In the backward parts of Russia, people were so poor; they had nothing. When they came to Budapest, they did everything in their power to accumulate everything they could, but there was not much left because the Germans had taken everything of value.

David: There was a story of a Russian soldier who took a big alarm clock and took it to a jeweler and said, "Make me 10 watches with this." That's how uneducated they were.

Q: How did you get food and clothing in the safe house?
David: They didn't. What you had, you had, and that's it. Sometimes you got some bean soup a day, and there was maybe some tea in the daytime. Bread was nonexistent. We starved. November and December were very hellish. We only survived because the youngsters in the house entertained themselves and other people.

Agnes: Before I went to the Swedish Red Cross, I had like $20.[12] I bought a gallon container of apricot jelly, which I brought with me to the Swedish Red Cross. I gave the children around me one teaspoon of jelly every day and that was instrumental to our survival. In the morning we got soup, and in the afternoon we got some beans; that was it. So this jelly was a little bit of sugar and it lasted for two months. That's it. There was no other resource; we couldn't get any food.

Q: Were all the people in the safe houses Jewish?
Agnes: Some of the people who refused to leave their apartments were non-Jews; they resented it. But some of them were very sorry for this multitude of people, and they went out during the day and tried to buy some food for them. They were allowed to go out because they were not Jewish. But there were some good people who remained in the houses. They tried to alleviate the pain of what was happening to the Jews. Some were happy about what was happening. It depended on their intelligence, their status in life. The good were few and far between.

Q: Raoul Wallenberg started an orphanage, a hospital, and also gathered trucks to help people. Did you hear of any of these deeds?
Agnes: After the war, yes. I escaped in December 1945 (illegally, though), so I was a couple of months into the Russian occupation, and they kept it a secret that they captured him. I heard maybe about the orphanages, yes. We tried to get to a place like that because most of the people were orphans. I was lucky. My mother and father remained alive. [David's] father was killed, and his brother too. And his mother was not with him.

David: She was, for a while, in Budapest high society, living in a six- or seven-room apartment in the best area of [the city]. She was living there, getting to know people who were not Jewish. That's how she probably got that paper.

Q: How were you reunited with your parents?
Agnes: After the Russians came in, the Swedish Red Cross said, "We have three plates of food left and after that, you are free to go and find your old life." They told us to go back and see if our relatives were alive.

So, I left the Swedish Red Cross and went to my old apartment. There was a strange family living there—a Russian translator. Somebody who was responsible for the house, a janitor, said he saw my parents recently. He told me to go down under the house where they kept the wood for the stoves. I went down

[11] A steppe is a geographical region characterized by grassland plains. The term is also used to refer to the climate encountered in regions too dry to support a forest, but not dry enough to be a desert. The Russian Steppe begins near the mouth of the Danube and extends northeast almost to Kazan, and then southeast to the southern tip of the Ural Mountains.
[12] Hungary's currency at the time was the pengő.

into the total darkness and at the end of this basement, I saw a light flickering. Somebody had a candle. I saw my mother and father. I looked at them, but I didn't recognize them. My father was always clean shaven since he was a banker. When I saw him last, he was 44—a youngish man. When I saw him after the war, he had aged 15 years. My mother I recognized, but my father didn't look like himself.

On the way to the apartment, I saw a Russian soldier, a woman, who said to me, "*Baryshnya*," which means young lady. She gave me a present: a chicken without a head, which died in the bombings. I looked at it. I couldn't believe that she gave it to me. I said in Russian, "*Spasiba*," which means thank you. I took it and walked to my old house. [My parents] saw the dead chicken and my father said, "We haven't eaten for two weeks. Find a place where you can cook this and make us something to eat because we are going to die of starvation."

I went back to the Swedish Red Cross, where they had a big oven and there were some coals glowing there. I threw the chicken into the oven, which burned away all the feathers. The lady there said to me, "I can't give you anything to put on it but here's some salt. Rub it on the chicken." Afterwards, I took it back to our old apartment and my mother and father literally ate it in 20 minutes. They were ravenous; they were at the end of their lives, almost. When they finished, my mother said, "Oh my God, we didn't leave you anything. Forgive us. We were so hungry." This is an image that remains in my mind. I realized, at the age of 14, that I had to be a protector. They totally lost everything during the war. I am just telling you this to give you a picture of how people got out of their regular human form during this war. People did really horrible things. They lost their humanity. This is what the Germans did to them.

Q: David, you were in the safe houses with your mother. How were you reunited with your brother?
David: At the time, my brother was active with the youth movement of the Zionist organization. When I left to go to Israel, he was one of the group leaders of over 150 youths. After the war, my brother went to Israel in 1948. He was not in the religious group; he was in one of the highly motivated, young groups made up of people from the orphanages. It took a year and a half to travel to Israel via Austria, Italy and finally Palestine. At that time, Israel was still British territory and the British captured us and shipped us to Cyprus. We spent 11 months there, where we were fed and taught Hebrew. There were almost 10,000 people in that camp in Nicosia and Famagusta. My brother came to Israel in 1948 when I was living on a *kibbutz*.

Q: How did the war affect your family's religious and cultural traditions?
Agnes: My father became more religious, more accepting of religious values. After the war, my parents came to the *kibbutz* where I had been for 10 years, Kvutzat Metzuba, and they lived there for about 10 years. When I got married, my parents told me they had to leave. But, my mother always had very strong Jewish values. She was a teacher in the Jewish orphanage. My father, on the other hand, worked with non-Jewish people in the bank. He was an actuary and he knew the Hungarian people. He was never very keen about Jewish values. His father left his mother when he was a child, and his father married an Orthodox woman. My father was left alone with his mother and he developed a middle-class European attitude, which was not too religious. They observed Jewish holidays sometimes—maybe they fasted on *Yom Kippur*—but other than that, they didn't push Jewish values.

My parents left and I went through three years of *aliyah,* and I was the one who tried to pull them back into Jewish life. My mother accepted Judaism better than my father. When they came to Israel as elderly people, it was very hard. They couldn't get jobs and the *kibbutz* didn't support older people. When you were young, you could work on the *kibbutz*, you could go to the city, and you could do what you wanted. But if you were old, you had a lot of struggling years ahead of you.

David: After the war, I was involved with the Zionist organization. I stopped going to my boss, who was trying to get me to be a partner with him as a dental practitioner. He practiced as a dentist but didn't have the papers, so when he would come across something serious in his dealings with his patients, he had to give it to a medical doctor. In Hungary, this was an accepted practice at that time. He wanted to adopt me because my father was gone and my mother was living her life trying to establish herself, so I left.

Agnes: He is very good with his hands; has very good manual dexterity, so [the dentist] thought [David] would be good in his practice.

David: At that time, we were bombarded with a segment of the Zionist organization. They sent emissaries to Budapest to get all the youngsters to Israel. They established a summer camp on Lake Balaton—which is the biggest lake in Hungary—for Jewish kids, and there was food, there were girls, and there was dancing. For a month, it was a community. But there was a lot of propaganda for Zionism; it was the main issue.

After this camp, I left the dentist and went to "Mi Cha" (Middle Hachshara) in Israel. They started to teach us about Israel, about the language, and about community life. So [Agnes] went to Israel in December 1945, and I went with another group in January 1946. I saw her at a group meeting in Budapest on a Friday night. She was reciting her own poetry, and I thought, “Oh, that girl. Maybe I'll get close to her.”

But for 10 years, I didn't see her. She was in a *kibbutz* in Galilee, and I was in the Negev near Gaza. We were five miles away from the Gaza strip, so all the new *kibbutzim* were in heavily populated Arab areas, or close to the border areas. So she was near Lebanon, and I was near Gaza. That's how they made the *kibbutzim*, to be sort of an army force. During the day you worked in the field, and at night, you patrolled the area with guns. If you could get four to five hours of sleep a night, that was considered good. Agnes spent 10 years on a *kibbutz*; I spent five years.

After that, I was in the Israeli army for three years. Then I went to the Avni Institute (the academy of arts) for painting and sculpture in Tel Aviv. That's where I met Agnes for the second time. I recognized her, but I didn't know if she recognized me.

Agnes: I did not.

Q: What would you say to Raoul Wallenberg if he were sitting here today?
Agnes: Well, I would thank him because he alone kept his humanity and tried to help other people. While all the others forgot everything they had learned in churches; their greed took over, they just wanted to do well from the wealth they accumulated from the Jews. Wallenberg didn't have to do this because he was a member of a privileged family from Sweden. He was an exceptional human being. I wish fate would have been able to pay him back for all the good deeds he did.

Q: What do you think he would say to the world today?
Agnes: Well, he probably would be very active against Darfur. He would keep his humanity until the end of his life. He would be 95 now if he were alive. No one knows what he would have done after the war, but my admiration for him is forever. He was a human being when others had lost their humanity.

Q: Why do you think it is important to keep his legacy alive today?
Agnes: Because there are less and less people like him. Nowadays, atrocities are still happening and there are fewer and fewer advocates. What really happened to those people?

Q: What do you think happened to Raoul Wallenberg?
Agnes: I tried to find out more about what happened to Wallenberg when I went back to Hungary, but nobody knew anything. That was in 1986, when Hungary started to be independent again. We tried to find out what happened after the war. We escaped and we were in Israel on a *kibbutz*. When I went back, I didn't get any information, even about my old school; my teachers disappeared because they advocated humanitarian principles and because they taught Jews, which was forbidden. So I didn't gather any knowledge about Raoul Wallenberg. But, I did see a street called Raoul Wallenberg Street. That's all. They didn't even make a monument or a plaque, just a street. There are some people who must know, but only the prisoners who were with him. Those are the ones who said he was alive and sick, and died 12 years later. The Russians said he was executed in 1947. His family has been trying all these years to find out what really happened to him.

David: It's very nice that there are young people like you trying to keep his legacy alive. We survived and

we're trying to rebuild ourselves, and rebuild society as a whole.

Agnes: It is late in our lives so we try to tell our children what we knew about him and the war.

Interview with Agota and George Adler

Q: What is your birth name?
George: My name is George Adler.

Agota: My name is Agota Adler, and my maiden name is Szilasi.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
George: Budapest, Hungary.

Agota: I was also born in Budapest, Hungary.

Q: What are your birth dates?
George: February 21, 1932.

Agota: May 17, 1936.

Q: Where did you grow up?
George: Budapest. I was in Budapest until 1956.

Agota: I also grew up in Budapest, on the Pest side with my mother and father, until my father was taken away for forced labor. If I am not mistaken, it was 1943.

Q: George, who did you live with?
George: I was living with my mother and father until they legally separated when I was about 4 years old. Later, my father was taken away to a labor brigade with the army as a Jewish laborer. Until the war, I was living with my mother and brother.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
George: It was not a Jewish community per se; it was just one area of the city where maybe more Jews than Christians lived.

Agota: Same with me. It was an area of middle class where many Jews happened to live.

Q: What kinds of schools did you attend?
George: I went to a Jewish elementary school and then continued in a gymnasium, which is equivalent to [an American] high school. That was before the war.

Agota: Five grades of elementary school with some interruption, then three years of public school. For ninth to twelfth grade, I went to a technical high school and graduated with a technical diploma.

Q: How did you learn your Jewish customs and religion?
George: My Jewish traditions were generated by my grandfather Adler, who kept a Jewish home, probably kosher, and celebrated every religious holiday. On all the major holidays, we would gather at his house and celebrate together. He had two sons and all the family members gathered there. I suppose my Jewish identity was also influenced by the Jewish elementary school I attended.

Agota: I did not have a Jewish upbringing but I was aware of my Jewish origin, and knew that my extended family was all Jewish. But, I don't remember attending a *seder* or any other traditional celebration.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?

George: If I remember correctly, it was around the time when the first Jewish law appeared, but I was very young. The Jewish laws curtailing our activities made me realize the situation. It awakened my fears.

Q: How did you first hear what was happening to the Jewish people?
George: We spoke about how we were affected with every Jewish law. I also overheard the German situation and their policy against the Jews. We were really scared about our future, the war, but especially, about the persecution of the Jews.

Agota: I remember when we had to wear the Yellow Star. I realized that we were different from other people. We had to leave our home and hide at a friend's house, and finally, we got to the protective house, which, now I know, was established by Raoul Wallenberg. I didn't know much about the political background, but I knew there was a war going on, and then my father was taken away. But the Yellow Star really made me realize I was different from other people and it made me worry very much. Remember, I was only 8 years old.

George: Even before the Yellow Star, Jewish laws really changed our lives. Business people were especially affected. Businesses were taken away or closed, and people lost their jobs just for being Jews. Persecution is really the right word for it because we were really disadvantaged in every way. Soon, life became more critical and we could leave our house only at certain times of the day. We were living in fear. I think that was just before the Germans invaded Hungary. I remember overhearing that the governor of the state [Miklós Horthy] was called by [Adolph] Hitler and told that Hungary must proceed in certain ways to help Germany in the war. It was a pretty hopeless situation for Horthy. I learned from my mother that when [Horthy] wanted to have a separate peace [treaty] with the Russians, the Germans took him out of power. That's when the situation really became severe for us, and when the people with Jewish stars (the Jews of Budapest) were collected into buildings with the Yellow Star. The conditions—especially for me, a child—were miserable. You can imagine that there was only a limited number of these Yellow Star buildings, so it was not unusual that 10 families were pressed into one apartment. We could only bring a few things with us. It was meager. That was only phase number one.

When Horthy lost power to the Arrow Cross, the Germans occupied the city and that's when [Adolf] Eichmann came to Hungary with a mission. We were told that all the Jews from Budapest were to be transported to the ghetto. It was in the inner city, the old city, which was a Jewish neighborhood even before the ghetto was declared. We thought that was probably the last stop of our lives; a virtual imprisonment. I remember we were totally hopeless, and didn't know what to do. All of a sudden, we learned there was an alternative to the ghetto organized by the neutral powers of Europe. They designated an area of Budapest—I have since learned it was called International Ghetto. I don't remember the details, but I know that all of a sudden, we had a passport (the Schutz-Pass) from Sweden and we had to move. Apparently, my uncle and aunt had an apartment in one of these buildings, which was declared to be a Swedish protective building, and we were to move there instead of the ghetto. It was much better, but we still thought this was the end of the road. Deportation from Budapest was not known at that time. However, we did know that the Jews from the countryside had been transported to Germany, but we didn't know where they were taken.

Agota: To the camps.

George: Well, I didn't know what the concentration camps were. We heard the name, but we certainly didn't hear about gas chambers or extermination or anything like that; but to be taken out of Hungary, we knew that was not good.

Q: Had you heard of Wallenberg's name by that time, when you first heard about the Schutz-Pass?
George: No, I did not know Wallenberg's name at that time. We moved into this apartment in the Swedish building and again, we were crowded with four or five families into one apartment. We knew our misery would have to come to an end soon because the Russians were very close to Budapest, and it was just a matter of time that we would be liberated. We thought that by living there and doing everything by the rules, we could buy ourselves some time.

That was all happening probably in October 1944, or maybe later in November; I don't remember. The building had a Swedish flag and a big sign on the gate that said the building was under the protection of the Swedish embassy. The next thing I remember is that one day, the police and Arrow Cross came into the building and they wanted to check all of our Schutz-Passes because there were some fake ones in circulation. At that time, we didn't know why all this was happening, but they told us to line up and to present our Schutz-Passes. After looking at them, they would tell people to go to the right or to the left. I don't remember if they were the people on the right or the left, but one group was taken away because apparently their passes were forged. Ours were good.

The next terrible event was when the police and the Arrow Cross invaded the building again, and shouted that all women should immediately go down to the courtyard of the building. We all knew that they would be taken away. Of course, I wanted to go with my mother, but she didn't want to take me. It wasn't announced that children had to go too, so she ordered me to stay. It was a terrible scene and I don't want to go into it, but it was very bad. She was taken away along with her sister, Iren, and that was the last time I saw them. I later learned that she was brought to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and she died there.

The city was encircled by the Russians just after my mother was taken away. There was house-to-house fighting all over the city. As I learned later, she was taken on one of the last trains out of Budapest. For another month, we lived through starvation, illness, and bombardment. We prayed that we would not die the next day, but we survived. Evidently, the Swedish protection worked and one day, the Russians came in and we were liberated.

Q: Do you remember the address of the house?
George: 40 Pozsonyi Street. It was a very nice building; modern, overlooking the Danube. It was next to a square called Szent István Park, where they would line up the Jews before taking them away. We saw that every day.

Q: The Danube played a tragic role in the annihilation of the Jews. People were tied together and shot into the water. Did you see or hear about it at the time?
George: There were rumors, but we didn't see anything. There was shouting and I heard small arms fire, but I didn't know what it was for. There was shooting everywhere.

Q: Agota, how did you manage to get your Schutz-Pass?
Agota: My recollection is just that one day, my mother was able to contact a friend of the family. Her husband had been taken away, so she was left alone with her child. She lived in a protective building and my mother arranged for us to go there. I remember I got a special piece of paper. I think it was after the war that I realized it was a Schutz-Pass. We moved in with 30 other people into a small apartment. I can't remember such dramatic events as [George], but that doesn't necessarily mean that they didn't happen.

However, I remember that my mother got very ill; she had pneumonia. I don't remember how, but I was able to sneak out of the building and get a doctor and some medicine. She got better, thankfully. I really don't remember how I was able to do this, but that's how we lived—40 of us, including lots of children.

After the war, I learned about Wallenberg. As years passed, I couldn't remember what the Schutz-Pass looked like. One day, we went to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. and to my surprise, there was a whole wall [displaying] Schutz-Passes. Not too long ago, we took our grandson to Ellis Island, and there was a room dedicated to Wallenberg and his activities, and I saw the Schutz-Passes again.

Q: Do you still have it?
Agota: Well, I had it for a long time, but when we fled [Hungary] in 1956, I didn't take any papers with me.

George: No, unfortunately, I do not.

Agota: It was a very emotional thing when I saw those papers.

Q: Were you able to continue with any Jewish traditions in the safe house?
Agota: I don't remember now, but I don't think so. Everyone was strictly trying to survive and that was a full-time job. It was a very tiring time.

George: No, there were no Orthodox people at the house and we had lots of other problems.

Q: What do you think would have happened to you if you hadn't come into contact with Raoul Wallenberg?
George: Well, it is obvious that he saved our lives. It is clear as daylight. We certainly wouldn't be here and probably wouldn't be alive. I don't remember the percentage of Jews who survived in the ghetto, but it was very small. We would have either been deported and died in the concentration camps, or died in the ghetto. There were about 600,000 Jews before the war. Five-hundred thousand perished.

Agota: Those who survived lived originally in Budapest; the Jews from the countryside were all deported.

George: So most of those who survived can thank Wallenberg and his helpers from different countries—especially from Sweden, and the Americans, who probably financed his activities—for their lives.

Q: What about your family?
Agota: I had a very small family: just me, my mother, and father. My father was taken to a forced labor camp and never came back. [My mother and I] came out from Hungary together in 1956. We went to Brazil first, and then [to America]. My mother lived with us until her death in 1979.

Q: George, you came in 1956 as well, didn’t you?
George: Yes. After the war in 1945, when I was 13, my uncle and aunt, the Kauffmans, had sort of adopted me and I lived with them until 1956. I got my engineering degree from the University in Budapest, and I came to the U.S. after the revolution in 1956.

Q: How did you meet?
Agota: We met in this country. It was a blind date.

George: It was a blind date about 50 years ago.

Agota: And, by the way, whenever we go back to Budapest, we happen to stay in the area called Lipótváros, which is very close to where my safe house was. It was at 25 Szent István Park. It is a very nice part of the city, and now there is a memorial monument to Raoul Wallenberg in that park.

Q: How close were your safe houses?
Agota: Only about five minutes apart.

Interview with Marianne Balshone

Q: What is your birth name?
A: Marianne Lowy.

Q: What is your married name?
A: Balshone.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: Budapest, Hungary.

Q: Is that were you grew up?
A: Yes, I lived with my parents. I didn't have any siblings; I was the only child. I grew up in a mixed, very affluent community, and went to a Jewish school. First I went to elementary school, and then the Jewish gymnasium of Budapest, which was like a private school. We were educated in all subjects. I never went to a mixed school, but I went to other places that were mixed—I studied ballet and music, I did ice-skating and went to concerts, and I went to camps in the summer. I was very bright in the culture before the war started.

Q: How did you learn most of your Jewish customs in religion, from school or from your family?
A: Mainly from my family. We were Orthodox.

Q: When did you notice the first signs of anti-Semitism brewing in Hungary?
A: Well, I didn't notice it, but it was there. In Budapest, I didn't feel it. But it was always there, I guess.

Q: What signs did you notice which started you thinking that Jews were not being treated right?
A: I had cousins in the provinces who were older than I was. They were not accepted into the universities because first, there were numerous clauses and then numerous rules, and it was like a quota system. Since they were Jews, they couldn't attend universities in Hungary. This was probably when the war broke out; I think it was after 1939.

Q: So this is how you first heard about what happened to the Jewish people, through your cousins? Or had you already heard of things that had happened across Germany or Poland?
A: Whatever we heard, we didn't believe. Life just went on for us. But since the Hungarian army fought [alongside] the German army as allies, the Jewish men started being recruited for labor force, instead of getting into the military. The difference was they didn't have any uniforms or weapons, they had yellow armbands, and they had the hats of the military—that was it. They were sent to Siberia and different places to build the railroads and dig. Some of my family and friends got into labor camps as well.

Q: How old were you when the war broke out, exactly?
A: I was young, not even a teenager. I still went to school and did everything that I had done before. I was not restricted in person until March 19, 1944. That was the end of the world for us because that's when the Germans marched into Hungary and occupied it. They occupied Budapest, and that was the beginning of the end of my youth and everything that I knew before. From one day to the next. It's very unbelievable. I was then 17 ½ years old.

You have to remember that Hungary was occupied for the last 11 months of the war by the Germans, because Hungary went along with Germany. [Adolf] Hitler really depended on the Hungarian government and once he didn't trust it anymore, that's when he sent in the SS and the Gestapo, during those last 11 months.

Q: When the Germans marched in, did you imagine that you'd be dragged away from you home?

A: By then, it did occur to me. We all had to fight for ourselves and I have a whole story about how I first went into hiding. Then I went to Liaison, then the Swedish legation, and that's my saga.

When the Germans marched in on March 19, 1944, I was already engaged to a young man who was in the labor force around Budapest, so I had communication with him. The day the Germans marched in, I actually had to go to meet him. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, a spring Sunday. Usually, the young people met on the Danube promenade, and we walked around and we communicated with each other. My fiancé lived on the Buda side, the other side of the Danube, and I lived on the Pest side. He called me on the telephone and said, "Marianne, don't go out. We are not going to meet because I can see the German army marching in through the bridges of Budapest."

From that day on, every day another restriction came into effect for the Hungarian Jews. In Budapest it was still easier, because it was a big city and people weren't counted for, but my parents' relatives—sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, cousins, etc.—were all in the provinces. They were rounded up and were taken into ghettos, and unfortunately perished. So, I decided that we had to do something, since there was no communication anymore. Jews were not allowed at certain times on the street. They couldn't go on the bus or the train; the stores were closed, the radio stations were not available, and the newspapers were closed. From one day to the next, we were just thrown into this.

My parents' building became a Jewish house, which meant that we had to take in other Jews, so every room was occupied by a different family of Jewish people. My fiancé was in the labor camp, but it was close to Budapest, and since we were engaged already, he said, "Well, why don't we get married." On April 4, he got to leave for a few days, and we had a civil ceremony. In Hungary, you had to have a civil ceremony, and if you wanted it, you could also have a religious ceremony as well. Two days later, we wanted to have a religious ceremony, but on that same day, [a law was passed that] Jews had to wear the Yellow Star above their hearts, sewn onto their outer garments, so we all got them. By then, the synagogue where my parents and grandfather belonged was occupied by the stables of the Gestapo soldiers, so it was no longer a synagogue. I had a wedding on the penthouse roof of my parents' home with a *tallit* held over our heads by four of our neighbors. It was traditional, and no other guests were invited, except for my parents and grandfather.

Then we were crying. It wasn't a very happy day for a young girl, and certainly not what I'd dreamt of, but we got married. We were supposed to go over to the Buda side, because my husband's apartment was there. Before that, my mother made a little meal of whatever we had, and this was during an air raid, so we all had to go down to the air raid shelter. Then, coming up, I decided that I would take my life into my own hands, and I threw away the raincoat I had sewn the Jewish star on. I said, "I don't want to be identified, even though I'm a very proud Jew." And I'm still a very proud Jew. "I don't have to be identified by this Yellow Star and whatever will happen, will happen." That was one of my first survival techniques. The next morning, my husband was taken back by an orderly to the labor camp, and I moved back to my parents' home.

A few days later—during Passover, so it was April—we thought we'd do some kind of a Holiday. At 7 o'clock in the morning the doorbell rang, and when I opened the door it was the Gestapo, looking for my father. I asked what the crime was, and they said that we were listening to the English radio. At that time, everybody had a little radio; the only way we got any news from anywhere on what was going on in the west was through the BBC, or the Voice of America that broadcasted a few minutes of news, which everybody was listening to. That was really not an accusation. I begged, but nothing helped and they took him away to a gathering camp on the outskirts of Budapest, to what was like a Gestapo headquarters from where people were shipped off. So, that was that.

Then, I went to hide in another home, where the woman of the house gave me her sister's paper, so I became her Catholic sister. I was supposed to take care of the house, and one day the doorbell rang. Instead of the Gestapo, there was the Gendarmerie, which was the higher range of the Police. They wore uniforms that were very horrible—outfits that already scared the daylights out of you. Five of them came in and they interrogated me for about an hour. My name was different; I was Catholic, and they asked me all kinds of questions—whatever my Catholic education would have been—and I answered. After an hour

they said: “We didn’t get you this time, but we will be back.” They might have known I was Jewish, but they couldn’t catch me in any of these ways. So, five minutes later, I packed my belongings, my toothbrush and underwear, and I went back to my parents’ home. By then, only my mother was left.

Then, we found out that a Swedish diplomat by the name of Raoul Wallenberg was coming to Budapest with the purpose of saving Hungarian Jews. My first husband was very astute to this news, and we acquired papers, what they called Schutz-Passes, for everybody in the family—my parents, my husband, and me—from Wallenberg. It was a piece of paper that actually made you a Swedish citizen under the aegis of the Swedish crown. You had your picture and information on it just like a passport: how old you were, how tall you were, the color of your eyes, etc. And it was signed by the authorities. This was, of course, all fake, but that was Raoul Wallenberg’s first great invention to save the Jews of Budapest.

Unfortunately, my relatives in the provinces were already carted away, except for one cousin who was sent to us by her parents before they entered the wagon. She had a brother, my other cousin, who also survived in Budapest. The two of them teamed up, and through other techniques, they survived.

Q: Do you know how Raoul Wallenberg learned about all these Hungarian Jews?
A: Initially, he had some business dealings with Jews.

Q: Do you know how he manufactured the Schutz-Passes?
A: He thought it up. It was his invention, and then he hired other Jewish people who volunteered for him in disguise. They just manufactured them by the thousands. It was a miracle paper.

Q: What did your family do once they got the Schutz-Passes?
A: The first recipient of this miraculous paper was my father. We sent up a messenger to the gathering camp with this piece of paper, and a horrible SS officer looked at the document, and they let my father go. The next day, he appeared on our doorstep. We were still in our parents’ home and he was gaunt and beaten, and just for a few weeks he looked skinny; but, he was alive. This was the first miracle.

After that, they declared that Jews had to leave their Jewish homes too. My grandfather was taken into a little ghetto that they had formed in the middle of Budapest. Raoul Wallenberg bought up some big apartment buildings in a very good section of the city, he hung out a Swedish flag, and he named them “Swedish safe houses.” They were also under the aegis of the Swedish legation, and the Swedish King. My parents moved into one of those. My husband left the labor camp and he moved into the Swedish legation, which was in another building. By that time, nobody really lived in their apartments, in their homes, because the bombing from the Allies was going on all the time. So, he moved into the basement of the legation with several other Jewish people—so-called Swedish Jews. I, on the other hand, went into a different place of hiding; it was at our accountant’s, from when we had our business. He was Jewish and his wife was Christian. She kept him upstairs in the apartment. I moved there, tried to take care of him, and in the meantime I was walking the streets of Budapest. It was winter, and I tried to barter for some food items that I could get. Sometimes, some farmers came in from the provinces and brought some bread or salami, a piece of bread or something.

I had gold coins that I carried in a ficus plant, and with them I was able to barter certain things; I was the liaison between the legation and [the family I was staying with], and I brought them some food. After a while, I thought to myself, this is crazy, I can’t do that anymore. Of course, I was 18 years old and life was ahead of me. I had three sets of papers in my pocket: my real ones—the Jewish papers—the Christian ones, and then the Swedish ones. If I was caught on the street, they would have killed me anyhow. It was only a matter of luck, because the Gendarmerie and the SS were on the streets and nobody else was out, and the anti-artillery fire was coming down because of the bombing, so it was very perilous.

After a while, I gave that up too. On December 31, New Year’s Eve, I moved into the basement of the Swedish legation, where my husband was staying with about 80 or 90 Jewish people. We didn’t really have a window because the house was bombed out, but we had a switchboard on the second floor that somebody always operated, and it connected us with Raoul Wallenberg’s office. One morning, I went up for some reason to this switchboard and I looked out of the hole in the window. I saw a whole Gestapo

brigade come towards the building and go down into the air raid shelter where all the other Jews were, including my husband. So, right away, we contacted Wallenberg's office as the Jews marched out, because by that time, there was no other way of killing Jews but to take them to the Danube and shoot them in, and that was it. The blue Danube turned into the red Danube. We knew that this was going to happen. Raoul Wallenberg took his chauffeur and his attaché case [to the river], and with his charisma and charm and tremendous personality, he told these SS guards that these were all Swedish people and that they could not touch them. He said, "Show your papers. Show your papers." Nobody had their papers with them, but whatever they had in their pockets, they took out. His persuasion was so strong that they let the people go. Two hours after that, looking out again from that hole in that so-called window, I saw all of them march back to the snowy streets of Budapest. There is a little more of a story to tell that I usually tell students, "Where there is life, there is hope."

One of our friends, a younger person in that "Swedish/Jewish" gathering, had a couple of diamonds that his mother sewed into his pocket and said, "If you survive, this might become very handy for you. The minute he marched out to the snowy street, he knew he was going to be shot into the Danube. He took the diamonds out and threw them into the snow. Coming back two hours later, he searched for those diamonds, but the snow was falling heavily and he never found them. That's why I say, "Don't ever give up hope."

In February, we were liberated by the Russian army. Unfortunately, it was not the Americans, but we were liberated anyhow. That is another saga about the Russians; they were not very kind. Slowly, we made our way back through the streets, where dead bodies lay all piled up, to my parents' home. The home was there. It was pockmarked with bullet holes, but it was there. We moved back and we thought to ourselves, let's see what happens. My parents arrived a few days after that, because Budapest was liberated house by house. Then my grandfather, who was in the ghetto, came back too. We were all united again.

Q: Which ghetto was your grandfather in?
A: It was a small ghetto in Budapest, in the inner city. I didn't know at that time that Raoul Wallenberg not only saved my father's and my husband's lives, but in a way, he also saved my grandfather's. I didn't know until I came to America that Raoul Wallenberg had a meeting just a few days before liberation with Adolf Eichmann**,** the doer of the final solution of the Hungarian Jews. Eichmann wanted to blow up the ghetto and Wallenberg threatened him with whatever he threatened him with.[13] The ghetto was not blown up, and that's how my grandfather was saved. So, in my little family, three people were saved by Raoul Wallenberg.

Q: Did you get to meet Raoul Wallenberg in person?
A: No, I didn't. I never met him. I know people who worked for him, who worked next to him. He was just a fantastic person with charm, charisma, and tremendous strength, and he was a remarkable person for what he decided to do. He didn't really have anything else but his personality, the diplomatic pouch, and some money from the Jewish Refugee Board from America. Whatever happened to him is very tragic, and I still don't want to believe that he doesn't exist somewhere, and that I cannot personally thank him.

Q: Do you believe that he lived through the imprisonment?
A: The way that they tell it, he died from a heart attack at age 37, and that there are no remains of anything. I don't believe that. Whatever happened there, later on, the Russians must have thought that they had made a mistake, so they took away all the evidence, whatever it was. By the intervention of the

[13] Unable to move the Jews to concentration camps, Adolph Eichmann ordered the destruction of the Budapest ghetto. As Eichmann had already left the city, General August Schmidthuber, the commander of the German troops in Hungary, was assigned to carry out the plan. Wallenberg learned of the plan thanks to his contact with Pál Szalai, a high-ranking member of the police force, and sent Schmidthuber a note. The missive stated that Raoul Wallenberg would make sure the general was held personally responsible for the massacre of the ghetto, and that he would be hanged as a war criminal when the war was over. Knowing that the Russians were days away from liberating Budapest, the General stopped the massacre at the last minute.

family and the Wallenberg association, his diplomatic pouch and passport were returned when Glasnost[14] [was introduced].

Q: How did the war affect your family's religious and cultural traditions?
A: It didn't. We remained Orthodox through the war, but not through the occupation since there was nothing to observe. There was no food either, but spirituality was very important. We believed in God even through the hardest times.

Q: How did you come to America?
A: We left [Hungary] in January of 1947 and we came to America, which was always my dream; truthfully, I always dreamt about America. I spoke English when I was 5 years old. Adolph Zukor, the founder of Paramount Pictures, was a relative of mine on my father's side, and they used to visit us in Hungary. They entertained me and they wanted to take me to America and make another Shirley Temple out of me when I was 4 ½ years old. I didn't want any of that, but I did start to learn English. My mother took an English governess so I spoke German, Hungarian, and English.

My son was born in New York City. I was very proud of that. I thought to myself that if I survived Nazism, then I had nothing to do and I didn't want anything to do with Communism—all I wanted was freedom. When we arrived by ship to New York harbor and I saw the Statue of Liberty at five o'clock in the morning, it was the happiest moment of my life.

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg were sitting here today, what would you say to him?
A: That he's a magnificent person, and I really made it my mission to teach people about his personality, about his heart, and about his greatness as a human being, which also teaches how one man can make a difference.

Q: Is this why you speak to schools and to young people?
A: Yes, young or any. Because he's a hero; he's my hero. You know, nowadays young people think that football players or film stars are heroes. To me, [Wallenberg] is a hero who saved lives, out of his own good heart and nothing else.

Q: You also published a book with your story?
A: I have a book that my second husband, who was American, wrote. The name of the book is *Determined!* by Benjamin Balshone.[15] It tells the story of my family's survival.

My second husband started to ask me about our survival, because he didn't know anything about the Hungarian Jews. He said, "Would you like to have a little documentation for your children and grandchildren later on?" And I said, "Why not." My mother was still alive at the time, so he interviewed her, as well as my cousins who survived. After a while he said, "I think I'm going to have it published," and we did have it published by Block Publishing Company in New York. As a surprise, he did this little shattered cover of Mrs. Adolph Zukor and me at age 5, from the theatrical magazine in Hungary that I found on the floor of my parents home after the war, thrown away with some other papers.

I'm very happy. This is a documentation that is very necessary because after we are gone—and my generation is dwindling away—there will be the book and the videos, like what you are doing now. It's very important for the Holocaust deniers, because unfortunately, there are a lot of Holocaust deniers. If I stand in front of university or high school students, or any other organization where I go to speak, they cannot say that it didn't happen because I am there, and I'm a flesh-and-blood person who they have to identify with.

[14] Coming from a Russian term meaning openness, Glasnost was a policy introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s promoting maximal publicity, openness, and transparency in the activities of all Soviet Union government institutions, as well as freedom of information.
[15] Balshone, Benjamin. *Determined!* New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1984.

Interview with Gisella Bulow

Q: What is your birth name?
A: Gisella Schwarz.

Q: What is your married name?
A: Gisella Bulow.

Q: When and where were you born?
A: I was born in Budapest in 1931, February 14.

Q: Did you grow up in Budapest?
A: Yes, I lived in Budapest until I was 14.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about your family, about your growing up in Budapest and life before the war?
A: I grew up with my family, and my grandmother lived with us. She was a strict Orthodox Jewish woman, so we had to apply to the Orthodox laws and keep kosher and do everything [to her standards]. When my mother married my father, as he was not Orthodox, [my grandmother] was totally against it, which was a cause for conflict between my father and his mother-in-law. Otherwise, everything was pretty normal. I went to a Jewish elementary school for girls and I had no problems with anything until [the war began].

Q: How did you experience those first signs of anti-Semitism?
A: I knew about anti-Semitism. After the Jewish elementary school, I went to a public school for higher education for two years. There were Christians and non-Christians; but, I never felt or looked like a Jewish girl. I had long braids with light brown hair and I did not experience, “Jew, Jew, Jew.”

And then it started—we had to leave our apartment and go to the house with the Yellow Star on it. That’s what I remember as the first [sign] that I was different from other people and from the other kids in the school. Then they took my father away; every Jewish man under 50 had to report. I saw him only one more [time].

Q: Where was your father taken away to?
A: He was taken away to a labor camp. He came [back] once. As a matter of fact, he brought some food, but after that we never saw him again. I remember him saying to my mother that it had been a very unusual time for Jewish families since they had been separated; he was not “living as a Jew” while my mother was strict with her mother’s Orthodoxy. Then we heard he had to report again. We never saw him again. I just remembered he said that we should keep safe.

Everything went rapidly downhill after that. That’s why I am saying I did not understand. It just happened, like bombs falling, one after the other; like you are another person. I was 13 and had just picked up my graduation certificate from what I think was called Third Gymnasium, which is like junior high. After that, I never went back to school. We were not allowed to.

The Nazis [arrived] in March. By June, everybody said we were not going to stay [where we were], that they were building an area for the Jews—a ghetto. So I think by October 1944, we had to leave the place where I was born, raised, went to school, had friends. We went to this area which they put a fence around, practically, with guards, and that was the Jewish ghetto.

My father's last gesture was that he called for a Swedish Schutz-Pass. He bought it,[16] I do not know for how much, for my mother, my brother, and for me. We went into this building in the old neighborhood and it said that the building was under the protection of the Swedish Consulate. I do not remember how long we stayed, but we were there a very short time.

Q: How did your father manage to obtain those Schutz-Passes?
A: I do not know, we weren't rich and [the Schutz-Pass] cost like thousands—I don't know how many thousand korona[17]—I do not even remember the money at that time, but he bought them for my mother, my brother, and me. We were very proud of that.

Q: What do you remember about the safe house?
A: The apartments were all occupied. It was full of children and parents and hardly any men; they had already been taken. We felt safe; we felt like we were privileged, but it did not last. By this time, in 1944 until the end of the summer, the Germans started to lose the war on the eastern front, and then it became very brutal. Hungary was included in the war very late because our leader—his name was [Miklós] Horthy—collaborated with the Germans, so they kept [the Jews] so-called "free" longer. But by then, [the Axis] started to lose and withdraw from the Russian front, and [the Nazis] just wanted all the Jews killed.

Q: Where was the safe house located?
A: It was in Nefaleitch stadt, the seventh district in Budapest. We had lived there before, and they put a Swedish sign on the doors. I still had not heard of Raoul Wallenberg yet.

Q: Were there people in charge of running the safe house and providing food?
A: They did not live there, but I think we could buy some food. We could go out, let's say from 10 to 12 in the morning. After five o'clock we were not supposed to leave the house (that's before the Safe-house), but I guess there were people who we could buy from. They brought [food] for us, and we knew Christians from before who had worked for us or had heart [and would sell food], and my mother had a little jewelry, so she would sell a little piece [in exchange for food].

Q: Where you there with your mother, brother, and grandmother?
A: My Grandmother, that's the most tragic story. My grandmother shaved her head and had a wig on and a long dress,[18] and from a thousand miles [away, it was clear] she was an Orthodox Jew. She was born in Poland, so when the Germans took over, they said that every Jew who was not born in Hungary should come to the precinct. So, she took her little purse and went to the precinct, and we never saw her again.

What we heard was that because she would not touch non-kosher food, that was her end. That was the most tragic picture for me [at the time], and I think it is still today. She was so fanatic that I guess she would rather die. That's what we heard, who knows how she died. We never saw her again; we never had a place to go to look for her. She must have been in her mid-60s.

Q: Were there any other family members with you?
A: There were some aunts who had been in the little apartment: an unmarried sister of my mother, and two aunts from another side of the family. So, everybody was around even in the ghetto when they took us. I think that [my brother] George, my mother, and I survived only because the Germans came pretty late to Budapest, but that's just my theory.

Q: Do you remember how things changed with the arrival of the Germans?
A: We did not feel the effect right away because of the Safe-house. First the Yellow Star house, and then the Safe-house. But by October, I guess that's the month, I remember they said that everybody should take just a blanket and some clothes, and line up on the street; it was already cold.

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[16] Although Ms. Bulow states that her father purchased three Schutz-Passes, records and testimonies indicate that Raoul Wallenberg did not accept payment for the protective passes. He gave them away for free. Ms. Bulows's father could have bought them from a third party.
[17] The Hungarian currency at that time was the pengő and not the korona, as Ms. Bulow states.
[18] The majority of Orthodox women wore clothing adhering to the principles of modest dress in Jewish law. This includes long, conservative skirts, sleeves past the elbow, and covered hair using either a wig or a scarf.

My mother was taken away before, but she came back. She was brought to Theresienstadt, which was large and very close to the city. Whatever the circumstances were, I do not know, but she did come back and she marched with us—my brother, me, and my two or three aunts—into the ghetto. I remember walking by and the non-Jewish people stood on the street; some of them laughing, some of them just pointing. It was like we had just murdered people.

They marched us into this fenced-in place to an apartment. I do not know how many people—15, 20 in each apartment. It was getting cold. In January 1945 we were liberated by the Russians, so that's why I am saying we have a [fraction] of a shorter ordeal than let's say the Jews who were born in the villages or borders.

Q: Do you know how your mother managed to come back?
A: I don't know, I think they let them go for whatever reason. I do not think my mother would have been the type to escape. They had been in a brick factory near Budapest, where they held a lot of women also under 45.[19]

Q: When were you taken to the ghetto?
A: That was around October. It had started to get very cold. Budapest could be very warm in the summer and very cold in the winter. Age-wise, I could not have been that dramatically serious about anything as when you are 16 or 18. I was 13.

Q: What do you remember from the ghetto?
A: Oh, horrible. We were very hungry. We got a little soup once a day from the Red Cross. By then, it had started to snow; it was November or December, very early [for snow], and they gave us a little soup and bread.

There was an incident, I do not know if I should mention it, but as I said—basically, I was not taken for Jewish, so my aunts and my mother asked if I could go to the old neighborhood [in search of food]. I practically snuck out from the ghetto, as some people did, and I took a piece from a gold chain they gave me, and I came back with bread and something else. I did this twice.

And then the bombs started—the American bombs, the British bombs, and the Russian bombs—but twice I was out there. Very few people could get out, but some children got away with it.

Q: How did you manage to do that?
A: I snuck by the guard house; I had light brown long braids and sandals and a dress, and nobody looked at me. I just walked maybe 35 minutes to the old house where I knew there was a porter family, and I was pretty friendly with their daughter of my same age. I said [to them that] I had a little gold and we needed food. They could have been spies and told [the Arrow Cross] about me, but they did not. They gave me a loaf of bread and a pack full of beans; something like that, as I remember. I only did it twice. My brother could have not done it because he would have been taken for a Jew right away. I cannot explain it, the non-Jewish just looked for us; I am not saying everybody.

I felt like a little hero in a way, even though later, an aunt told my mother that it was dangerous and that I could have been found. I remembered that very, very clearly, and after that, I never went again. They sometimes snuck up to the apartment where we still had some gas in the oven, and once, they cooked something—a soup, or something—and one of my aunts said I should go upstairs and bring it down. We were in the cellar; we slept on benches because of the bombs. As I was upstairs, I heard the bombing and was standing with a pot of bean soup in the corner when the stairs were [destroyed by the bombs]. Two older men from the cellar found a ladder and brought me down from the second floor. When I talk about things like that, I cannot even imagine them today; but you can do it if you are very young, maybe, and do not understand the consequences.

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[19] According to Ms. Bulow's brother, George Schwartz, their mother was rescued from the brick factory by Raoul Wallenberg. Read Mr. Schwartz's full account in his interview on page.....

Q: Did you feel—since you were with your brother and your mother—protected in a way, staying with them?
A: That helped in a way, of course. And I was with a couple of aunts. Even though we slept, I do not know how many people, in a bed. I slept, I think, on an old lawn chair that was half broken; things like that. You cannot imagine it now, but people can do things that are unbelievable. I think the survivor instinct is so strong. I did not understand that you could die from that, or what was really behind all that. Only much later, I knew what went on.

Q: Were you in the ghetto when the Russians liberated the city?
A: Oh sure, well of course. We sat in a cellar on these rotten benches, and there were a couple of old men who were still alive, and they said, "Oh, Jews, pray now because that is going to be our salvation that the Russians are coming."

I do not know how they knew it, but they kept saying, "Pray, pray," and you know, Jewish things. We prayed, we sang, we sat, and we were hungry. We heard all the bombs and the cannons on the roof. Then in January—I do not exactly know the date, the middle of January—the first Russians came. By then, some of the Germans took their uniforms off and hid.

But when the Russians came, it wasn't such a great thing in a way. They were very brutal. Not to me, personally, but I heard about a lot of raping. They had these big, big wagons with soup and bread, and they threw them down on the street so we could get them. I saw women; I had never seen women in uniforms marching, and so we knew that the Nazi thing was over.

Later, I knew that my father would never come back. At that time, we did not know. In fact, when I lived in Germany, I visited Dachau. I wanted to see. It was all cleaned up, of course. I went to the office and I said I knew my father had died there, so they found a file. Béla Schwarz [was held prisoner] then and died, I think, of typhus or something like that.

So after that, of course, we were so-called liberated, and we went back to the old house where we lived; it had been bombed. One half of the apartment was destroyed, and the other half was still there. We moved in with no heating and no food, and I got pneumonia. My mother wandered around the snowy streets to find a doctor.

My mother went from house to house, from apartment to apartment, practically begging for food for us, you know? As you see, we survived.

Q: You mentioned that, at the time your father obtained the Schutz-Passes, you did not know about Wallenberg?
A: No.

Q: When did you first hear about him?
A: Here in America, not in Germany, not in Israel. I never, never heard [about Wallenberg], but here I heard about him many, many years ago.

I think he was an aristocrat, in a way. He was so involved; we always questioned the why. I think there are unique people who can do that; it has nothing to do with his kind or his people. Then, when I knew he was killed by the Russians in 1945, we could not believe it. I still do not know why.

Q: It is not clear whether he was killed right away or if he was killed later on.
A: They don't know why, I mean nobody. He probably demanded some answers; I do not know why they killed him. Maybe they did not know who he was, really.

Q: There have been many versions. Some say the Russians accused Wallenberg of being an American spy. There are also other versions about what happened.
A: It was brutal that the Russians killed him because we were supposed to be allies.

Q: What happened to your family after liberation?
A: After we learned that my father was dead, my mother met somebody who had lost his wife and three children in Auschwitz, and she re-married right in the DP camps in Germany, close to Munich. I was [in the DP camps] for three years with my aunts because my mother remarried, and they went to America.

By then, the Zionist movement from Palestine started to collect children and tried to tell them that we had to build our own country and our own land, and that they needed young people. My brother and I headed to Palestine with the Zionist Youth movement, [though we went with different groups]. I don't remember clearly why that happened, but I was in a group that went by train to Marseille, France, where we stayed for six weeks. By fishing boat, it took us 12 days to get to Haifa. I remember it was not Israel yet.[20] At night, they told us to go into the water up to our knees, and head to land, where young Israelis were waiting with beautiful tables with food and white covers.

Q: How long did you stay in Palestine?
A: Well, I stayed 10 years. In 1948, Israel became an independent state. I came in just before that. It was Palestine and it was not legal yet, but by then, the British started to move away.

Q: When did you come to the United States?
A: In 1968.

Q: How did you adjust to your life here? Did you meet a lot of Holocaust survivors?
A: Well, it is interesting that I have still no more non-Jewish friends than Jewish friends. I do not know why. I still have some Jewish friends, and my husband is not Jewish, but we do not have a religious house one way or the other. My brother stayed in Israel much longer. I was married for a year and a half to a Hungarian boy, but it did not work out. I was 17 and I needed a special permit [to get married]. After the divorce, I met a man who was a Berliner Jew, who was already living there even before the war. He ran a few clubs and cafés and he was my boyfriend, so he gave me a coach and singing lessons. It was very glamorous for five years. Then, my future husband arrived with a group of Germans to build power stations in Israel, and that is how I met him. I was about 22 or 23, and he was three years my junior. We have been married a long time. We have a son, Peter.

Q: Do you talk to your son about the war?
A: Oh, yeah. I did not talk to him about it when he was young. He was born premature in India. It was a very complicated birth and I had a nervous breakdown. We came back to Germany and it was hard for the first five or six years, but I must say that my mother-in-law, my husband's mother, was a Godsend—a beautiful, big-hearted, generous, wonderful woman who saw where I was and took over. She really took care of Peter.

Peter stayed with me, but she picked him up in the morning, did everything for him. I started to think more and more about my mother in America, and more and more I thought that I really did not want to raise Peter totally as a German. We traveled a lot; we lived in Sweden and Morocco, and my husband traveled even more. When Peter reached school-age, I said to [my husband] Andrew, "You know, I am tired of this traveling; I do not want to stay and get old in Germany." So I convinced him to immigrate to America, and we have been here for 42 years.

Q: Is your son familiar with your Holocaust experience?
A: He is now very familiar and very involved. I keep telling him that one day maybe he should see Israel, but I always feel it's not so safe yet. But, it will never be safer, in my opinion. He is totally assimilated here, but he knows the history.

Q: You already told us about Raoul Wallenberg, but have you heard about other people who helped in saving lives?

[20] Following World War I and until the declaration of independence of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, Palestine had been under the mandate of Great Britain.

A: All I know is that [Raoul Wallenberg] saved. I did not know then that he saved 100,000 Hungarian Jews. I cannot even imagine how he did that, but I guess that was in part because he had this appearance. I did not even know that he went to the Germans and told them that he had passes and demanded that people come with him, and they let him.

I am very glad that somebody like that was around; there should have been a few thousand people like that around, but there wasn't.

I think most people enjoyed that Jews were punished, whatever the reason. Look, when you live in a country where there are a lot of poor people and a lot of problems and you are a minority and you happen to do pretty well, you will never be liked. That's history, it is just human nature. They can do well, but you are not supposed to, because you are not really one of them; that is my theory. Because Wallenberg [was not Jewish and he came from another part of Europe], it was amazing that he had the heart, the nerve, the energy, and the strength. He was probably in danger all the time.

Q: Do you have any documents and photos from that period?
A: Yes, I have some.

Q: What about the Schutz-Passes?
A: Oh no, who knows what happened to the Schutz-Passes. I do not even have a birth certificate; everything had to be reproduced. It was the bombing and the moving, I think. When I got married in Berlin, I had this piece of paper that looked like a birth certificate and they said it was not original. I said I have been through I don't know what in my life, and I did not move with papers when they took us into the ghetto; my mother had nothing.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add?
A: I do not understand how some people got away, even with the Schutz-Pass. The Schutz-Pass was fine for a while, until a period when they said it did not matter. You could have a Schutz-Pass, but still, all the Jews were sent into the ghetto. So, I just say it was a miracle that we survived.

You cannot talk about everything because that would take a very long time. Once you start to talk, the details come in, and even if we do not want to forget, we are people; we forget. A person does not survive by thinking 24 hours about what happened. I am pretty much over it, because I had so many different lives through my traveling and marriages and my son. [Peter] is such a talented, capable young man; such a good-hearted person, so I am very proud of that.

I just talked to him and I said, "If you have a lot of problems and a lot of bad times and you survive, then you are a survivor."

I am not religious. I believe in a higher power or some type of spirit, but I absolutely do not go for 15 different Gods. Some people get killed and put down and some people grow from it; it depends, whatever it is.

Interview with Eva Brust Cooper

Q: What is your birth name?
A: My birth name is Eva Brust.

Q: What is your married name?
A: My married name is Eva Cooper.

Q: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary.

Q: What is your date of birth?
A: I was born on March 18, 1934.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in Budapest until 1947, at which point we came to the United States.

Q: Would you tell me about your family?
A: We were a small family. I am the only child, but we had a large extended family. My grandmother had many siblings and they had husbands and wives and children. I am the first of the generation of grandchildren.

My parents and I lived in the Pest part of Budapest. I lived in a very nurturing and, I guess, affluent family. My grandparents and my parents were university educated. My father was in a wholesale paper business, and my mother was a typical European lady housewife. My grandfather was in the watch business and was also very successful.

We had a household staff, which was a very popular occurrence in those days among the more comfortable families of Budapest. My parents traveled a great deal. We summered at the lakes in the suburbs of Budapest. I had a nanny and a tutor who taught me English. I also had a French tutor, so I was quite fluent in many languages, but I no longer am, unfortunately.

My early life was free, really, from any bad thoughts. I went to school, I had friends. Our world was kind of turned upside down in 1944. I was 10 years old at the time. Up until then, I had a really wonderful life. As did my parents, even though after 1939, they had become very much aware, as most intelligent people were, of [Adolf] Hitler's intentions and his growing influence.

Q: What kind of school did you attend?
A: I went to what we in the United States would call a public school. I went through four grades in the elementary school and then I went to the regular school, called a gymnasium. It was a very interesting school. We divided up for classes in religious education. The Jewish children went to one class, the Protestant children to another, and the Catholic children to another. That was the religious integration.

Q: And you studied your religion during those classes?
A: We studied, in our case, Hebrew and the history of Judaism. It was friendly and there were absolutely no issues. After religion class, the students got back together and we were all friends.

Q: What was your religious upbringing at home like?
A: We belonged to the big temple on Dohány Street; I think it is the largest temple in Europe, if not the world. It was a Conservative synagogue. There was no Reform movement at that time, and I did not know anything about Orthodoxy or the more religious aspects of Judaism. We were very traditional and we celebrated all the major holidays with our extended family.

Q: What were the first signs of anti-Semitism you noticed?
A: I did not notice anything anti-Semitic until much later because, first of all, we were a comfortable, upper-class family who enjoyed certain virtues because of the money. Also, my father was very much involved in the Jewish organization and had access to much more information than a lot of people.

There was no obvious discrimination, certainly not at my level, but around 1939, my father was definitely becoming aware of anti-Semitism. By that time, rumors about labor camps had started, but a lot of people ignored them because they seemed so preposterous. And actually, even though [Miklós] Horthy—who was the [regent] of Hungary—had a reputation for being anti-Semitic, he was also extremely friendly with the affluent Jews, especially the professionals.

My grandfather was much more concerned about Hitler than most people, and he decided to go away. He left with my grandmother on a supposed "vacation" to the United States in 1939 and never returned. He had tried to talk our family into leaving as well.

Q: So, even though your father was becoming aware of what was happening, he did not convey this at home?
A: No, but he probably did tell my mother. My parents, even when things got worse, were very much responsible for me being fairly well-adjusted. They always protected me and did not act like the world was coming to an end, even when it seemed like it was.

My father was aware of the situation. He was constantly meeting with Germans and Hungarians, trying to get us as much information as he could. And when my grandparents left, it had a major impact on our lives.

Q: And you did not know why your grandparents really left? You believed they were going on a vacation?
A: Oh, yes. That was the story. Actually, the reason my grandfather said that was because my grandmother never would have left her children or grandchild; as a mother, she just wasn't going to leave her whole family. She did not realize that her husband did not plan for them to return. He made provisions. He took money to Switzerland and since they were in the watch/jewelry business, he took items from there. My grandfather very much planned for what he thought was going to happen and he shared those thoughts with my father, but a lot of people thought that the danger would pass.

Q: When did you actually realize what was going on?
A: Probably in 1942, I think, when my father was taken to a labor camp. It was not a concentration camp, but it was outside in the country. The Jewish young men were taken by force to labor camps and made to do heavy labor. I am not actually sure what kinds of things they were told to do—build things, move bricks?

I know that a kind of tension appeared in my household in 1942, especially when my father was taken away. My father must have been in his 30s at the time. There was a 12-year age difference between my father and my mother. My mother was obviously concerned and was always trying to contact people to ask them if he was okay. She was always trying to find out where my father was and at some point, she was able to visit him and bring him some warm clothing and food products, and to find people to make sure he was being taken care of.

My mother met a young, 18-year-old man whom she asked to take care of my father. She also gave this man stuff to take to my father when she could not visit him. My mother knitted my father items out of angora and made him clothing to wear under his underwear to keep him warm during the wintertime. This young man ended up leaving for the United States many years later. He just died at the age of 90. He was very active in Israel, doing a lot of good things.

Q: How long was your father in the labor camp?
A: My father was there for several months. I do not remember if my mother told me these things at the time or not. That was in 1942, and I was 8 years old, so I do not really think she would have shared

details, but she did explain to me why my father was not there. She was always very cautious not to scare me. The hard part for my mother was explaining to me when he was going to come home. My mother always said he'd be home "soon," and that "afterward, he'll be fine. It is something he has to do." I was very close to my father, so I did not like him being away.

Q: After your father was taken away, what happened to your mother?
A: My mother kept busy by working and going to my father's business. My mother was highly educated and even though she had never worked, there was nothing she could not do. She worked at my father's business and kept the household going. We had a cook and a driver until early 1944, and until that time our household more or less ran the same as it had before, except it was a little bit tenser.

Q: What happened when your father came back?
A: When he came back, life went back to the new "normal," which was a little more worrisome because, while he was away, he got much more information. Also, some people from the labor camp were actually taken to a concentration camp and did not come back. My father, as I mentioned before, was very active in the Jewish community—not the synagogue, but the community. People who were influential and knowledgeable about what was going on actually met with Adolf Eichmann to negotiate how much money the Jewish community would give to him in order to get people off the list and prevent them from being taken to the camps.

Q: Do you know what happened at the meeting?
A: I had no idea who Adolf Eichmann was or what they were talking about, but I remember very clearly that my father said how charming he was. Of course, Eichmann was impeccably dressed and clicked his heels and shook hands and acted like a perfect gentleman, and all his discussions were pure business.

Q: Did Eichmann accept the offer?
A: Yes. But I do not know, in reality, how many people were really saved.

Q: German soldiers arrived in Hungary in 1944. How did your family manage that?
A: My birthday is March 18, and in the late afternoon of that day, in 1944, we were having my 10th birthday party at my house with my favorite foods: hotdogs and ice cream. A lot of my friends were there. Many of them were the children of my parents' friends. The others were my school friends. There were also a lot of nannies at the party because they brought the children and then picked them up. The adults in attendance were my parents' friends.

Then we heard marching and drums, and a kind of weird noise. We lived on a street near a major boulevard, so we looked out the window and saw the Germans were occupying. This was expected since all of the neighboring countries had already been occupied. Hungary was the last Eastern European country to be occupied by the Germans.

So the Germans were marching in, and I was not happy because everybody left very quickly before my cake. At the age of 10, I did not care about the marching people, I cared about my birthday. So, again, my parents comforted me and we opened some presents. Then everything started to get weird. I use the word "weird" from a child's point of view. I certainly had no clue about anything that was going on politically, just that it was impacting my little life.

Q: What kinds of changes did you notice after the German occupation?
A: Information came out about the rules and regulations regarding Jews, and it was all over the papers. One of the first major changes was that every Jewish family had to fire or let go their household staff, which had a major impact on my family because there were three of us and we had a nanny, a cook, and a chauffeur. It was a major change in the household’s dynamics. They were all wonderful people, really devoted to our family. Subsequently, they bought us food on the black market and got stuff for us when they were no longer available. That was the first change.

The second change was that every Jew had to a wear a Yellow Star in a very specific way and place, and could not ever appear on the streets without it, so that was weird. In one way, I guess, it was almost

amusing for me, but then I realized it was not amusing and how serious the consequences could be for people caught not wearing the Star.

The next change was that Jewish houses were designated. Because of my father's influence in the community, we were able to stay in our building, which was designated as a Jewish house. The Gentiles living there had the option to stay or move out. We didn't have to move out of our apartment, but every family could only have one bedroom. I moved into my parents' bedroom. We were fortunate because we could select the people who were to move into the other rooms, so we asked friends and family to move in with us. That was kind of exciting from a child's point of view. Being an only child, there was a buzz about having other people and their children with us.

One of my parents' best friends moved in. Her husband was an attorney and their boy was my best friend; we had grown up together. That was very exciting. The father wrote funny little poems and he put them in every room. For instance, he wrote one about making sure to put the toilet seat down because there were a lot of people sharing toilets now.

Q: How many families lived in your apartment?
A: Five families lived with us. Everybody had to draw to determine who would do the cooking and who would do the cleaning. Most of the ladies had never cooked, cleaned, or ironed before. I had an aunt who was an incredible cook, so she got that job. My mother was very businesslike, so she doled out the food products to be used since we had a big pantry. Everybody got jobs and it really worked out remarkably well. The children were able to just remain children. The parents allowed that to happen.

Jews could not go out until after five, so the children went to the market late in the day. By that time, the food products that were left were pretty shabby. We got a lot of food from Gentiles and friends, including people my father had worked with; they brought food and it kind of worked. This whole process worked from the beginning of March until October.

Q: Did you attend school during this time?
A: No.

Q: Were you homeschooled?
A: I do not really remember. When my mother passed away eight or nine years ago, my source for those answers stopped. Now, I depend on a lot of information and memory, but some things are kind of pieced together. We did do a tremendous amount of reading, so that worked out fine.

Q: What else did you do with your time?
A: The kids became very entrepreneurial. We used to buy newspapers and sell them to the people we lived with. Europeans smoked a lot, but it was hard to get cigarettes; so, we would collect cigarette butts, take the burned ends off and put what little tobacco was left into a ball. Then, we rolled new cigarettes out of toilet paper and sold them. We did this because we realized that our parents were working and would need some support. Those are things that made it all work. We were very excited about how we were growing up.

I did have one experience with a very good friend, a little girl who lived in our building before it was designated as a Jewish house, and who stayed in our building afterward. I said to her, shortly after all this had happened, "When do you want to play? Do you want to play today?" and she said she could not. "So how about tomorrow," I asked, and again, she told me she could not. So I said, "Tell me when," and she said she "could never play with me again." That was her answer. I said, "Why not?" and she replied, "I am not sure, but it is because you are Jewish." I asked, "What does that have to do with anything?" She did not know, but she knew she could not play. That was the most traumatic point for me, I think, because I did not understand what she was talking about. But she did not understand either.

Q: What happened then?
A: During those months, everybody was aware of the trains taking people to camps. Those of us who were pessimistic claimed that they were concentration camps and gas chambers. Other people said that

was ridiculous, that it was not possible for anybody to do that. But then they started rounding up people in the streets and the restrictions became more serious. By the beginning of October, they really were rounding up all the Jews.

Everybody, including my family, would have tried anything and everything to stay alive. My father was busy working out all possibilities for saving our lives. One possibility was conversion. My mother and I went to a Catholic church, and we had to go through a whole learning process in order to be converted. My father did not do this, but he insisted that my mother and I do it because supposedly, if you were converted, you would not qualify. This turned out to be a lie because if you were a little Jewish, you were Jewish.

At one point, my parents were going to send me to a convent—another possibility for survival. But, as much as they thought my odds of survival would be better there, emotionally, they thought that if something was going to happen, let it happen to all of us. That kept them from doing so. So, staying together was the option they chose. It was a good thing. A lot of my friends ended up in convents, separated from their parents.

Q: Did you all manage to stay together?
A: Yes, and somewhere along the way, my father heard about Raoul Wallenberg. My parents and I got the Schutz-Passes and we were told where the safe house was.

Q: Do you know how your father heard about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I think he heard about Wallenberg through the Jewish organization I mentioned earlier. Budapest was not a big city and information was available to those who were involved in such things.

Q: Did your father ever mention Wallenberg to you or your mother?
A: Yes. Wallenberg was kind of a hero, really, from the minute he arrived—not because we knew how things were going to play out, but because this fairly young man from another country and without any ties to the Jews or to Hungary or to anything, took this task upon himself. Without any credentials except his family, he walked in there and pretended that he was important, and that people should listen to him. And it worked.

Q: Did you ever see Wallenberg?
A: No, I never saw him.

Q: Do you remember what your Schutz-Pass looked like? Were you present when it was prepared?
A: I was not there, but my father was and he brought them home. They looked like little passports. He was told that if we were stopped or anything, this would be a passport to safety, and they couldn't arrest us.

When we walked in the street, my mother had a very self-assured way about her. She didn't walk around like she was scared, and she always told me to stand up straight. The other thing she said was to never contradict her. If somebody asked, "What is your religion?" my mother would answer, "Catholic." Most of the time, a young child would say, "No, I'm not. I'm Jewish." My mother would tell me, "If I say it's black, it is black—even if it is white or purple. It doesn't matter. You can ask me later and I will explain to you my reasoning." I remembered that my whole life: never to contradict my mother, which is what children do all the time. She was very rational.

My father, on the other hand—being a man—was very easily identified as a Jew; the first thing they did when they arrested people, besides asking for papers, was to ask the men to drop their pants. That was the end of any argument because of circumcision. So, my mother became very protective of my father and she did all the talking.

In October, when the day came to move, my mother and father told me that we had to leave our home, and that we were going to put on several layers of clothes. I had a backpack, and whatever we could

carry by ourselves, we could take. We did not take a lot of stuff because we did not quite know where we were going. My biggest worry was where we were going to sleep. My parents said they did not know but not to worry: "We are going to be together. We are going to be fine." The only thing I put in my backpack was my pillow, which I continue to take wherever I go. That was my little object of security, along with some layers of clothing. We weren't too prepared because it was October and winter was coming.

We had several people tell us that the Germans were rounding up Jews, and that we were not safe anymore. There were a lot of stories. We went out and asked one person to help us, but she said that the SS were around, and that she could not take a chance on taking us in. We ended up staying somewhere else for a day or two. We stayed in basements, in attics, in people's houses, and in the houses of Gentiles who were away. Though their superintendents gave us permission to stay, they would deny it if they were ever confronted. My mother became extremely efficient, and organized our shelters when we were still in Budapest. She was very big on organizing things and providing us with whatever we needed.

Once, we stayed at a house among the private homes in the suburbs of Buda. My father went outside one morning for a walk, and there were a lot of dead people [on the street] who had been shot. My father took off their boots and brought them back to us because when this all started, we were not prepared. The shoes we had were very worn because of all the walking we were doing. Afterward, we used to tease my father for doing that because he was always a very polite, academic, soft-spoken person. We used to talk about what war does to people and to their behavior.

At one point, we went to the safe house. One thing I do remember is that they were packed like sardines. It was really scary. If you were claustrophobic, you would have walked right out. There were piles and piles of people and no provisions. My parents talked and talked, and we stayed there one night and then we left the next day because my father was concerned that having all those Jews packed into one tiny space presented a very good opportunity for the SS to come and just kill us all at once—Schutz-Passes or no Schutz-Passes.

My parents thought it would be better to just go underground by ourselves, which is what we did. We owned a building and the superintendent was somebody who worked for my father and had high respect for him, so he put us in an apartment and he would bring us trays of food. It was a very nice apartment and it had a lot of children's books, so I did a lot of reading. I read all the children's classics. We listened to one of those underground radio stations in the apartment. We were getting information about what was happening in Europe.

When we were hiding in that particular building (in the apartment where we had the radio), my father had a very painful kidney stone attack, and there was a big dilemma about what to do. He had had kidney stones before, but we certainly could not have the doctor come to us, so it was decided that my father would walk to the doctor. I remember sitting for hours, listening for him to come back. Anyhow, he came back hours and hours later, and we were all very happy. I really don't remember what happened with the kidney stones.

Then, sometime along the way, it turned to winter and it was cold. The Allies were getting very close and there were a lot of shootings. The Russians and the Americans were coming in and there was some talk that the Germans were losing, and that they were getting even worse about rounding up whomever they could find. They were killing as many Jews as they possibly could, in case they lost the war. There was a major siege going on and everybody was shooting, so we walked to the countryside, outside of Budapest.

We found safety with people and places to stay. We stayed mostly on farms, where the people led very simple lives, not like what we were used to. We had no beds and slept mostly on the floor, but the people were very kind to let us sleep. I always slept between my parents; I always had that comfort.

Q: You were still in danger, though, even in the countryside?
A: At that point, we were not only in danger as Jews hiding from the Germans, but there were also bombs flying all over the place, and we couldn't even tell who it was doing the shooting. We tried to create as

much of a shelter as we could. We kept hearing rumors that the Allies were getting closer. But "closer" was not "here," and the war was not over.

Food became a big problem. I was extremely fussy. I used to smell everything before I even put it in my mouth, and there were not a lot of choices. One time, my mother was working on the farm, and a chicken laid an egg, so she stole the egg and made me a yellow cake. I guess some flour or something had always been available, but she never had the egg. She made just a little piece of yellow cake; I had always liked sweets, so that was very good.

People would share pieces of bread and things like that with us. I always liked Hungarian sausages so my mother would cut one tiny slice of sausage and chop it up finely so that there were many, many pieces, and she made one sandwich with the little sausage. There were a lot of dead animals on the road, and a lot of people cut pieces of meat off of the animals.

Q: Did you head back to Budapest eventually?
A: All the Jews who had been hiding started to go back to Budapest, and so did we. But, there was still a bunch of Germans hanging around. At one point, there was a firing line and we were lined up to be shot. But, a bomb was dropped nearby and the Germans who were supposed to shoot us ran away. That was scary. It is funny, because in a child's mind, you do not really deal with the reality. You see guns and people, but you do not totally understand it. As I said, though, I was incredibly secure in the idea that everything was going to be okay.

I mentioned to you that my grandparents came to the United States in 1939. I know that my grandmother was never really happy here. Unfortunately, she got cancer and died in 1942. My mother was extremely close to her, and she was in her 20s when my grandmother left Budapest. Anyhow, my mother made up a story that every time we saw a butterfly flying outdoors, it was my grandmother and she was taking care of us, and it meant that everything was going to be alright. My mother was lucky. We saw a lot of butterflies and I totally bought into that story. I shared it with my daughter, so we always get very emotional about butterflies. We have a butterfly pin and all that. That was my butterfly story.

But, we did survive; we got through the firing line. It was February and we just kept walking. We were not even sure of the direction. The roads were lined with dead bodies and dead animals, and it was very cold. Then we heard rumors that the Allies had arrived. Our next bad experience was with the Russians.

It is interesting; when we compared Eichmann—the ultimate gentleman who dressed like he did and knew what to wear for the best affairs—to the Russians, who were rude and vulgar, we could not think of them as our liberators. My father, and I have no idea how, traveled with a bottle of cologne, which is still made today called 4711; I think it was like aftershave. The Russians took one look at the bottle and went for it. We did not speak Russian, but my parents had learned a couple of words and my father tried to explain to them that it was something people put on their faces. One Russian wasn't buying that, so he took a sip. He spit it out and put down the bottle with a disgusted look.

Q: How much time had passed since you left your apartment in Budapest?
A: We left in October and returned in the spring. So, my personal involvement in the war and the atrocities I saw only lasted for a year, which was the shortest period of time one of the European countries involved could have experienced.

After we returned, my parents had visas and we were supposed to go visit my maternal grandparents [who lived in America], but we were not allowed to. Basically, more and more restrictions were implemented between 1939 and 1942. Things still seemed okay, but then after 1942, we could not go on vacations or anywhere. So, we went back to our apartment.

Q: What happened when you returned to your apartment?
A: My father had said that if we got back to our apartment and there were any Germans there, he was going to kill them. I do not know how he planned to do that and I don't think he would have, but nobody

was there anyway. There had been a lot of bombing, so there were holes in the walls and the house was not exactly in the best condition.

This was now postwar. The Americans were there and my parents began to speak with the American soldiers, which kind of helped us get information. A lot of our family was missing: cousins, aunts, and uncles. My grandmother passed away when I was 8 and most of my other relatives ended up in concentration camps. But, some lived through the war and we did actually find one aunt alive. Her husband and son were dead. There had been a major massacre at the Danube on Christmas. Men were called, forced to take off all their clothes and face the Danube to be shot. So, the blue Danube became the “red Danube.” My father was able to identify my uncle through his dental information. I am not sure how that worked, but a lot of people were identified by their teeth.

The next few months were a combination of putting our own lives back in some order and dealing with the lack of food available. They were hanging Germans all over the place and everybody was kind of pleased by that. The synagogue was in bad shape. The city was cleaning up all the bodies. Lots of people who couldn't be identified were buried. The American soldiers were searching for people's families but unfortunately, the Americans were very anxious to get all their soldiers back home, and the Russians were happy to continue living in Budapest because life was better there than where they had come from.

As time went by and my father reopened his business, we went back to some normalcy. We thought that we would stay in Budapest and go back to our normal, pre-war way of life. But then, all of a sudden, the Communist party came and all the people who had been Hungarian Nazis now became Communists. They changed their green shirts with the Arrow Crosses to the red shirts. Anybody could get a job. My parents were a little concerned about what was going to happen, so we applied for visitors' visas. But, even then, my parents were not totally committed to leaving Budapest because they thought things may work out politically. We packed up everything with the knowledge that if we moved to the United States and decided to stay there, they could ship our belongings to us. We left for Switzerland and eventually came to the United States, since my grandparents and my uncle had come earlier. My uncle was a young man then, and he had come to join the American army. After the liberation, he was actually in Europe so he came to visit us.

Q: Where did you arrive in America?
A: We sailed first class from Dover and we landed in New York. On the boat, my mother was very sick; she had seasickness the whole trip, but my father and I had a great time. We even watched movies. My mother had a beautiful coat she used to wear, but she did not get to wear it because she got served in her cabin.

Q: Did you stay here in New York?
A: We stayed here. We got off the boat here in New York and my grandfather got us an apartment in an apartment hotel where he was living, on West End Avenue and 95th Street. After a while, we moved into another residential hotel on 86th Street and Central Park West because we needed a little more space. Then, my parents started looking for an apartment because we decided that we were going to stay in the United States, and we told the movers in Budapest to send us our stuff. We got our furniture, dishes, and crystal. They did not send my father's library, or our valuable things like books and paintings—they kept it. It took us a while to find an apartment since all our furniture was European and very large. We stored it for a while, and then my mother found an apartment on Riverside Drive and 75th Street. We sold a few pieces and, with the rest, furnished the apartment. It really looked lovely, traditional.

The move to the United States was harder for my parents than it was for me. We got here in the spring of 1947 and in the summer, I was shipped off to an American camp in Maine. That fall, I was enrolled in the eighth grade at a public school on the Upper West Side.

Q: Did you speak English already?
A: I spoke a little bit of English. Subsequently, I found out that the English my nanny in Hungary had spoken was not that good. She had learned how to speak British English and not American English, and I realized that my English was not that great. It had worked in Hungary, but in school and at the camp, the

kids were not only American, but they had come from a whole different world. I was sort of quiet for a while.

Q: During the time that you were in Budapest after the war, did you hear anything about what happened to Raoul Wallenberg when he disappeared in January 1945?
A: The only thing I remember is that nobody knew where he was. There was a rumor that he was alive. I do not know what happened. There was no reason whatsoever for the Russians to take him. I am sure that it was not a pressing matter for a lot of people, because they were busy getting their own lives and memories put back together. They had to put all those memories away.

It is interesting that, 60 years later, there is more talk about the war than there was when the war ended. My family totally assimilated. My parents had accents so it was obvious that they had not been born here, and my parents had a lot of Hungarian friends, but I ran right off to camp and into school, and I became an instant American teenager. Not until about 15 years ago, when the Hidden Child Foundation[21] organized and had a gathering in New York at the Marriott Hotel, did I attend something like that. It was advertised all over the place. That was the first time I got in touch with other Hungarians. Throughout all my school and college years, I had no contact with Hungarians except my parents.

Q: What was it like to connect with other Hungarians after so many years?
A: It was incredible. At first, I did not even want to go, but my daughter read about the gathering in *The New York Times Magazine* and said that I should. It was held on Memorial Day weekend, and we had already been invited to the beach by some friends. I told my husband that I did not want to mess up the whole weekend, so I said, "How about I leave for one day and then go back to the beach?" He offered to come back to New York with me, but I came by myself. Then I heard that Elie Wiesel[22] was going to speak that evening, so I called my husband and asked him to please come to dinner.

The gathering was in a huge ballroom and there were people looking for each other; they had notes. The foundation expected 200 or 300 people to attend. There were people from all over the world. There were signs for every continent. I sat at the Hungarian table. Then we had, like, a little group therapy and people talked a little bit about their stories. One of the women kind of became the leader of our group and said, "What about gathering once a month and sharing our stories?" And that is what we did.

Q: So, the people at your monthly meetings are all Hungarian?
A: Yes, though some have dropped out and some have died. The group is interesting because there is almost a 10-year age difference between the oldest and the youngest members. There are people younger than me, and there are people older than me who are in their 80s. Some were only babies or a couple of years old when they were hidden, but others were not children during the war; they were 18 years old or so.

It is a very diverse group. The common denominators are being Hungarian, being Jewish, and having been hidden. But our lives have taken different routes. Some of the people are still kosher and Orthodox, while others are not. Because we do not have a current common denominator, we can only talk about the same topic [the war] for so long. You cannot be friendly with everybody who lives in the city just because they live in the city; you have to have similar interests.

The group found out very early on that our children ("the next generation") have two mindsets. One group resents their parents because they never talked about the war. The other group resents their parents

[21] After the gathering, the Hidden Child Foundation was founded in 1991 after the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II, where 1,600 former Hidden Children from 28 countries met for the first time. The Foundation operates within the Braun Holocaust Institute of the Anti-Defamation League.
[22] Elie Wiesel is a writer and professor well known for his internationally acclaimed memoir, *Night* (*La Nuit*), about his experiences during the Holocaust. He has also defended the cause of Soviet Jews, Nicaragua's Miskito Indians, Argentina's disappeared, Cambodian refugees, the Kurds, victims of famine and genocide in Africa, victims of apartheid in South Africa, victims of war in the former Yugoslavia, and Ethiopian-born Israeli youths. In 1986, Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Prize for Peace for his human rights efforts.

because it was all they talked about ("When I was your age...."). And those children say, "I'm sorry that happened to you, but it is not my war. I do not want to hear about it." So it is just an interesting contrast.

Q: What was your approach for speaking to your daughter about the war?
A: I would say that I was in the middle. I did talk about the war, but not a lot. One thing my daughter just recently pointed out is that I tell the overall story, but I do not go into the sentimental part—the fear. I think I even blurred some of that out. I like the glass half full, rather than half empty.

I really give credit to my parents. I only have one daughter, and there was one thing I never shared with her. My father took a whole set of pictures right after the war and they were really horrific. I gave them to the museum. I told my daughter that someday, when she grew up, I would show her the pictures. I made such a big deal out of it and when she turned 35, I think she decided she was grown up.

I am not sure about all this sharing. It has been 60 years, and we said "never again," but it has happened again and again and again. Now, because of television and CNN, we see horrific things all the time. That was just not the case in those days.

Q: Why do you think it is important to keep sharing these stories?
A: I have grandchildren, and I have shared stories with them. Actually, at that Hidden Child meeting, they had a wonderful library of children's books, so I bought a lot of books as references on how to deal with relating my story to my grandchildren. It is interesting because at this stage in my life, I almost have a need to share more with my grandchildren than I did with my daughter. I was young when I got married, young when my daughter was born; I was still busy assimilating, and somehow, my war was over. It was a different world. Now, I am very conscious of the fact that I am the last generation, and after the people of my generation are gone, the stories will be gone. That is why I like to share.

Interview with Gabor Fischl

Q: What are your parent's names?
A: My parents are deceased, but their names were Bernard and Erzsbete, which is the equivalent of Elizabeth. Her maiden name was Klein.

Q: What city and country were they born in?
A: They were both born in Hungary. My father was born in a city called Vác,[23] and my mother was born in [an area] that today is a part of Slovakia—a border area which, on many occasions, belonged to Hungary or Czechoslovakia.

Q: What are your mother's and father's birth dates?
A: My father was born on October 16 or 17, 1907; and my mother was born on December 22, 1910.

Q: Where were they raised?
A: In Hungary. My father lived in the town where he was born until he got married. My mother became an orphan at the age of 3; her father was killed as a soldier in World War I, and I think her mother died in childbirth. My mother ended up living with her grandparents. In the beginning they lived in a smaller village, but I think in the 1920s they moved to Miskolc,[24] which is a major city in Hungary.

Q: Where they raised in Jewish communities?
A: Yes, they were. They were all observant, what we call today Orthodox.

Q: What kind of schools did they attend?
A: To the best of my knowledge, my father received a secular education until maybe sixth grade, religious education until the age of 19, and elementary, secondary and advanced yeshiva education. My mother's was probably something like that of my father's; she must have done about eight grades. That's about my recollection.

Q: How did your parents learn their Jewish customs and religion?
A: Their parents were all observant Jews; it was a major factor in their lives. My grandfather died before I was born, but was a very strict religious person who raised his children to follow in his footsteps. The same goes for my mother's grandparents; they were very religious people—the minute observances of religion they would observe.

Q: What kinds of activities were your parents involved in before the war?
A: My parents got married in 1937, and they lived in Budapest after that. For a short time they lived in Miskolc, for a couple of months maybe, and then they went to live in Budapest. My father was a traveling salesman; originally, he was a salesman for Zwack, which is a major alcoholic drink manufacturer. After that, he worked in a family business of shirts and uniforms.

Q: Do you know when they first noticed signs of anti-Semitism?
A: As Jews, they probably experienced anti-Semitism all their lives. The organization of anti-Semitism started with the rise of Nazism, which in turn came into Hungary shortly after that. I don't know if you're aware, but there are numerous clauses where the Jews were restricted from certain professions because, according to the demographics, there were too many Jews in those professions. So, there was always unofficial anti-Semitism in Hungary, there always was.

[23] Vác is located 34 kilometers north of Budapest on the eastern bank of the Danube River, below the bend where the river changes course and flows south.
[24] Miskolc is the fourth largest city of Hungary and the regional centre of Northern Hungary.

As these things came about, the restrictions became worse. My father's two brothers were taken into forced labor, in all practical purposes as slave laborers to the Hungarian Army. He lost two others in Ukraine with the Hungarian Army doing very menial work, often very dangerous work. I don't know exactly what they were doing, but many times these people were sent out to the front to be human shields, to activate mines if the opposing army mined their fields. They were human sacrifices.

We don't know what happened exactly to them, but one brother was used as a human sacrifice. His family still got a notice from the Hungarian Red Cross stating that he fell in the war. Ironically the letter said, "In the defense of the Motherland," which wasn't a fact. My father observed whatever the date of his demise was. For the other brother, we don't have any definitive [information], but obviously he succumbed to something.

This was in 1941 when they were taken away. In general terms, to the best of my knowledge, many restrictive professions came about against the Jews, at certain times. A Jew could not employ a Gentile; a Jew could not have certain business, limited businesses, and eventually no businesses. By 1941, there were very restricted anti-Jewish laws that were enforced and that were in the books.

Q: How did the war affect your family's cultural and religious traditions?
A: My parents kept to their religion very strongly even in the worst of times. They tried to avoid, even in the Swedish safe house, anything that was definitively non-kosher. Obviously, they could not observe certain strict interpretation of kosher laws, but as far as not eating pork, they did refrain from that, in the worst of times. They weren't in the condition of starvation, but they were hungry.

They abolished ritual slaughtering in 1940, I believe, which did not allow people to eat meat. If there was any clandestine slaughtering of small birds, it's possible, but I'm not aware of that, so this is something I cannot answer you definitively. On the other hand, they refrained from eating anything that was specifically non-kosher. They went hungry; there was a great deal of food lacking. They survived on whatever there was.

As far as I know, there was forced labor even in the Jewish community. My father was working in Budapest in the Forced Jewish Labor Brigade at the Budapest Airport, which is called Ferihegy, but was able to come home on very frequent occasions. I never heard from him that as a policy he violated the Sabbath, even though according to Jewish law you are allowed to violate the Sabbath for the preservation of life.

Q: What happened to your parents during the war?
A: My father was first, I'm vague on that [area], but for some time my father was taken away. It must have been in the early 1940s. I believe it was to Yugoslavia, Serbia. He was there for not an extended amount of time, but some time. Then he came back to Budapest and, as I just mentioned, at one time was forced to work at the airport, where he was able to communicate with his wife and come home very frequently. That was until the occupation of Germany, which occupied Hungary, I believe, in March 21st or 22nd of 1944.[25]

Q: And what happened to your mother and siblings during this time?
A: They stayed in their apartment, which turned out to be in the ghetto, when the ghetto came into effect. When the Hungarians and Germans sent Jews into ghettos, our apartment was in that area.

Q: When did your parents first hear of Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I can't answer that exactly, but his legend was known. My brother was born on October 16 of 1944,[26] which was the date that [Miklós] Horthy was ousted by the Germans and the Nazi Nyilaskereszt [Arrow Cross] collaborators in Hungary. My father went to get my mother, but by that time, she had already given birth on the street while trying to get to a hospital or a medical center—[I'm] not quite sure which one. Afterwards, they were able to get to an infirmary, or a hospital. They were there approximately 10 days or

[25] The Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944.
[26] Miklós Horthy was ousted on October 15, 1944.

two weeks, and during those days, the new regime in Hungary picked up most of the Jewish men and hoarded them, killed them. My father was not in that house because he was with my mother in that so-called hospital, and in a way, that was [how he survived]. They came back to their apartment—again, my dates might not be perfect—around the 30th, and my sisters, who were 6 and 4 at the time, were being taken care of by neighbors. The Gentile superintendent squealed to the Hungarian collaborators that there was still a Jewish man in the house. So, one officer and two younger soldiers picked up my father and also found another Jewish person in that house. They took them to the SS Headquarters in Budapest; I think it was number 60. That was a place where once a Jew was brought in, it was almost unheard of that he should walk out alive.

It seems that my father had some righteous instinct, God helped him, and as soon as they got there, there was an air raid. All the Germans and Hungarians ran to the shelter, and my father and this other person walked out. They took a broom or a shovel and made believe they were shoveling the snow, and they walked out and returned home. This was on a Friday night. Saturday during the day, the officer came back. He told the superintendent, "I forgot my white gloves, and I'm coming to pick them up." My mother saw, and obviously got scared.

I forgot to mention that all the way from our apartment—I would say, it was a good mile—the two enlisted Hungarians were beating my father nonstop with sticks. When my father came home [Friday] night, my mother saw that he was blown up, and that his head was unimaginably altered. The officer told my mother, "Don't be afraid. In civilian life, I am a doctor. I came here to see what's happened to your husband. I'm not here in any official capacity to harm him. I'm here to heal him." He looked at my father's wounds, and then my mother asked, "Tell me, who are you?" and he says, "Don't ask." And he disappeared. He could have been Jewish, German, or a Good Samaritan. This must have been early November of 1944. [My family] received a Schutz-Pass, which was the Swedish protectorate paper, soon after that and in mid-November, they entered the Swedish safe house.

The building where they went must have been a luxurious apartment building before the war, but it was bombed. There were no windows and only some of the walls were left. It was cold and there wasn't much warmth. They were in there for 24 hours a day in whatever clothing they were able to have. They stayed there until a little after the liberation.

Q: Did your parents meet Raoul Wallenberg?
A: My father said that he saw him once, I think. Once he came to this safe house, but one on one, I don't think my father ever did, no.

There was something I [was told by] my older sisters. They were going from the apartment where we lived, which was in the seventh circuit of Budapest—by that time a Jewish area, it wasn't yet considered the ghetto, but it was an area were Jews were allowed to live—to the Swedish protectorate in a non-Jewish area. This was quite a long walk from where they lived and a Jew was not allowed to be on the street, outside of the [Jewish] area. My sisters were young kids—as I said before, 6 and 4—and they were hanging on to the carriage that my mother was pushing with the one-month-old. They were trying to go to different places, but they were told, "You can't go here, you can't go there."

My father knew Budapest like the palm of his hand, but there was no way of going. He knew the address, but they weren't permitted. My sister told me that they were stopped, and there was somebody who said, "I will take care of them." He marched them, and eventually they got to this safe house. Once they arrived there—again I don't have the exact date, but it was by mid to late November of 1944—they went along with my older siblings (two sisters and one brother), two of my father's brothers, a neighbor family from across the hall, and two young girls who were cousins of my father.

Q: Did your father describe Raoul Wallenberg to you?
A: Physically? No. He said he once met him, but his physical appearance, no.

Q: How did your parents obtain food and clothing while at the safe house?
A: I would assume that clothing was only what they had from before, whatever they took with them. I have

not heard anything about clothing. Food is something which I inquired about. They don't have a clear recollection that the Swedish Embassy brought in any food. I had some recollection of my father saying that sometimes, somebody from the Embassy brought in something.

I had two girl cousins that were there. One, who was 12 or 13, was able to pass as an Aryan and would occasionally go out without the Yellow Star and was able to secure something. Also, an original neighbor from our building—his name was Schneider—was able to [find food]. So they both risked their lives by going out. An interesting thing that happened, somewhere along the line, was that they were able to secure beans. My mother cooked them or baked them using the broken pieces of wooden beams from the building to make a fire. There was no gas. My mother ate those, and she was able to nurse my brother, and he survived. The beans were a major staple. I don't really know where they got them exactly, but it was probably a major factor in their survival, as far as food is concerned. As I said, I do not have any recollection of them talking about any new or newly acquired clothing.

My family was in the Swedish safe house, by my calculation, roughly two months—from late November to late January, when Pest was liberated. [Budapest is a city made up of Buda and Pest. Pest is the eastern part and Buda is the western part, separated by the Danube River. The Russians liberated Pest, but they had a tough time crossing the river because the retreating Germans bombed all the bridges. So in order to cross the Danube, they had to put up bridges, and it took them about a month before they were able to cross. So this was in Pest, which was liberated in January. Buda was liberated in February.] During those two months, as I mentioned before, these safe houses, and these Schutz-Passes were just as good as the Hungarian-German officials accepted. I know that at least once or twice, that the Hungarian Arrow Cross, which is the Hungarian SS, came into the safe house. They ordered all the occupants to line up and they were taking them to the Danube to be shot. This was a time when deportation was impossible for them, because the railroad to the death camps was broken; so, what they did was take Jews, march them to the Danube, line them up, and shoot them. The same thing happened at least once, but I think twice, to my family. My father said somebody from the Swedish Embassy came and arranged to pull them off, so they were not taken to the Danube. There were others who were taken, even from the safe house. So, it was protection, but not full protection. This was what transpired there and how they survived.

Q: Do you know anything about the design and manufacture of the Schutz-Passes?
A: My father had a friend who is not with us anymore, Mr. Benedict. He was a year or two younger than my father, from the same hometown as him. I met him here. I was traveling once on a bus with him and we were talking, so he told me an interesting story. He said that he also had a Schutz-Pass.

Thousands of people besieged the Swedish Embassy to get this thing. He came up with an idea, which flabbergasted me when I heard it. He went up to the library or the post office, saw the Swedish telephone book, and looked up somebody with the name "Benedict." He found someone and sent a telegram to that address, stating, "I am Alfred," I think that was his name, "I am the son of this-and-this Benedict, who is a brother of a cousin of your father. I am stuck here in Hungary, and there is such a thing as a Swedish Schutz-Pass. Can you secure one for me and my family?" He went up a few days later to the Swedish Embassy, where people were trying to get these Schutz-Passes, which were very limited. He identified himself as "Benedict," and there was a Schutz-Pass written up for him, with instructions from this Mr. Benedict in Stockholm. And he got it without any fighting, without any standing in line.

As far as I understand, people were standing day in and day out, trying to get this [document]. He got it and survived. He had a wife and two daughters. The daughters were, to the best of my knowledge, probably 4 or 5 years old at that time. He told me that after the war, he had sent a letter to this Mr. Benedict, thanking him for what he did. And he explained, "This is what I did, and I appreciate what you did, and I thank you." He got back a letter that said, "I knew that you were not related to us. We are not Jewish, we are Gentile. We have no relatives in Hungary, no connection whatsoever. But I did that for you and your family."

So, if you're talking about Wallenberg as a humanitarian, there were other Swedish people who did the same thing. I mean, this person did not risk his life, but he went out of his way to save a fellow man. And he said he knew it all along, and he did it as a humanitarian. I don't know if any similar stories are in your

records or not, but it's something that I tell many people. It should never come to it that people should need these types of different ideas, but it's a tremendous idea.

Q: Were those rescued by, or who worked with, Raoul Wallenberg all Jewish?
A: If he had any Hungarian Gentiles, to the best of my knowledge, I don't know. [I think] it was all Jewish people.

Q: Do you know what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: That is a major question. I know as much as what's written. But as far as I know, he went to meet the Russian Commandant and that was the last time he was heard of. There are all kinds of rumors, and I know as much as anybody who wants to read or study. I have an interesting theory on that.

Raoul Wallenberg was an honest man who believed that the Russians were liberating the Jews. He trusted them. He did not have the same fear of the Russians as Rabbi [Chaim Michael Dov] Weissmandl.[27] He was legendary in Slovakia. As a Jew, he held meetings with the highest officials of the SS to save [his people]. He jumped off the wagon taking him to Auschwitz, made his way back to Bratislava, and hid in a bunker. The Russians were right there to liberate Bratislava. Rabbi Weissmandl, with a small group of people from that bunker, made a deal [to be] taken by German officers to Switzerland. Here is a man who knew that the Russians were there, and that while he was in the bunker, the chances were that he could survive until the Russians came, [but would rather] let himself be saved by the Germans, instead of waiting days to be saved by the Russians. He didn't trust them. And I think that, obviously, he made the right move. They survived and he made it to Switzerland.

But as I said before, I dabble in amateur history of this era. I talk to people; I love to talk to people. I read books, but every book—even if I know its author—is still written down for mass distribution in an appeal to sell that book. I like to speak to people who were there, one on one. I can ask a question; I can have communication and I did, in many cases, have conversations with people—like, as I said before, with this Mr. Benedict. I have other stories, not necessarily related to Wallenberg, which are probably very rare or not written about.

Q: What happened to your family after the war?
A: My parents went back [to the apartment] after the liberation, which was naturally ransacked. Not necessarily ransacked, but it was small, and it in the ghetto, and there must have been a hundred people living in those small apartments. And what they did, since they needed heat, was take the furniture and burn the wood. So, a lot of things were missing. [My parents] picked up their lives after that. They survived.

There was no food after the war either. There was a Swiss chocolate factory and, somehow, it got hit and they were able to remove blocks of chocolate; that became my father's way of bartering for everything. With a piece of chocolate, he was able to secure some flour or some wood. My father and his brothers were able to get their hands on something, and that became their bartering tool for food, for whatever they needed, for the early period after the war.

My father was dealing with some Russian officers. The Russians, as I said, were barbarians. Many of them were illiterate, starved and hungry, in war for four or five years. It's an old fact, but they attacked women; they did not care. The officers, obviously, were of a better breed. Some of them were Jewish, who spoke Yiddish, and were able to communicate with the Jewish population. My father had some dealing with a Jewish officer in bartering food. The Russians—this is an old story—were crazy about watches; they hadn't had any. Russia at that time was way behind, to the best of my knowledge. So they were crazy about watches and they were trading with everybody; [the minute] they saw someone with a

[27] Rabbi Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandl (1903–1957) became known for his efforts to save the Jews of Slovakia from extermination at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. Thanks to the efforts of his "Working Group," which bribed German and Slovakian officials, the mass deportation of Slovakian Jews was delayed for two years, from 1942 to 1944, and three concentration camps were transformed into work camps. Unfortunately, his plan to expand these efforts across the European continent was unsuccessful.

watch, they would grab it; the ones who were decent would give something in return. They were also so foolish—when they had a big alarm clock, they would ask for 10 small watches in return!

So that was at the beginning; there was no industry at the time yet, so [my family] lived on that. My father also was able to retrieve some things he had before. As I was saying, he was involved in shirts and uniforms, so he had some raw fabric, which was also in demand because there was no clothing; he was able to barter for that also.

It was something miraculous that my brother survived. He was [born prematurely] and there was no food, but as I said before, my mother was able to nurse. The family was together practically; other family members were killed, but the immediate family was together. They survived and they built up a new life after the war. Eventually, life became somewhat standardized, and I can't tell you exactly—I wasn't there—but they were liberated in January of 1945. I would assume by the time I was born in 1946, there was a certain normalcy for that era in the way of bringing food, or getting food, and earning a living.

We stayed [in Hungary] till late 1956 when the revolution against the Russians took place, and there was a possibility of leaving illegally; that's what we did. We crossed the border to Austria illegally and from there, we eventually came to the United States.

Q: How did the war affect your parents' religion?
A: Obviously, my parents stayed together and they remained [Orthodox]. You had people returning from concentration camps who went through hell—one year, two years, three years of living subhuman life, who hadn't [been religious] during that time. You had this syndrome that you had later on in Vietnam. The prisoners were treated like dogs; life meant nothing to the Germans. So the prisoners came back, and obviously, their religion was lax or they didn't believe in anything. Many of them, after a while, did return to it. But as far as my parents were concerned, they remained pretty stable, because they were able to. That's because of my parents' situation, where they were. But these people, especially young people who were separated from their parents, or whose parents were killed, or who went to the concentration camps—they were 15, 17 years old—lived for a year or two in slavery, where every day was killing and a crematorium. They came back and in retrospect, the humanity was lost for them, but only for a period of time.

Q: What was the longest period of time that your parents were separated?
A: I would say not long. Only that period that my father was in Serbia, which I don't have a figure for; it must have been a couple of months.

Q: How did the war affect your relationship with your parents?
A: My sister asked my mother, "How did you survive?" What was it that made people survive, who were dying left and right, [subjected to] hunger, murder, everything. My mother said, "I only live for the day." Over here we are making plans, education for our children, for our grandchildren; we are making plans for our 401ks, and this and that. There were no such things for them; there was only survival for the day, survival for the children. It obviously had a tremendous impact; they were thinking about it.

I know many people would not speak about it for years. My parents, well, I never directly asked them a lot—my mother a little bit, and my father whenever he opened up, but I never really interrogated my father into what it was. Occasionally he would speak of things, but most of the things he spoke of were the religious aspects: never give up hope; there is a God, and he his watching over us; we don't know his methods, we don't know what he is doing, but whoever was destined, whoever wanted to survive. As I said, [my family] was lined up to be taken to the Danube, and at the last minute they were called. They were probably a quarter of a mile to the river or less when they were taken out, and it was finished. It is not something that could have been saved… it was pure luck, or God's help. This is something that they lived with all their lives, and my father spoke very rarely, but the main thing that he did speak of and explain to us was to have faith; that there is a God and we don't know what he is doing. There were many cases where at the last minute, he survived. My father, rest in peace, was a very peaceful, very righteous man.

Let me tell you a story. My father's doctor had a potion that, if injected into someone, would make that person yellow, and [look] very contagious. The Germans and the Hungarians were very afraid of it—if there was a concentration of Jews and someone was yellow, they would kick them out. So this potion was a way out. Obviously this was poison, and it was strong. My father got hold of it from the start, and had some sort of percentage in which he shot many people with it—I don't know the number, if it was 5, 10, 15—and he saved people's lives. My father never told this story, but my mother did.

When my father was working at the airport, it wasn't an 8-hour work shift; it was an 18-hour work shift. In order to get to and from work, he put in probably more work also with that. So that day, when he came home knocked out, there was a person sitting there, and his son was taken into a place where almost everyone was killed. My father came home as knocked out as a person could possibly be, and my mother said that this man asked if my father could come and administer the potion to his son, or they would ship him out. My mother said to the man, "Please, let him eat," but my father said, "No, I have to save him." And my father went. It wasn't too far from the neighborhood, and he [gave the boy the shot], and the kid was thrown out and survived. The man came to my father's home and told him that it was because of him that his son was alive. That was one story.

In Slovakia, the deportation was in 1941, and they took a big chunk of the gypsies there. From 1941 to 1944, there was a hiatus; the Slovakian people spoke Hungarian because Slovakia was next to the border with Hungary. Most of those people closer to Hungary spoke Hungarian, so many of those young people escaped. A man who escaped from Slovakia went to relatives and said, "Can I please sleep here? I have nowhere to go," and they said, "No, you can't, I cannot risk my family." [The Germans] did come, you know; in the middle of the night, the police came to check papers. Despite [its small size], this man slept in our house for many nights, with refugees and other illegal people. My father took the risk and he brought them out food, and he gave them anything they wanted. And this was before Wallenberg. This is what my father did; they always say nice things about my father, always risking his life to save others.

Q: How do you feel about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: Very thankful. Obviously, I am here because of him and so are my siblings. He was a young person who came from a rich family and risked his life to save others. It's a pity; it is crazy how today there is no way to try to locate him in.

Q: What would you say to him if he were here with us today?
A: I would thank him in any possible way. He gave me my life and as far as history says, he had no particular reason to do it, only for humanitarian reasons. It's not a question that he had no connections. He did a beautiful thing, came from a well-careered family and for no other reason, just to save lives.

Q: How do you think Raoul Wallenberg would respond?
A: Great people like this would say, "I would do it again." I would think that he would probably say, "It's still worth it." What did the Russians want from him? Obviously Wallenberg had outside help and had connections to foreign money, to Jewish estates and to the U.S. and maybe the C.I.A. According to the legend, he had an abundance of money to buy his houses, and he was bribing everybody. So this was a man who would be able to do it and even when [Adolf] Eichmann said, "Even diplomats have car accidents…" that didn't stop him. We are talking about a person who was willing to do it, and he did it.

Interview with Judith Friedlander

Q: What is your name? Where were you born?
A: My name is Judith Friedlander. I was born in Budapest on July 31, 1937.

Q: Tell us about your family.
A: I was the daughter of Lisker Rabbi [Solomon Friedlander], a well and active man who reached out to the community and to everybody, Jews and Gentiles. He had many friends. When the Holocaust started, they tried to help him.

Q: How was your daily life before the war?
A: I had a very rich Jewish life. My father was a well-known rabbi who had a large group of followers. My grandfather was a well-known rabbi who lived in Olaszliszka.[28] The family dynasty came from there. I grew up near our synagogue. My father had a lot of followers and we were very observant.

We lived a very comfortable life in a beautiful apartment that faced three ways. We spoke German, Hungarian and Yiddish. My German was perfect because I had a German governess. It was the spoken language. I had a younger brother.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: I remember that the Jews were afraid to travel on the train. Their beards would be cut off and they would be caught and sent to Russia, or who knows where. The Hungarians had a Jewish battalion. It was called Munka Tabor.

You knew in the air that anti-Semitism was there. I was in a Jewish school but we were afraid to go out at night. During Christmas, it was terror. The priests would preach that the Jews killed Jesus. So, if they found a Jew walking in the street, they would beat him up or who knows what. It was a very precarious time.

My father knew what was going on. One Saturday in January of 1944, two detectives arrived looking for him. They wanted to know if we were hiding Polish Jews who had escaped from Poland and came to Hungary to hide out. Polish Jews had come to my father and he had tried to help them by giving them papers. He sent them to different farms to hide with Gentiles. The problem was that [the Polish Jews] did not speak Hungarian, so it was a lot harder for them [to blend in].

One of the detectives had a Jewish girlfriend. He started talking to my father, who was very charismatic. This detective was very taken by my father and said to him, "You have to cut it out. You are in line to be taken into the German headquarters." My father knew what was happening and dispersed the people among other Jews. We stopped the synagogue's activities. We closed it down except for twice a day. So, he knew and tried to warn the Hungarian Jews; some listened and some did not. That is an unfortunate thing.

Q: How did you experience the Nazi takeover of Hungary?
A: One Sunday, I was standing there at the window in the corner and, as if I see it now, I saw the Germans marching in. As young as I was, I knew in my heart that something bad was going to happen. You grow up very quickly. I ran to my mother and said to her, "Come to the window and see! The Germans are marching."

That Sunday, my father ordered groceries to the apartment. He spoke to Dr. Baragi, [a friend of the family], and said, "I want you to warn whomever you can to start hoarding food." Not everybody wanted to believe it. They said, "The Germans will not hurt us." Hungarian Jews were very Hungarian, they admired

[28] Olaszliszka is a village two hours away from Budapest.

the government greatly. They felt they were citizens and that they would be well-treated by the government. They were wrong. My father told them of the demise of the Polish Jews and what happened to them: "Polish Jews were persecuted, don't expect it to be different here." As usual, some believed and some wanted to let it go.

I was 7 years old at the time. The following Monday, the Jewish schools were closed down—we were not allowed to go there anymore. I was a second grader. The Germans took over the building. We knew subsequently that things were not going to go right. My father immediately started making preparations to go into hiding. He knew he did not want to go to the Yellow Star buildings because he knew the Jews would be doomed. He knew the Germans were not allowing the Jews to go free, and he was only thinking of hiding in houses.

The Germans took over Budapest and turned apartment buildings into Yellow Star buildings. The Hungarians welcomed the Germans with open arms; [they] could say whatever they wanted to, whatever they liked. They were with the Germans.

The Jews were afraid to walk on the street since people who were caught never came back. The Arrow Cross decreed Yellow Star buildings designated houses [for Jews]. Whoever had a big apartment was pushed to one room [and other families moved in]. [Jews] had to wear the Yellow Stars and were only allowed to go shopping between 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Once the government changed, the Arrow Cross took over and they just took Jews to the Danube and shot them. I remember passing by the Danube, hearing the screams of the people who were thrown into the water and shot. Some people were trying to swim away. It was not the Germans who were shooting, it was the Hungarians. The Germans did not have to. Some of the Polish and Hungarians were worse than the Germans. I would not hug any of them; my feelings are strong.

It was a month later when we moved into the hiding apartment. It was not a Yellow Star building, and everyone who needed a hiding place was there. My father organized a small printing shop and since no Jew was allowed to walk outside without proper identification papers, the printing shop made sure whoever needed a document was given one with a name taken from Gentile person..

It was up to the people to decide how to conduct themselves if they were stopped [by the authorities]. If they showed some nervousness and fright, the Germans knew something was not right; if you carried [the alias] off well, you passed. Those who were stopped would be asked questions in German because the Jews always spoke German. The Jews would not speak or answer, as if pretending they didn't understand German so that they wouldn’t be discovered. I know my father had passed [this test] many times.

As a little girl, [my father] would take me with him. I would stand by the corner and watch him on the other corner. He told me, "In case I get caught, you go and tell the others, so they can be dispersed." Thank God he was able to carry on. He spoke beautiful Hungarian; his accent was perfect and once he cut his beard, he did not look Jewish at all.

I was one of the younger surviving at the time. My father was about 38. My mother was 35. You age very quickly when life treats you in such a way. The whole family was alive. If the rest of the family could hide, we knew we could be saved. We had cousins who came from different parts of Hungary to hide with us in the first apartment.

In January of 1945, the apartment where we were hiding was bombed. We were forced to get out.
We were caught on the street, probably because it was my brother who was teased and got into a fight with some of the Gentiles he was playing with. We were taken to prison. We were very young children.

After four days, my brother and I were released and placed in a ghetto. My parents were destined to be transported to a camp near Germany. My father escaped and brought my mother back. He put on a German uniform, found her, and brought her back.

We were living outside the city with Gentile papers in a big house with a tremendous courtyard. My father rented [the space] from someone we didn't know. My father knew the location was away from our previous apartment and the neighbors did not know us. He told them we were from out of town and we came because [our old city was] bombed. We knew the neighbors would be very suspicious, so we tried to stay to ourselves. We knew not to say too much.

No one could cook because everyone was afraid of the smell. During the day, the shades were drawn and we did not move too much—only at night, when we went to the bathroom. We had a schedule of what to do, so we took turns. My father was able to go to different parts of the city and look for different bakeries to get bread and other food. At night, he would deliver the bread dressed up as chimney sweeper. He had all kinds of disguises.

We knew about the orphanage in Budapest, but we tried to stay away from community places where Jews were congregating, because my father always knew we would be caught with all the Jews if we were there. He knew that the Germans or Hungarians, when they were ready, would take us. We stayed isolated. We tried to stay away from friends. We could not trust anybody.

The first apartment we took was outside the city. There was a very famous sanatorium in Budapest where people tried to hide and were caught. We had a superintendent who would keep our stuff and light the stove on *Shabbat* for us. When the Germans came, he was the first to tell on us. You could not trust anybody. In Transylvania, the superintendent did the same thing.

Q: Did the war affect your family's relationships?
A: I was very young and lucky to be left with my family intact. I was not torn, I was not alone. My outlook [now] is different. I was never separated from the family; I got a very hopeful upbringing and outlook—tomorrow brings a better day. It's carried over in my lifestyle. Thank God, I am grateful. Those people who did not have that strength of faith did not make it.

Q: What aspect of the war made the biggest impression on you?
A: You could hear the bombs. By the sounds of the airplanes, we could tell if they were English or American planes. I am still afraid when I hear lightning and thunder. Thank God I was young.

There was also hunger and a terrible fright. Plus, people were so confined they were practically sitting on top of each other.

Even if I relive and talk about it and renew it, I feel that I want the world to know. It is very important.

Q: I understand that you met Raoul Wallenberg personally. How was the encounter? What role did he play in your family and your father's congregation's survival?
A: Dr. Baragi, a very close friend of my father, was friendly with Wallenberg; he had dealings with him. One day he invited my father to a meeting in the heart of the city, in a beautiful apartment. Because of Dr. Baragi's international dealings, he had connections and set a meeting with all the Jewish leaders of the city, and they discussed how to save the Jews. My father grouped us up and when we met Wallenberg and Dr. Baragi, and my father said, "We need 40 Schutz-Passes." Wallenberg asked, "How can I find 40?" My father said, "You give me one and I will make 40."

I had never heard of Wallenberg before. He was not a tall man, but he had the kindest blue eyes. He patted me and I looked up at him, but I did not speak to him. I was only 7 years old so I did not speak to him. We did not spend more than 10 minutes together.

After Wallenberg gave us one Schutz-Pass, we forged 40. My whole family got the documents and was able to walk. We had no place to go, so we were on our way to the Swedish house and were divided into walking groups. I was with my mother, my brother, my grandmother, two uncles, and a cousin. But the Arrow Cross caught us. It did not matter to them if we had the papers. My mother was beaten, I was kicked, and my grandmother was beaten. We were brought into the police station.

Some of the Jewish boys were dressed as Arrow Cross. One of the boys said to my mother, "I will try to get into conversation with the Arrow Cross, so when I say '*Telech*' (a Hebrew word for go) like a hint, you start walking." He distracted them by talking and offering them a golden cigarette case. We walked away and met my father, who was already waiting for us at the gate. When he saw us all bloodied, we told him what had happened. Dr. Baragi was also there in the Swedish house.

It all happened within one hour. It was about 10 days before liberation.

Q: How would you describe the daily life in the safe house?
A: We hid in the Swedish protected house, in the basement, because there were bombs. There were people there that we knew, but there was no food and all the people were packed together. But, everyone stayed since the protection house was the only place the Germans couldn't touch since it was a foreign institution.

In the house, I caught pneumonia and was taken to the sick room for a day, and my fever started going down. One night, the bombs came and I was terrified. My father came and carried me out, and within a minute of leaving the room, a bomb hit and everyone who was still in there died. But I was saved. It was a miraculous time; it was a terrible time. Some are meant to live and some are meant to die. In the sick room there was no medication or food, and a doctor came rarely to check on us. When I was sick, my father ate my food portions because I could not eat. He said to me, "I could never believe I would eat my daughter's portion."

People tried to make the best of [the protection house]. We tried to keep our tradition; otherwise, you go out of your mind, and some really did lose their minds.

We played cards and played jokes on each other. There was a father and daughter who were constantly fighting. The boys made a box, put the daughter in it, and said to the father she died. He was very upset and started crying, so suddenly she popped out of the box.

We tried to make [the house] as livable as possible. There was fighting. It was a tiny place, but we did what we could.

We were full of lice. My mother cut my braids, and my hair was filthy and my scalp was infected. But, we only thought of the next day. The feel of survival is very strong and the harder the condition, the harder the survival.

Q: How did you manage to continue practicing your religious traditions during the war?
A: We could not celebrate Sabbath—there was no food and we never cooked because we were afraid the neighbors would smell the cooking. Life was each minute as it came. I don't remember thinking about Sabbath; we were taught Christian prayers.

Q: Do you remember the day of the liberation?
A: We stayed in the basement and heard the *katyusha* and street fighting, so we knew the Russians had arrived. The Germans were fighting with them. The Russians told the Germans they wanted to save the palace in Budapest, which is beautiful and faces the Danube, but the Germans couldn't care less. My father took me on his shoulders and we went outside and met the Russian soldiers. The Russians were good with children. They handed me a piece of candy, but I did not know what to do with it. We stayed for a few days in the protection house, and then returned to our own apartment. We lived in one room. Most of the city was destroyed. We hobbled around the stove for warmth and went around trying to find some food. All we could find was tofu cakes, and since then, I cannot touch tofu—it harbors bad memories. Hunger was terrible; people ate dogs and horses. There was lice and filth, it was horrible. There was nothing since the Russians took everything they could. We stayed in the apartment for about a week, since my father was sick and could not be moved.

Q: What happened after the war?
A: My father's family was taken, along with my grandfather. They had a chance to come to Budapest, but my grandfather did not want to leave his village. He died in the Holocaust.

We also lost one aunt who had two children. They were caught when the superintendent gave them out. And one of my uncles was caught at the last minute in Budapest.

My [maternal] grandmother took me, my brother, and my two uncles to Transylvania, where she was originally from. There was food there already, so my parents came too and we stayed there for six months. When my grandmother came back to Transylvania, the neighbor said, "So you came back." My grandmother said, "Yes, and I am going to take back my furniture from you!"

In Transylvania, we were able to have a more normal lifestyle. Later, my father returned to Budapest to build a community—people returned from concentration camps and needed a rabbi.

Q: How did you arrive in New York?
A: My father signed over everything we owned to the Russians for a passport. It was real, not forged. I was very sad when we left. I was, by then, 11 years old. I went out with a cousin to the other side of the Danube, where I could see the whole city. I wrote a poem as I was saying goodbye to the city. It was my home. I remember that it was painful and we were crying, but my father never wanted to go back to Hungary. He did not feel like a Hungarian anymore. My father went back only once to visit the cemetery and, interestingly, I went back several times but I felt nothing; it was all gone.

We traveled to Prague in 1947 for four months. From there, we got a visa and arrived in New York on an American freighter. The trip took three weeks. My father had been to America in 1939 for a year, so he had immigration papers. The boat had docked in Galveston, TX, on Sabbath. My father was not going to get off and desecrate the Sabbath, so the captain let us stay. Afterwards, we took the train to New York.

All of our family stayed intact and came together to the United States: my uncles, my grandmother, my parents, and my brother. We settled in Washington Heights, NY. My mother picked me up right away and sent me to school, and within a year, I spoke English. We later moved to the Bronx, where my father started a synagogue. I studied at Hunter [College], later got a Fulbright scholarship, and went to France to the Sorbonne.

I speak Hungarian, French, German, Italian, and Yiddish. Here in the States, we spoke Hungarian at home with my mother and father, but Hungarian is not the easiest for me to speak and understand; English is easier.

After the war, my father kept in touch with all the people who helped him and took care of him. Dr. Baragi was not a young man and did not have children, so my father used to send him packages from America. He lived out his life and was supported by my father, and died in Budapest.

Q: Why do you think it is important to spread Wallenberg's legacy and tell these stories?
A: I want to tell the story because it should be carried on and taught. Young people don't believe the Holocaust happened. Europe now is anti-Semitic. I was in Budapest in the year 2000. I went to the museum and a group of French tourists did not have anyone to translate, so I did—I was willing.

I went with my children to the anniversary of my great-grandparents' deaths, and I went to their graves. Afterwards, we went back to Budapest and I wanted my children to see what it was like. They enjoyed the trip, but to me, Budapest was a foreign country. I went up to the apartment and I showed the kids where we were hiding. We always talk about it. I always felt it is very wrong for parents to hide it, and that it cripples the children when they don't talk about it. Why close the world on your children because certain things happened? The bigger the world, the more you will learn.

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg were sitting with us here today what would you say to him?

A: When you talk about miracles; that is what Wallenberg did. He will never get out of heaven because he saved so many souls, and the Germans could never touch him. I think when the Russians caught him, he knew too much—he knew too many Russian secrets, and they killed him right away. When I heard he went to prison, I did not believe it. He was a man with a mission, and he would not think of taking his own life.

He did it all on his own.

Interview with Veronica Gelb

Q: What is your name?
A: Veronica Gelb.

Q: When were you born?
A: I was born on February 17, 1937, in Budapest, Hungary. We moved to that address when I was 3 years old.

Q: How was your upbringing? Your family?
A: I'm an only child. I lived with my father, who was a tailor, and my mother, who was at home. My father had his business in the home where we lived—13 Hollyed Street, on the second floor. It was a large two-room. It was in a brand new building that had indoor bathrooms and toilets, which they didn't have in every building at the time.

I had a happy childhood. I lived in a building that had many families with children, girls my age, so I had a lot of friends. We used to play together a lot. We used to go to the park. I remember going to nursery school and crying the first time my mother left me there. Things were good until—I don't remember the year—my father had to report as a slave laborer and he was taken to Yugoslavia. He came back to visit. This must have been in the early 1940s. Basically, I guess because I was so young, I didn't feel the change so much because he was back home in between. Not until 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary, suddenly everything changed.

Q: Did you go to a Jewish school?
A: No, I went to a public school.

Q: Do you remember having any religious upbringing?
A: Yes. We weren't Orthodox. We were what they call now conservative. I didn't go to a special Hebrew school, but in the public schools they had religious instruction twice a week, and children were divided depending on their religion to different classrooms. They required that every Friday, we go to synagogue. Because I lived close to it, I went to Dohány, which was a large synagogue in Budapest. In fact, my parents got married there. I had to be there every Friday, and they held it against you if you didn't come. We did not have a kosher home, but we celebrated all the Jewsh holidays with my parents and the family. My mother had a large family; she was one of 10 children. My father came from a small town. He moved to Budapest when he was a young man and met my mother.

Q: So, you were saying that the Germans came to Hungary in 1944. How did you experience the occupation? Did you notice small changes in the beginning?
A: Yes, we all had to wear the Yellow Star. I remember my mother very busily sewing them on all our garments. You weren't allowed out of your home unless you wore the Star. It didn't affect us going to school because at that time, they still allowed young children to attend elementary school. I know they had restrictions for universities and certain professions, but they didn't affect me personally.

Things started changing even more when they had designated buildings they called Yellow Star houses and people had to move if they lived in another area. By then, my father was gone permanently. We didn't know where he was. My mother's sister and my grandmother moved in with us. A cousin of mine moved in too, along with her new husband and his parents. So, suddenly there were eight of us living in the apartment. I stopped going to school. There was no more school, as far as I was concerned. We weren't allowed to leave the building. So that was a major change.

From then on, I remember many air raids. We had to go down to the air raid shelter. I remember being very scared. We had to pull the blinds to make sure no lights were seeping out. And then suddenly things started getting even worse, which I did not understand, but I was aware of the changes. My aunt and my

cousin were taken away. In the mean time, my grandmother passed away, but she died peacefully one night. Knowing what came after, it was a blessing. So my aunt and my cousin left and we didn't know where they were. The old couple who were my cousin's in-laws moved away. I didn't know at the time, but they were taken to the ghetto. My cousin's husband was also taken to a slave labor camp. So, at that time, it was just my mother and me left.

Q: Do you know under what circumstances they were taken?
A: Well, notices came. People used to come to the courtyard and announce that certain people had to report. During one of these instances, my mother was called. Like I said before, there were many children in the building. Many were just with their mothers. They took all the mothers. There was an older woman who lived in the building and she took us all into her apartment. We were all crying and she tried to console us. This happened early in the morning and we were very scared. That night we saw from her terrace all our mothers, except for one, coming back. I don't know what it was, but from what I remember, they had no room for so many people. Some came with medications, and they said they were sick. They let them go. My mother was one of the people who they let go and she came back. By then, we knew it was only a matter of time before they took everybody.

When she came back, she met a neighbor who was going someplace with luggage. My mother asked where she was going and she said that she had gotten these papers, and was moving into buildings that were under Swedish protection. She told my mother where she'd gotten them, and my mother was able to get these papers too, and was very happy when she came home. She packed us up—we couldn't take a lot, just a little bundle—and we went to the houses.

Q: Do you remember the documents?
A: No.

Q: Did she keep them?
A: Unfortunately, no. I always wished that I had some of them. I don't.

Q: You mentioned your mother packing a small bundle…
A: Some kind of bedding, but I don't remember exactly what it was. I remember that when we got there, she put it on the floor, but I don't remember if it was a blanket or a cushion. I do remember walking into the apartment. I remember the room that we were assigned to sleep in. It was a large room. They had people sleeping side by side against the wall. There was only a small space where the feet met for a person to walk through. It was like sardines in a can, but nobody complained because everybody felt that we were safe. We were hoping that we were safe. I know that my mother had to go to work. I believe it was one of the requirements for working-age people, even though they were in these safe houses. The Germans allowed them to go to work during the day and then to come back.

Q: Do you remember what she did?
A: No, I do not. But I know that she left and she wasn't the only one who went to work. They had some older people in the apartment who took care of the children. I remember there was a big kitchen and a bathroom. There was only one bathroom, if I remember right. In Budapest in those days, apartments didn't have two bathrooms, even though these were more modern buildings. They had central heat. That I remember.

Q: Was the heat on when you were there?
A: I don't know, but I don't remember being cold. So, it was either because there were so many people that kept us warm, or maybe there was some heat. In the building I grew up in, you had to make a fire in the fireplace to have heat. Here, it was central. It was a very nice building, but conditions weren't like normal times. On the other hand, it was much, much better than what we knew in the ghetto of Budapest. Conditions were pretty bad there.

Q: Did you see Wallenberg at any time?
A: I don't remember. If he did, I don't recall.

Q: Did you hear his name or that of somebody who was in charge?
A: I only heard that it was under Swedish protection. I didn't know a name. I have to say that I only found out much later.

Q: How did you find out?
A: More in this country [America] than in Hungary. I grew up after the war in a communist country. I guess they didn't talk about Wallenberg. You didn't ask too many questions. You did what you were told. That's why, when I got older, I wanted to leave. The opportunity didn't come until 1956.

Q: Going back to the safe house, do you remember how long you were there?
A: We must have gotten into the house probably towards the end of October of 1944, and we were taken by Hungarian and German forces into the ghetto two weeks before Budapest was liberated in January, 1945. It must have been the end of December when they came and no longer honored the protection. I don't know what happened, suddenly, but they came and rounded us up and they took us into the ghetto. That's a whole other story. It was a horrible experience.

Q: How was the ghetto in comparison to the safe house?
A: Well, first of all, when they came for us, they told us that anybody with any valuables must turn them in because, if they don't, they would be shot on the spot. My mother had long hair and she made a bun. She put her wedding band into her hair. I happened to see it, and I was crying and begging her to give up her ring. She wouldn't. I was so scared that they were going to find it and take it and kill her. That was the worst of it. Somehow they didn't.

They marched us into the ghetto. Once we got there, they opened the gates and herded us in. They pretty much just left us, and everybody had to fend for themselves. At the time, the ghetto was overflowing with people. There was very little space and no food. I had a great-aunt who lived in the area of the ghetto. We tried to find her. We went to where she lived and we did find her, but she had no food either. I remember that she gave me a little piece of white bread and I wanted to share it with my mother, but she insisted that I eat it. I don't recall if she had a bite or not, but I remember it was horrible.

Q: Do you remember how the food situation was in the safe house?
A: It felt secure and comfortable under the circumstances. It was like camp. It was nice. It wasn't like people were rude to each other. Everybody was thankful for being there and people got along. I felt safe. That's why it was so horrible. We never thought it would be suddenly over and they would take us out. I guess that we were hoping we would be able to stay there, and the war would end. It didn't work out like that. There must have been food. I'm sure it wasn't luxurious. It was probably very minimal, but we ate.

Q: Were you hungry?
A: No.

Q: So you were in the ghetto for two weeks before it was liberated?
A: Yes, and during that time, we were starving. It was cold. It was the winter. We spent most of the time in the air raid shelters. They were overcrowded; the bombings were nonstop at that time. I remember that our building was hit and we had some people upstairs in their apartments who were killed. I still get scared when I hear a loud noise. If somebody scares me from behind, I jump. I can't control it and I have a feeling it goes back to those experiences. The Hungarian-Budapest ghetto had mines under it and the Germans planned to blow it up. I believe that's why they wanted to make sure they got everybody in there. Fortunately for us, they ran and didn't stop to blow us up.

Q: Was there only one ghetto in Budapest?
A: Yes. There was only one.

Q: Wallenberg is credited with stopping the General in charge of blowing up the ghetto. Wallenberg told him that the Russians were in the outskirts of the city and that if he didn't want to become a war criminal, he had to dismiss the orders.

A: That's very possible. It's only a guess on my part that they wanted to, but they didn't. So you figure that they didn't have time. Either way, I feel that so many key people were killed in the ghetto. Not only were they shot, executed, but they also starved to death. So I feel that without Wallenberg's protection, we probably wouldn't be here. I'm very grateful for that. We both survived, and my father came back.

Q: When did he come back?
A: It was summer when he came back. When the war ended in May, he was in Germany. They took him to Germany. It must have been another two months or so before he came home. I remember it was hot on the day he arrived, and it was at night. We didn't know if he was alive. By then, maybe I didn't realize it and didn't hear about all the horrors, but my mother knew. She heard so many people were killed. She didn't know if my father would ever come back. It was a miracle.

Q: Were you able to go back to your apartment after the liberation?
A: Yes.

Q: Was everything intact?
A: I told you my father had his business there. I have a feeling that some of his machinery was gone. There was furniture and the apartment was in pretty good shape. The building that we lived in was hit by bombs. There were markings, but it wasn't hit directly so the building was in pretty good condition. We were able to go back to our original apartment. I stayed there until 1956, when we left after the revolution in November.

Q: Did you live with your parents?
A: Yes.

Q: Did you all come to the U.S.?
A: We came. Yes.

Q: How was your experience moving to America?
A: It was very exciting. I was 19, almost 20. By then I realized that Communism wasn't what I, as a child, was made to believe. I had a teacher who kind of opened our eyes and openly talked to us about the world and opportunities, and what life could be. So, when the revolution broke out, the doors finally opened up and it was an opportunity to leave.

Also, unfortunately, part of it was the anti-Semitism that came out of the woodwork again. My father had one surviving brother who still lived in the small town where he came from. He called my father and said if this revolution succeeded, we would have to get out of there because they were already writing a list of how to get rid of the Jews. So, when we had an opportunity, we left. My parents wanted to leave, too. Mainly because of that. It wasn't easy, but to me, it was an adventure.

We first walked miles through the fields at night before we got to the Austrian border, and then we stayed four weeks in Vienna before we were able to get our papers organized to come to the United States. We flew from Munich to New Jersey. The reason we were able to come to the United States was because my father had two brothers who left Hungary in 1904. They were much older than my father and were living here; that's why we were able to come. We settled in Miami, Florida. It was like starting a new life.

Q: Did you meet any other people who came from Hungary ?
A: We met Hungarians, but some of them left Hungary after the war. They were from different parts of Hungary, not necessarily from Budapest. Later, when we moved to New York, my parents had a lot of friends who were from Budapest. I know that they survived in different ways, but I never really asked about where they were and what route they took during the war. I have a cousin who I know was hiding with her mother, and I have other relatives who I know were also in hiding. I mentioned my aunt and cousin who lived with us when we had to move in together. The two of them were hiding during the war and they survived. In fact, my cousin was in a slave labor camp, but he survived.

Unfortunately, my father's family wasn't so fortunate. He had three siblings in the small town—a sister and two brothers, who each had four children. So, each family consisted of six people, and from each family there was one survivor. My uncle lost his wife and four children, and I have a cousin who lost his parents and three siblings. Another cousin, who passed away already, lost his parents and three siblings. But I don't know anybody who was in the Wallenberg houses.

Q: When did you first hear about Wallenberg?
A: Pretty much when I came to New York. I married my husband, who was American. He passed away in 2005, but he was in the military and we traveled a lot. So, we were in different parts of the United States. I never spent that much time with Hungarians. In 1961, we moved to New York and I met some people who were from Hungary. I met some old friends of my parents again. In New York, I really heard the full story about him. I certainly didn't know that the Russians captured him and took him to Russia. The Communists didn't advertise it when I was growing up. It was such a shock to hear what had happened to him. It was so hurtful, so tragic. It doesn't make sense, even today, when I think of it.

The only thing I can say is that I know a lot of Jews who survived and were in camps, and were trying to come back to Hungary when they were captured by the Russians. Many were taken to Russia to work in Siberia and in different places. My uncle was one of them. Somehow, he was able to come home. I guess they let him go. But there are people who never came home.

My father was captured by the Russians on his way back to Budapest when he was liberated. My father was a tailor. Obviously, the Germans needed skilled tradesmen—especially towards the end when they were in trouble. They didn't have that much money, and there were uniforms that had to be repaired and fixed. So, my father worked until the end of the war. Because they needed him, they gave him food. When the war ended, he didn't look like the people in the concentration camps. He was in better condition. When they were liberated by the Americans in Germany, the Americans told them, “Don't go home because nobody survived; why don't you start a new life?” But my father said, “No, I have to go home to find my family.” He and three other men were able to collect food, and they got a horse and buggy. But, they were captured by the Russians, who thought they looked too good to be Jews. My father was fluent in Yiddish and it just so happened that one of the Russian soldiers was Jewish, so he spoke to him in Yiddish. They said, “Well, you're Jews, but you have to stay here.” So, he took everything away from them and put them in barracks. But, my father and his friends escaped during the night. From then on, they only traveled at night. They were very careful and very cautious, but they did make it home. I guess it took a long time from Germany to Budapest. He wasn't the only one. It just doesn't make sense to take Jews who just survived the horrors of the war and bring them to Russia to work. I don't know how to explain that.

Q: You mentioned that you spoke about Wallenberg at a synagogue. Tell me about that experience.
A: Nerve-wracking. I'm much older now, but at the time I was a nervous wreck—just standing in front of a group of people and having to make a speech. But, I felt that I wanted to do it and I wanted people to know about him. So I said, “I have to do it. I have to overcome my fear and my nervousness of public speaking. Stand up there and talk.” I did it. I remember standing up there, I remember talking, but when it was over I said, “Did I do it?” I was so nervous, but they said I did well.

Q: How did the people react to your story about Wallenberg?
A: They were happy. This was a synagogue that had a lot of American members, so they really didn't know too much about him. But, it started people questioning and looking and finding out. They appreciated hearing from somebody who experienced his goodness and his selflessness.

Q: Did you share this story with your children when they were growing up?
A: From that time on, we talked about it. It was in the early 1970s.

Interview with Tibor Gonda

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is Tibor Gonda.

Q: When and where you were born?
A: I was born on September 20, 1929, in Debrecen, the second largest city in Hungary. When I was around age 3, we moved to Budapest, and I stayed there until I left Hungary in 1949.

Q: When you were living in Budapest, were you part of a larger Jewish community?
A: We were a family of four—my sister, my parents, and I—and we lived in a very nice section of Budapest. It was not specifically a Jewish community, but we had many Jewish friends. My sister and I went to a Jewish High School, so my friends included many Jews. The neighborhood was very peaceful, and there were no serious problems until 1944.

Q: What was the name of the high school?
A: The Jewish Gymnasium. In Europe, gymnasium means high school. The Jewish High School was an excellent institution that was exclusive in terms of the teachers and professors. At that time, many of the Jewish University professors had already been laid off and could not find other jobs, so they were teaching at our High School, but they were all qualified to teach, and used to teach at a higher level.

Q: So you had both general studies and Jewish studies?
A: Absolutely. Every day at school we had one "religion" hour, which consisted of Jewish history, the Bible, the Torah, or Hebrew. By the time I graduated high school, I was able to read Israeli newspapers. It was very thorough.

Q: Before the war, what was your family's religious practice like?
A: We went to *shul* in our neighborhood; it was separated [by genders]. My mother would maintain a kosher home. *Shabbat* was always observed, and on Friday nights the candles were always lit.

Q: How did the war affect those practices? Were you able to keep any of your cultural and religious traditions during the war?
A: There were distinct phases of the war, as far as we were concerned. Relatively speaking, before the German occupation, which started March 19, 1944, life was more or less the same as it had been; the war did not have much of an impact. The major impact was primarily on the economy.

Certain practices were withheld from Jews, and we were often excluded from certain professions, such as teaching at universities. Jewish students were limited on where they could get higher educations. Other than that, there was little impact observing the Jewish traditions in daily lives. But everything changed after [March 19, 1944].

Q: Before March 19, you were under the Hungarian fascist regime?
A: Actually, the Hungarian fascist regime came later. At that time, it was more a cooperation with the Germans, not direct fascism. As a matter of fact, there were some attempts made by that government to make it easier and safer for the Jews.

Q: But they were still imposing economic restrictions?
A: There were some so-called "Jewish Laws" which started imitating what happened in Germany and Austria.

Q: Did the Germans force the Jews to abide by these laws?
A: The Jews were so intimidated, no force was necessary.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: Very early on. In kindergarten, I was told that I was a very bright kid, so the teachers convinced my parents they should get me into the first grade early. It was a problem, because according to the regulations, you had to be 6 years old before September 15th. Since I was born on September 20th, I missed that cut-off by five days, but they said they would still take me, get me some recommendations, and make an exception for me. They took me to the Department of Education, where they interviewed me, and they agreed I was qualified and ready for the first year. I went to a public school and completed the first year with the best grades.

Next year, I enrolled in the second grade, but the new principal found out that I was a Jew, and that I had gotten in earlier because I had a special permit. He said that it was not permitted, and he overruled the decision. I had to go back to the first grade. I was the only child I know of who had to go through the first grade twice.

Q: In other words, you had to repeat a grade because you were Jewish?
A: That is right. And that can have a major impact on a child of that age.

Q: Do you still remember how you felt about it?
A: Of course. I knew it had happened because I was a Jew. That was my early experience with anti-Semitism.

Q: What happened to your family during the war? Were you separated, or did you manage to stay together? Do you know what happened to your parents?
A: Mostly, my mother, my sister (who was one year older than I am) and I stayed together. My father was taken to the labor camp relatively early and was not with us for most of the time.

That was the situation until toward the end of May or the beginning of June, when they established "Jewish houses." They designated quite a large number of buildings in Budapest as Jewish houses, each marked by a huge Jewish Star, and every Jew who was living in a non-Jewish building had to move into one. They were very congested, as each family was crammed into one room. That was a big change in the family situation, because we had to live in an apartment with total strangers.

Q: So you had to move to this Jewish house and you lived there with other families?
A: Yes, it was a regular apartment with 10 to 12 people crammed into a space that was formerly occupied by four.

Q: What happened to your previous apartment?
A: It went to whoever wanted it. The Nazi Party got hold of everything. Usually when you had to move, you had no way of moving your furniture or the contents of your apartment. You moved with just a little bit of luggage.

Q: What happened after you moved? When did you first hear about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: So that was the situation we were in until the big break in the Hungarian government, when the Hungarian Nazi Party took over, which was on October 15, 1944. That is when the collaborating Hungarian government was chased out of office.

When the Hungarian fascist government took over, Jews had already been deported from all over the country except from Budapest. The Jews from the rest of the country were already in concentration camps. The previous government had moved very systematically, from town to town, from village to village, and the rest of the country was already what they called "Juden-free." Budapest represented a relatively large Jewish population, so it had presented some strategic difficulties. Plus, the collaborating

Hungarian government had many friends among the Hungarian Jews in Budapest, so the Jewish [deportation] was able to be delayed. But after October 15, that was over. This new Nazi government was determined to make their first action the riddance of the Jews in Budapest.

Three days after they took power, we were awakened in the morning and told to go down to the street in front of our building. They checked to make sure that every Jew had left the apartment and was in front of the building, and they took us for a long march. Jews from all over Budapest were taken on a long, long march to the other side of the city without being told what was happening; they only said that we would be taken for some labor.

It was late in the evening when we arrived on the other side of town, which was designated as the assembly point for Jews from all parts of the city. This assembly point was a famous brick factory. A brick factory is an open structure, as raw brick has to dry outside. It was a terrible place, not designed for any human occupation. As I said, it was an open structure, and it can be very cold at the end of October. It was late in the evening and dark; we were exhausted after the very long walk, and waited for them to tell us what to do.

I was only 15 years old, and one of the most dramatic things that I will never forget was when a lady had to go to the bathroom. Since the place had no facilities, if we wanted to go to the bathroom, we had to get out and go somewhere that had at least some semblance of privacy. But the place was very dark and tightly packed, so when this lady came back, she couldn't find her old spot and became mad and started screaming. Finally, a fascist took her away.

Our time in the brick factory lasted for a while. We spent a day or two there, in terrible conditions, but slowly, they emptied the factory out by starting the movement toward the west, without saying where they were taking us.

They separated the women and men. The issue was that people who had protection could stay because there was supposed to be a different arrangement for them. That is how I found out about Wallenberg. I knew about him already, because I had a Schutz-Pass, but I didn't know him in person. So around our third day at the brick factory, Wallenberg showed up. He had the responsibility of checking every single Schutz-Pass and determining which were valid, and which were forged.

Q: Wallenberg had to determine that?
A: Yes.

Q: And how did you get the Schutz-Pass?
A: We got it from the Zionist underground. I had a cousin who was very active in the Zionist underground. This had nothing to do with official Schultz-Passes.

Q: So yours was a forged one?
A: Yes, my cousin got it for us. They were being fabricated 24 hours a day. This was a major operation. As a matter of fact, there is a special exhibit at the UN with a replica of a very famous building in Budapest, which was originally established by the Swiss government.

Q: The Glass House?
A: Exactly. There's an exhibit with the Glass House at the UN until March. The Schulz-Passes were forged in the basement of this Glass House.

Q: What happened to those individuals with forged Schutz-Passes?
A: At the time, it was very difficult to make a distinction between German and Hungarian fascists, because they looked and acted the same. When the Hungarian fascists found out that so many passes

had been forged, they said they could not accept them, and Wallenberg had to come down. It was a situation similar to that with [Josef Rudolf] Mengele[29] in the concentration camp, when an entire row of people had to go in front of him, and [their fate depended upon] whether he raised or lowered his thumb. It was a huge line with thousands and thousands of people.

Q: And Wallenberg himself was standing there?
A: Yes, and everyone had to go in front of him and show him their Schutz-Passes. His objective was to validate as many Schutz-Passes as possible, but if he had claimed all of them to be correct and original, they would have not accepted any.

So at that critical moment, after we had been standing in line for possibly half a day, we got to the point where we reached Wallenberg and showed him our Schutz-Pass. He had very little time to spend on each case, having to process hundreds and hundreds of them. Obviously, we knew that ours was not right, but when we got to him, he looked at my mother, my sister and me. We must have looked terrible, because it was already our third day at the brick factory. He looked at the Schutz-Pass and obviously saw right away that it was forged, but he said, "This one is okay." At that moment, we were removed from the line, and went to the place where they collected everyone with Wallenberg-approved passes. There, we became human beings again. We were treated like human beings and were moved into a bus, which took us back to the city. By that time, Wallenberg had already organized safe houses in the city, and we got assigned to a room in one of these safe houses. We had nothing to move in with, so we just tried to occupy our room.

Unfortunately, for the rest of the people, many of whom were my friends, this was the beginning of the so-called "death march." Equipment was very scarce, because the German and Hungarian armies were preoccupied with moving as fast as possible, as the Russians were getting closer and closer. So there was no train or car available and the people had to walk, and they were treated very brutally. If for whatever reason they slowed down or could not keep up, they were shot. When night came, they had to just lie down wherever was possible, under a tree or on the side of the road.

But, thanks to Wallenberg, we were brought back to a relatively safe life. Obviously, the problem was not resolved altogether, because there were very strict curfew regulations. We had to wear the Jewish Stars and could only go out from three to five o'clock in the afternoon. The problem was—and this was true for the whole city of Budapest—that food was very scarce, because the Russians were enclosing the city. By the end of December, the ring was closed, and Budapest was encircled by the Russian army.

Q: Was this curfew mandatory for all people?
A: No, it was mandatory for all Jews, and only for Jews. There were no general laws, only Jewish regulations.

One very cold December afternoon, I walked down our street before the curfew began for the evening (we were always trying to search for some food, whatever we could find—potatoes, carrots, or fruit—and grab as much as we could). I saw a bakery that was still open. That was very unusual, because even if they had bread, it was always sold out early in the morning before we [Jews] could go out anyway. It looked like they had a second batch, and people were lining up. I got in line, but it was very long and moved very slowly.

The end of the curfew came and I was supposed to go back, but decided not to walk away, having waited for so long. I tried to cover the Yellow Star on my coat and waited until I could get my bread. Before I could even reach the store, they picked me out from the line, and without saying anything, took me to the bank of the Danube. At that time, this was the place where they took anyone they found; they were not

[29] Josef Rudolf Mengele (1911–1979) was a German SS officer and a physician in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. He was in charge of determining who would be killed and who would become a forced laborer, but is better known for the horrific human experiments he performed on camp inmates, including children. After the World War II, Mengele fled first to Argentina, where he met Adolf Eichmann, and later to Paraguay. He was never captured.

making any secret out of it. They always said that you would not have to worry about anything, because you would certainly get shot. It was winter already, and the Danube was flowing in ice; they said that they had to wait until it cleared some. There were about a hundred people there, waiting to be shot. Wallenberg showed up, and again he said that whoever lived in a safe house should come and see him. So I went, and it was a magical moment when our eyes met. He said that I would be protected….

Q: So Wallenberg saved you twice?
A: Yes, the first time was at the brick factory. I am not sure if that was a 100% chance of death, but he certainly saved me from suffering. It is highly probable that he did save my life then. But the second time, definitely this was the case.

If you go to Budapest now, you will see on the bank of the Danube a memorial with iron shoes.[30] Before they shot you, all they wanted you to take off were your shoes. To me, this is a very touching and solemn memorial. It has inscriptions in Hungarian, English, and Hebrew, and shows baby shoes, old shoes, brand new shoes, men's and ladies' shoes, all made out of iron and mounted on the bank of the Danube. Unfortunately, nobody knows how many people were killed that way, but there were many, many thousands. That was going on for quite a long time until finally, on January 18th, 1945, the Russians took over the city.

Q: Going back, how was daily life in the safe house? How many people were there?
A: The safe houses were apartment buildings in a nice part of the city, the Jewish part of the city. They were occupied by at least as many families as there were rooms. If it was a three-room apartment, then three families lived there. All we had was a regular mattress, no bed seat equipment.

The main concern of those safe houses regarded all the atrocities that could take place. Sometimes the Nazis came in and said, "Somebody shot from this building," which they had really made up, and they ordered everyone to come down so they could search for weapons. We were always in fear.

The second concern was getting food, because it was extremely difficult to obtain anything. That was true for everyone, but obviously, if you were free to move, you had much more opportunity to obtain something.

Q: Was Wallenberg able to bring in any necessities to you?
A: No. The only thing was the big sign on the building that said, "This building is under the protectorate of the Swedish Consulate." There was always someone assigned to stand in front of the building. This was also a problem, as the guards were complaining of danger—that someone might shoot, hit, or throw something at them. Not everyone respected these guards 100%, but it was good compared to the alternatives.

At the same time that we were at the safe house, they established the main ghetto in Budapest. When the new fascist government took over, they first decided to get rid of the Jews by taking them to labor camps. But, only certain age groups were included. The rest of the people had to move into the ghetto. That was the end of it for us, too. On January 10, 1945, which was about one week before Budapest was freed by the Russians, they ignored the safe house protection and took us into the ghetto.

Q: All the safe houses?
A: It was not scheduled for one [particular] day, but most of the safe houses were liquidated by January 18th.

[30] Mr. Gonda is referring to the *Shoes on the Danube Promenade***,** a memorial created by Gyula Pauer and Can Togay on the bank of the Danube River in honor of the Jews who died as victims of the Arrow Cross. The monument depicts the shoes left behind as the Jews fell into the river after having been shot during the Holocaust.

Q: What was it like in the ghetto?
A: The situation in the ghetto was indescribable. There was just no room available. We had to go in and find somewhere to live. We found this dark basement with a dirt floor. We had no other choice. Food was provided once a day by the Jewish community. The problem was that we could not take much advantage of the curfew-free hours because the Russians were constantly shooting cannons at the city, and we could not go out without putting our lives in danger.

Q: What did you do after getting out of the ghetto?
A: After January 18th, we tried to go back and re-occupy the apartment we had been removed from in October. We found some not–very–nice people there who did not seem to understand what the heck we wanted. We could not get in right away; we waited until someone opened the apartment and we could join them. A long time passed until we could really occupy the place. Obviously, anything of value was taken out.

Life, slowly but surely, got back to normal. I cannot say that it totally normalized, but the Jewish Gymnasium opened up again, and in 1948, I graduated. I faced the situation of what to do next, because I did not see myself spending my life in Hungary. There were two reasons for this: first, my past, with the memories of how I was treated; second, the future. It looked like the Iron Curtain[31] was about to go down and would stay down forever. I was about to start University in the fall, but together with a group of friends, we decided to get out. This was the time when Israel was created, so there was quite a strong Zionist movement called Briha, which was really trying to help us get out. So we decided to sneak out of Hungary.

Q: How old were you at the time?
A: Eighteen. I just finished high school.

Q: And how did you contact the Briha movement?
A: As I mentioned, I had a family member who was a Zionist. Also, after the war, the Zionist movement was freed, so we could openly join it.

Q: For how long was it free?
A: Probably for about two to three years. It was a very short period of time when Hungary had the so-called “democratic” government, before the one-party system was declared in 1949. By that time, the Hungarian-Austrian border was already mined, so we could not escape. However, the Briha was not in Budapest. We got the information that they were going to help us get from Bratislava to Vienna. So we had to reach Bratislava first. We took a long trip from Budapest moving east through Czechoslovakia.

Q: Were you traveling with all of your family?
A: No, just friends.

Q: What about your mother, father, and sister? Where were they at this point?
A: I lost my father. My mother could not make it. We believed very strongly that once my sister and I managed to get out, the senior members of the family would get permission to leave.

Q: Did your sister go with you?
A: My sister went with a separate group. She left later, and luckily managed to get out. She went directly to Israel. As for me, I had reached Vienna with the help of Briha two weeks later. Most of it was walking at night. We had to give money to the people at the border to guide us across.

[31] The Iron Curtain was a political, military and ideological barrier erected by the Soviet Union after World War II to divide communist and noncommunist countries in Europe. The term was popularized by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in a speech delivered in 1946 when he stated, “An Iron curtain has descended across the continent.”

Q: Were the border guides bribed?
A: I don't know how they managed, but they knew what the best time was for someone to sneak through. So, in this way we managed to get to Bratislava, and then to Vienna. Once we got to Vienna, there was a relatively large number of University students there; we thought that we might get a chance to continue our studies in Austria if we could get some help from the Joint Distribution Committee,[32] so we approached them and applied, and they were very willing to help us. They said that they would give us a stipend.
They operated through one of the hospitals. It worked both ways. People who were returning to Hungary got certain accommodations, as did people like us who were going the other way.

Q: What year was that?
A: 1949. We started studying, but not in Vienna. There were two reasons for this. Number one was that we were political refugees and, at that time, Vienna was not a very comfortable designation because it was encircled by the Russians. The city itself had four zones. But, Vienna is also part of eastern Austria, which was under Russian occupation. It was very uncomfortable to know that if you stepped out of the western zone, you might find yourself in Siberia.

Q: So you were afraid that the Russians might send you back?
A: Absolutely. It was even more probable that they would send us to Siberia. So this was the first reason for being afraid, the political reason. The second was the financial reason. We found out that in Graz, which was the second largest city in Austria, we could find much cheaper accommodations. (The stipend was barely enough to survive, so it did not allow us any luxuries.) So we went to Graz, and that is where I finally got my diploma.

Q: What did you study?
A: Electronic engineering. Graz was a very pleasant place. It was the capital of the British Zone and had a very large student population. It was a center of culture, and nature is very generous in that section of Austria.

In 1957, I arrived here [in the U.S.]. Actually, I got my visa earlier, but I was able to postpone it because I wanted to get my diploma first. It was through a special Eisenhower program that gave 5,000 visas to refugees from Eastern Europe who left their homes after 1948.

I continued my studies, while working at IBM as a research staff member, and received the Ph.D. in Computer Science.

Q: Where was your mother at this point?
A: This is the sad part of the story, because my poor mother was alone in Hungary. She had to apply for a passport every six months. She stayed in Budapest until the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Then she joined my sister in Israel.

Q: So now your family lives in Israel and here?
A: No, my sister and [my mother] came and lived here. Unfortunately, my mother passed away quite a few years ago.

Q: How was the relationship between the Jewish refugees and the Austrian population? How were you received?
A: I came to the conclusion that after the Hungarians, the Austrians were the biggest Nazis. I had only

[32] The Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) used a variety of international connections to channel aid to Jews living in desperate conditions behind what were now enemy lines. The organization allocated funds to assist refugees in temporary European havens and tried to help them find permanent refuge in the United States, Palestine, and Latin America. From the outbreak of World War II through 1944, JDC enabled over 81,000 Jews to emigrate. After the Holocaust, the JDC ailing Jewish communities and Jewish refugee camps by distributing food, medicine, clothing, tools, equipment such as typewriters, and educational, cultural, and religious materials. The organization also created an emigration program for survivors.

one good friend, who was Austrian-Christian. He was my colleague at the University. He felt very much like I did. His father was a Social Democratic Party member, who had been taken away and executed.

Q: Have you tried to find out what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: Absolutely, all the time. I am familiar with every piece of information that came through.

Q: Did you know back then that he was captured by the Russians?
A: Absolutely. The ghetto was freed on January 18th, and the Russians invited him for a meeting. That was the last he was heard of. The problem was that the Russians were convinced that he was an American spy. Russian mentality was incapable of accepting that this person did all his work for humanitarian purposes. He got money from the United States of America, but it was for carrying out his actions, not for spying. It is very shameful because it was never cleared what exactly happened. We had one member of Hungarian Community in U.S., who was actually my contemporary, Mr. [Tom] Lantos. He and I are the same age, and he went through the same things that I did in Budapest. His wife was saved by Wallenberg. Lantos tried to determine the story of [what happened to] Wallenberg. He [sanctioned a bill that] declared Wallenberg a U.S. citizen so that the U.S. could apply more pressure on the Russians and get information.

Q: We are also trying to gather 100,000 signatures for 100,000 lives saved by Wallenberg and to present them to Mr. Putin, to try to find out what actually happened. The Russians issued a statement saying that he died in prison.
A: The Russians do not feel that they are obliged to give any explanation. They did what they felt like doing, what they wanted to do. After the 1990s, when Russian immigration opened to Israel, there were some immigrants who claimed they were in the same Siberian prison camps, and that Wallenberg was there, but that was never confirmed.

Q: I know that it is very painful to remember this.
A: You never forget it, but bringing it up makes you relive it once again.

Q: One of the things I read about survivors is that they actually try not to think about it, or to deny all memory of it.
A: Yes, but everything should be done to remember what Wallenberg did. His story is so unique that it has to be done. Even if I can contribute a single brick to this memorial, it should be done.

Q: Were there years after the war that you didn't want to think about it or talk about it?
A: My daughter was already born in the States. When she was growing up, at about the age of 10, she got very interested in the subject. My wife and I found out that she went to the library and was reading books about the Holocaust. It was impossible for me to talk about this and discuss it.

Q: Did she ask you questions?
A: Very much so. I had the innermost conviction that I would never set foot in Hungary again. During my 30-year high school class reunion in 1979, my classmates decided that they wanted to organize a reunion in Budapest. At that time, there were four of us here in the States. I was the only one determined not to participate. Finally, they convinced me to come with them. (My little daughter was very upset by this. Because of a story she built up on her own, she thought that she would never see me again.) I told my classmates I would only participate during the banquet. As soon as the banquet was over, I planned to get out of Hungary. The situation didn't work out the way I thought, because there is a certain magic in finding yourself back in your classroom 30 years later. You feel like you are 17 or 18 again. So for the time being, you forget about what happened and feel like a very young high school student.

Q: Is your wife also from Hungary?
A: Yes, she is.

Q: Did you meet here?
A: Here, in the United States.

Q: Have you gone back since 1979?
A: I did. Once I "survived" the first time and found out that Hungary had changed so much, I was there for all subsequent reunions. Now, we are working on the 60-year reunion. I will have to organize it, which is sad. The first reunion was so depressing because we had to record all the classmates who did not survive the Holocaust, who were taken away. Now we have a different problem. Due to disease, illness, and old age, many cannot be with us anymore.

Q: Is there anything you miss about Hungary: the language, the literature?
A: Absolutely not. I lived in Austria for about seven and a half years, and I actually appreciate German literature more than the Hungarian literature.

Q: Thank you so much for coming.
A: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to add something to the memory of Wallenberg.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?
A: More than 60 years passed since the Holocaust, but the memories of those dramatic times did not fade, and the inflicted wounds did not heal. Six million Jews, among them many members of my family and friends, did not survive. However we, survivors, moved on, and I—a once-persecuted, hunted teenager—became a proud grandfather.

I have a beautiful granddaughter and a wonderful grandson. He is a bright, curious, inquisitive first grader. His first name is Nathaniel, a Hebrew name that means "Present from God." His middle name is Raoul. In his room, a framed picture of Raoul Wallenberg hangs on the wall.

The memory of the Great Humanitarian should be kept alive.

I appreciate the opportunity to say in a small way, however belatedly, "Thank you, Raoul Wallenberg, for saving my life twice."

Interview with Vera Goodkin

Q: What is your birth name?
A: Vera Herman.

Q: What is your married name?
A: Vera Goodkin.

Q: What is your birth date?
A: June 13, 1930.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: I was born in Uzhgorod, Czechoslovakia.[33]

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in many places. My first nine years—or almost nine years—were spent in my hometown. The next four years were spent in hiding, always just a couple of steps ahead of our pursuers. Then we were imprisoned. I was in a holding prison—Kistarcsa Prison—in Budapest, where you grow up very quickly.

I was rescued by [Raoul] Wallenberg's people, and I spent time in a children's home, in an orphanage, and was ultimately reunited with my parents, courtesy of Wallenberg, in the cellar of one of the protected houses. That was during the last 10 weeks of the siege of Budapest, whereupon we were liberated by the Russians and started walking back to the life we had left behind.

All of this took a little over 14 years.

Q: Who did you live with?
A: I was an only child, a spoiled-rotten only child, and I lived with my parents.

Q: What activities were you involved in before the war?
A: Before the war, I was just a little girl. Obviously, I played with my friends; I skated; I was my parents' ball boy in their tennis games; and I skied. We spent a lot of time in the mountains.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: No, not really. The Czech-Jewish community was very, very assimilated and emancipated. It was a very non-Jewish Jewish community and a very small one, while we did have a synagogue and we did have a rabbi. When my grandfather—my mother's father—came to visit my parents on *Yom Kippur*, he went to the synagogue and was absolutely horrified because he could smell food down the hallway from the rabbi's residence. He said to my mother, "This is not a synagogue." So thereafter, we always went to her hometown and spent the high holy days there.

Now, my mother had a kosher home—mostly to please her parents. Her kosher meat was flown in on ice from Prague.

Q: Was your family religious before the war?
A: Well, both of my parents came from Orthodox families, but not Orthodox in the inflexible way we know today. My mother's five brothers went to the university and they were not strict observers of the Sabbath.

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[33] The city of Uzhgorod is currently part of Ukraine, located at the border with Slovakia and near the border with Hungary. On September 10, 1919, the region was officially annexed to the Republic of Czechoslovakia. After the Munich Treaty, the city became part of the Slovak half of the new Czecho-Slovak state. After the Vienna Award in 1938, Uzhhorod was transferred to Hungary. On October 27, 1944, the city was captured by the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front of the Red Army and, since 1991, has become one of 23 regional capitals within Ukraine.

My grandfather said he didn't care if they beat him in Gehenna;[34] his sons were going to have a better life than he did.

Q: How did you learn your Jewish religion and customs?
A: My parents hired a *kibbutznik* to come to our home. He was [a member] in an experimental *kibbutz*, not far from my hometown, where idealistic youngsters who were going to a *kibbutz* in Israel trained to work. It was an experimental farm, and one of the faculty [members] was Israeli. He taught me Hebrew and customs.

Q: What school did you attend?
A: I attended a public school until the third grade when the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, and things started going downhill.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: All of a sudden. Maybe two weeks after the Ides[35] of March. After March 15, 1939, when we were occupied, I walked into my classroom and one of my classmates called me a dirty Jew. And as if that wasn't enough, she said, "And she's Hungarian, too," because there was no love lost between the Slavs and the Hungarians. They knew my mother was of Hungarian descent because she had a Hungarian accent. My father was Hungarian too, but his Czech was so perfect that nobody could tell. And so, I was not only a Jew, but I was a Hungarian.

You can see [their] upbringing during that incident. Another one of my classmates got up and said, "That's not right. That's not nice. Everybody is the same. My parents tell me that."

Q: How did you first hear about what was happening to the Jewish people?
A: Well, we heard about it for years, actually, because from the time I was 3 years old, there were visitors in the home whom I didn't know. When, at age 5, I was finally able to ask an intelligent question, I was told that these were German Jews who were escaping anti-Semitism and persecution, and that homes were arranged for them to use as shelters on their way to England, to the United States, to Australia, to Canada, and so on.

So we heard what was happening to the Jews from these people, but we didn't believe it any more than the Hungarian Jews believed what we told them when we went there. This disbelief cost a lot of lives.

It was my mother's mother who, when she saw all these German Jews in our home, said, "Don't you think they know they had writing on the wall? Don't you think you and your little family ought to find a safer haven?" My mother was out of her mind with indignation, and she said, "How can you say a thing like that? This is a perfect democracy. It'll never happen here."

My mother never forgave herself for that because she felt that, had she taken her mother's advice and had we come to the United States, maybe we would have been able to save our family, or some of them. You know, survivor's guilt is a real thing, and when you add to that something you feel is really worth being guilty about, it's hard.

Q: What were your thoughts, feelings and reactions to what was happening?
A: Well, that depends on when it occurred. The first time I was called a dirty Jew, I was totally confused. I didn't know where that came from. Little by little, as we lost our civil rights, as we were subjected to the Nuremberg Laws, as we lost the protection of the law and the ability to make a living or to get an education, we began a gradual process of dehumanization. Your self-image plummets. When people ask me these days why the Jews went like lambs to the slaughter, the answer is that we didn't go to death camps from our affluent homes with our personalities intact. It was preceded by two years or more of dehumanization, and by that time there was very little left in us. Not that it would have been practical to

[34] Gehenna is a term derived from a place outside ancient Jerusalem known in the Hebrew Bible as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. In both Rabbinical Jewish and Early Christian writing, Gehenna was a destination of the wicked.
[35] Probably referring to the day of the full moon, ides is a term used for the 15th day of the months of March, May, July, and October; and the 13th day of the other months in the Roman calendar.

fight back. We didn't have weapons. We were not fighting people. We were, indeed, the "People of the Book." It was a horribly dehumanizing process.

A number of years ago, I taught an extension class that was contracted with our college for prisoners in the Prison Education Network, and we were talking about prison mentality. Actually, we were reading [Albert] Camus' *The Stranger* and I told this story to my students to illustrate what happens to you when these unspeakable things happen.

When I was 5 years old, I got a Shirley Temple doll. Later, in our miserable state, I would fantasize about my Shirley Temple doll. Then, the memory got fainter and fainter and fainter, and I convinced myself that I had just been dreaming, that the doll didn't exist. I didn't have a Shirley Temple doll.

My parents were able to ship some of their furnishings and belongings to the United States in early 1939. These belongings were put in storage, and when we arrived on these shores in 1947, we claimed them. When we were unpacking, I saw a large shoebox. I lifted the lid and a layer of cotton, and there was the Shirley Temple doll.

Q: Sometimes the perpetrators used the fact that victims questioned themselves to their advantage in order to re-victimize?
A: Sure, sure.

Q: You make a strong point in reminding people about the dehumanizing process. It is important to note that the Jewish people didn't just "let this happen." This was a process that was very, very shrewdly planned.
A: Absolutely, starting with the Evian Conference and the Nuremberg Laws.

Q: I think the fact that there was a planned dehumanizing process is something people are not reminded of enough. The victims were hungry and thirsty. They were not protected from the heat or the cold, and they did not have fresh air to breath. Individuals do not think straight under such conditions.
A: It isn't clear to most people because with a sane mentality, you really can't imagine it.

Q: What changes did you experience during the war?
A: The most dramatic change was fear for your life. You wake up hungry, you go to sleep hungry, and you don't know whether you're going to survive the day. That's really a major change. It informs all of your thoughts and all of your actions. And, yet, there was hope because, without hope, none of the survivors would have made it.

Q: Do you know where that hope came from?
A: I guess it's an instinct of self-preservation.

Now, those of us who were fortunate enough to meet the rescuers had logical reason for hope beyond a certain point. Up to that point, it was kind of foolhardy, but it was there.

Q: How did your family manage to continue their religious traditions during the war?
A: At most points, we did not have many ration cards, and we had even fewer ration cards before and during the time we decided to hide out, so we never had meat. I remember one instance, just before the high holy days, my mother moved heaven and earth to get us a goose. And she got a live goose. It was my job to carry that live goose to the slaughter (of course, kosher slaughter was forbidden; it was a criminal act). So, they gave this 10-year-old child a goose in a bag, and all I could do—boy, I was religious—was pray the entire way that this goose would make no sounds or noises, or I was done for.

Why, I think in retrospect, take chances like that? But, it was tradition and, of course I got to the *shochet*[36] and the goose was slaughtered. On the way back, I didn't have to worry about its noise.

So we tried to practice as much as we could, as much as circumstances permitted.

Q: Tell me how you and your parents made it to Budapest and how Raoul Wallenberg saved you.
A: When we were in our last hiding place in Slovakia, someone betrayed us and we were visited by a Jewish property confiscation team—a real joke because we had nothing left to confiscate. Along with the team came a member of the SS, a member of the local secret police, a local collaborator (probably the person who betrayed us) and a poor benighted Jewish attorney, who they dragged along to draw up confiscation papers. They took an extra pair of shoes—that's about all we had.

The event was a good warning to us that we would be in the next transport to Auschwitz. I think that, by that time, my father had had it up to here with the running and the forced labor, and he was, perhaps, just content to be a sitting duck. But mothers in the Holocaust were not inclined to be sitting ducks.

My mother had heard about this "underground railroad," so to speak, of farmers whose properties spanned the Hungarian and the Slovak border and who would guide people across that border to get them to Budapest (the only remaining Jewish community in central Europe that had yet to be deported). So my mother literally went from house to house, and after she had a lot of doors slammed in her face, ultimately made contact with this underground organization. We were told to take off our Yellow Stars, make sure that we removed all the telltale threads, walk to the local railroad station, and take a local train. Then, we were to get off at a certain village and when we got on the platform, look to the left. At the end of the platform, there would be a young man. We were to follow him, at a reasonable distance, to his farm.

Well, we did all this. We were very lucky. We were not asked to identify ourselves and we made it to the village, and we followed this man to his very poor little farm. It was just one large room for three generations of family and some farm animals.

The man propped a ladder against his attic window and as we were climbing, he said, "Please be very careful. Don't move around too much because my mother-in-law is here, and she's a Nazi sympathizer. If she finds out about you, you won't be here very long." So, we did that.

We climbed up to the attic and as we were trying to be very quiet, we realized we were not alone. The rat population of the farm was up there. It's sort of seared in my consciousness. I was afraid because my father was bald and I worried that the rats would get at his scalp, so I put my scarf around his head.

We were there for 24 hours, at which time, the farmer again propped the ladder against the window and we descended. We had heard the rain all day—we were right underneath the roof—but we didn't know just how torrential it had been and how it had affected the soil. First of all, by the time we got to the bottom of the ladder, we were soaked to the skin. Then we started walking in that black mud. We sank into the mud, to mid-calf, and we, literally, had to lift each foot out to take the next step. I was just so exhausted that I wanted to sit down in the mud and lean against one of the trees and take a nap. I said that to my mother, but she wasn't impressed.

We weren't watching anything, but during that procedure, the young man who was guiding us saw a flicker of light in a place where none had been before. To him, that meant there may be a new guard or that the old guard had tried another route that day. The man didn't want to be left there with us, so he turned on his heels and started walking back, leaving us in the pitch-dark forest in the pouring rain.

The next thing I knew, my mother started running, following this man, screaming in the forest. She didn't care if anybody heard her because, by this time, it didn't matter. She said, "You have children of your

[36] The Hebrew word for ritual slaughterer, a religious Jew who is duly licensed and trained to kill mammals and birds according to Jewish dietary laws.

own. Are you going to let this one die?" And because he was basically a nice man, he slowed down and let us follow him back to his cottage where we stayed for another two days, until we made the crossing.

We made the crossing into Hungary and did the reverse of what we had done before. We got on the local train and took it into Budapest. This maneuver saved us for another two months. However, Adolf Eichmann sent the native Jews of Budapest—some of whose families had been there a thousand years—into ghettos, and he put people like us—known as "alien" Jews—into holding prisons.

The first holding prison we were in was a medieval fortress in the city of Budapest. That is where we were separated from my father. Then, a month later, my mother and I were transported 30 kilometers closer to the Austrian border to a place called Kistarcsa. That is where I was taken out of prison by [Sandor Alexander Kasza]-Kasser and his two colleagues.

Q: So, you and your parents were separated?
A: Oh, yes! Yes, we were. First, we were separated from and lost contact with my father when we were arrested in Budapest. Then, in the next holding prison, in Kistarcsa, when I was taken out by Wallenberg's people, all three of us were separated.

Q: Can you tell me the role the Red Cross played in helping you?
A: Well, when Dr. Kasser and two of his colleagues arrived, they introduced themselves as a Swedish Red Cross inspection team. They persuaded the commander of Kistarcsa that the prison was not a nice place to keep children, and elicited an agreement to let the children below the age of 14 leave the prison in their custody. When they got me outside of the prison they said, "Well, this was not really a Red Cross project. This was a project of Raoul Wallenberg (which was the first time I had heard the name), a Swedish diplomat who wants to save as many innocent victims as possible, and above all, children," because children are the hope of the world.

The second home I was in was also a Swedish Red Cross home. They ran the children's homes.

Q: Do you know how the Red Cross was organized?
A: All I know is that the president of the Swedish Red Cross in Hungary was Dr. Alexander Kasza-Kasser.

Q: Can you tell me about Dr. Kasser?
A: Dr. Kasser was a member of an Austro-Hungarian aristocratic family, a very bright man who didn't just sit back and lean on the wealth and prestige of his family. He was a very successful and wealthy exporter-importer and he, with his volunteer function in the Swedish Red Cross, became friendly with Wallenberg. His wife, Elizabeth, became Wallenberg's interpreter.

After Dr. Kasser got me out of prison, I didn't even remember his face. In 1985, NBC presented a two-day miniseries on the life of Raoul Wallenberg (Richard Chamberlain played Wallenberg). The miniseries itself ran on a Monday and Tuesday night, and the Saturday afternoon prior, NBC aired a historical retrospection, for which I had done the narration. As a result, I was invited to a gala at NBC for the launching of this miniseries. At the gala, someone brought over a short, elderly gentleman and said to me, "Oh, this is Alexander Kasza-Kasser." Well, it didn't mean anything to me. We shook hands and this person said, "You know, Dr. Kasser was president of the Swedish Red Cross in 1944 and 1945 in Budapest." I looked at him, and said, "Dr. Kasser, did you ever go to prisons?" He said yes, and I asked, "Did you ever take children out of prisons?" He said, "Yes," and was getting more and more suspicious. I said, "Well, take a good look at me; I'm one of your children." He responded, "No, can't be. My children were killed."

That's when I knew I was really looking at the right man because in the first children's home I was in, I became very ill. I got scarlet fever and was taken to a hospital for contagious diseases. While I was quarantined—it was a six-week quarantine—the Hungarian Arrow Cross, a bunch of bums, got drunk one Sunday afternoon and, with no respect for territorial integrity, broke into the home and killed the children he had left behind. That's what Dr. Kasser knew, and that's why he thought I must be a fake—because all

his children were killed. He took me over to Elizabeth and I met with his daughter; I'm still in touch with her.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the Arrow Cross?
A: The Arrow Cross was the Hungarian equivalent of the SS, the difference being that they were strictly hooligans. They did not even have military discipline. They were truly the soft underbelly of society. Of course, they didn't want to copy the swastika, so they had a logo of their own. It was a horizontal arrow and a vertical arrow, and it formed a cross; hence, the Arrow Cross.

Q: When Dr. Kasser rescued you from Kistarcsa Prison, you left your mother behind. What happened to her while you were in the children's home?
A: My mother then found herself in a cattle wagon en route to Auschwitz. Her train was chugging along and all of a sudden, the people who still had the strength to try to look out the iron-grated openings saw that the train was going in another direction, and were approaching a walled-in facility. The gates to the facility opened, and the train pulled into the enclosure.

Admiral [Miklós] Horthy was the Regent of Hungary, and he was trying to do the Nazi's bidding, so they left him alone. One of his sons married a Jewish girl and he couldn't keep the Hungarian authorities from putting her in prison, but he made them promise that she would never go to a death camp.

My mother's train entered the facility because the Horthys found out that somebody, either accidentally or on purpose, had stuck the young Horthy wife in this transport, and they ordered the train to stop on Hungarian soil. They wanted this young lady, this needle in the haystack, found in a group of wagons that had no passenger lists. For safety's sake, they stopped the train in a prison enclosure so they could unlock all the wagons and disgorge the entire human cargo.

When my mother jumped off the train and got used to the light, she saw a man across the yard who looked very much like her husband. In fact, that was who it was. My father had been transported there and served as prisoner physician. He saw this chaos, so he passed by to see what was going on. When he saw her, he disappeared and returned with a little vial of liquid. He brushed by her and, as he did so, he put the vial in her hand and whispered, "Take this." What he wanted, obviously, was for her to pass out so he could put her on a stretcher and take her to the makeshift infirmary, out of harm's way. His plan worked, but it almost didn't. One of the guards ran after the stretcher yelling, "I have to deliver 2,000 bodies, and I don't care whether they're dead or alive." Just then, the guard got a telephone call from headquarters, who said, "Don't bother bringing them anymore. Just take them outside of the prison and machine-gun them."

There were only four survivors from that transport of 2,000: the young Horthy lady, whom they did find; my mother; and two resourceful souls who must have hidden somewhere. These four remained in this facility, in this last holding prison on Hungarian soil. My mother made uniforms for the SS in the tailor shop, and she and my father did not see each other again for three months.

Three months after my mother arrived, the police in the woods surrounding the prison sabotaged some of the gates, and some prisoners—quite a few prisoners—tried to escape. Most were recaptured, but my parents were lucky because they ran into each other and since the Russians were advancing, the countryside was pretty well burned and bombed out, so a lot of the farmhouses were abandoned. They walked for three weeks, hiding out and getting food in these farmhouses as best they could, and when they got to Budapest, they heard about Wallenberg.

Q: How did Wallenberg save your parents?
A: The rumor mill had Wallenberg's name, and he became so well known that his name preceded him. When my parents escaped from the last holding prison on Hungarian soil and walked back to Budapest, my father said, "We're going to get recaptured anyway, so I'll take a chance, and I'll try to get to the Swedish embassy and see if I can meet Raoul Wallenberg, this miraculous Swede." As it happened, he was lucky. Wallenberg was at the embassy when my father reached him and within five minutes, my

father had a Schutz-Pass for himself and his wife, and permission to go into one of the protected houses. Then Wallenberg smiled, and he said, “Do you know we still have your little girl?”

Q: How old were you when you met Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I was 13.

Q: Do you know how old he was at the time?
A: Well, I didn’t know then. I know now. He was born in 1912, and I met him in 1944.

Q: How would you describe him?
A: He was very handsome. He was slender and he had a uniquely intense face, and yet, he had such a wonderful sense of humor. He used to come to the homes and bring food at night, and he would joke and play with the children.

He was a member of a very, very wealthy banking and diplomatic family. There were actually two sides to the Wallenberg family; one side was not as humanitarian as the other, but Raoul had a remarkable and unique history. He was unique.

First of all, his young father died before he was born. Raoul was the only son of an only son, and he was brought up by his grandfather Wallenberg. It was this very, very wise man who had an influence on the boy. He wanted to make Raoul a citizen of the world. From the time Wallenberg was 8 or 9, he and his grandfather exchanged ideas on directed readings, geography, history, and so on. Then, of course, he was sent to the University of Michigan.

When I met his sister, Nina Lagergren, many years later, she approached me and I said to myself, “I wonder what she’s thinking. I wonder whether she’s thinking, ‘If it weren’t for people like her, my brother would have a wonderful life in Sweden.’” As she came up to me, she put her hand on my shoulder and said, “May I touch you? When I touch the people he rescued, I feel his presence.” Then she said something I have never forgotten: “His American education taught him the art of the possible.” In other words, she attributed his ability to think outside the box to the fact that he didn’t go to a rigid European university, but that he came [to the United States], where he met people from all walks of life, which gave him the one extra push toward being his brothers’ keeper.

Q: Raoul Wallenberg was given the status of legation secretary, and he arrived in Budapest in July 1944. Do you recall hearing about the existence of the legation and what it did?
A: Well, the legation usually takes care of the business and trade needs between nations—the host nation and the diplomats—but those were unusual times, and the legation had various other functions. I don’t think I thought about its function during the war. I did know that one of its functions was to save Jews.

Q: What was the Schutz-Pass?
A: Schutz-Pass means “protective pass.” Some of the Wallenberg survivors I know are very intent on making sure that the documents Wallenberg gave out are not viewed as passports. They did not entitle you to cross a border. Instead, they were a takeoff on the diplomatic immunity passes that embassy and legation employees carried with them in host countries to indicate that they were not subject to the host country’s laws. When Wallenberg arrived at the legation, though, he looked at those little IDs and he figured they weren’t going to impress anyone, so he redesigned the diplomatic immunity pass. It was a document, 8 ½ x 11 inches, on parchment, in the Swedish royal colors, with lots of stamps and seals to impress the SS and perhaps, hopefully intimidate the Arrow Cross. That was what the diplomatic immunity pass did, and it became what is called the “protective pass.” *Schutzen* in German means “to protect,” so a Schutz-Pass is “a pass that protects.”

Q: Do you know how the Schutz-passes were created and distributed?
A: They were manufactured, I guess, in conjunction with the underground resisters. They were supposed to be limited in number, and the resisters started manufacturing their own. The people around Wallenberg were very concerned and upset, and they wanted to stop this; but, Wallenberg said, “More power to them.”

They were distributed by the 500 or 600 young, Jewish volunteers who Wallenberg had recruited. He had his little side joke as well: He took some of the young men who looked remarkably Aryan, and dressed them in SS uniforms. He let them loose around the streets and they would, occasionally, commandeer groups of Jews who were being taken away by the real SS. They'd pull rank on the real SS.

Q: How did Raoul Wallenberg save those on the cattle cars who did not have Schutz-passes?
A: What he gave those he rescued were the Schutz-Passes. What he asked from them were papers, anything they could hand him that he could pass off as "proof" that he had given them a Schutz-Pass. So, when he called all the fictitious names and people started playing his game, he would say, "Well, you must have a Schutz-Pass that I gave you when you came to the legation." Those who caught on to the charade would hand him any scrap of paper or ID they had. He then passed off these papers as proof of his having given them a Schutz-Pass. And, of course, he would say, "I realize that most of you didn't bring your Schutz-Passes (on the way to oblivion), so stop by the legation and I'll give you another copy."

Q: Do you know how these Jewish people were able to use these documents once they were rescued from the cattle cars and returned to Budapest?
A: Well, they could use them only if they also stayed in one of the protected houses. Otherwise, they weren't worth the parchment they were written on.

Q: What were the protected or safe houses?
A: They were houses either offered to or solicited by Wallenberg. They were offered, very often, because the people or corporations who owned them were very much afraid of having them confiscated by the Nazis and maybe, they thought, they could even keep them away from the Russians (they were not right about that). Anyway, they tried to protect their property and Wallenberg took advantage of this, and he used the funds given to him by the Swedish King and by the United States War Refugee Board. In the end, there were about 33 high-rise apartment houses that flew the Swedish flag.

Q: Did Wallenberg obtain and organize the safe houses himself?
A: He had a staff, mostly made up of volunteers—young people between the ages of 18 and 25—who were still in Budapest and who thought this was a grand adventure. They adored Wallenberg and would follow him to hell.

Q: What did people say about Wallenberg at the time? What were the stories that came back to the safe houses about Wallenberg?
A: Well, the stories most people know are his forays to the railway stations and his "readings" of hundreds of names off completely blank rosters. The point of doing that was to get the victims to catch on to his game. They would jump out of the wagons and get into trucks so he could take them back to Budapest.

People also know about all the times Wallenberg and his volunteers were on the shores of the Danube, jumping in every time the Nazis decided to play "turkey shoot," where they tied three Jews together and put a bullet in the middle one. With all of these stories, he became legendary.

Q: Can you tell me more about what happened at the Danube?
A: Yes. Because of the bombings, there was a blackout in the city and no public lights were on at night. Wallenberg found out when these "turkey shoots" were to take place and in the shadows, he would station a couple of ambulances and a number of swimmers. Every time a shot rang out and they heard a plop into the icy water, they'd jump in and pull out the victims. The victims were dragged over to the ambulances, wrapped in blankets and given hot liquids. On a good night, Wallenberg could save 20, 25 people.[37]

Q: How did Wallenberg obtain food, clothing and other necessities for those he rescued?
A: I think he used some of the funds from the Swedish King and the United States War Refugee Board, but I don't really know the details.

[37] For a detailed account of Wallenberg's rescue operations at the Danube, read Agnes Adachi's interview on page…..

Q: On the outskirts of Budapest, there was a death camp in a mason factory where thousands of people were held. Do you know how Wallenberg learned about it and what he did to help the people there?
A: How he learned about it I don't know, but he had a tremendous network of intelligence who gave him information he needed.

The mason factory was used after the trainings stopped working. They had forced marches. My father was in one of the forced marches.

My friend, who became a librarian at New York University, told me her story about the mason, or brick, factory. She said she, her aunt, and her mother were caught in Budapest and they were put in this brick factory in preparation for forced march, where they would walk on foot toward the border. The people were herded in at night and, since it was dark, some of them fell into the brick pits. They, of course, didn't have to worry about going on in the morning. This factory simply served as a gathering place for the night. During the march, those who fell by the wayside fell by the wayside, and those who couldn't go fast enough were shot and left behind.

But, early in the morning, my friend, her mother, and aunt saw this handsome young man in a long, leather coat, bustling among them, and he kept saying, "Don't worry. Don't worry. I'll come back for you." They thought they must be imagining things, but when he did come back, she said 500 people—who had not uttered a word all night long—said as one, "*Shema Yisrael*" (Hear, Oh Israel…). They said it, she said, not because he saved their lives, but because there was somebody who found them worthy of saving.

Q: Were all of the people rescued by Raoul Wallenberg and those who worked with him Jewish, or were there others among them like gypsies or resisters?
A: Resisters, yes. I have not heard of any gypsies. To the best of my knowledge, he just wasn't in touch with any gypsy groups.

It is an interesting question because I had a black student ask me, "If Wallenberg had seen black people in the position that you were in, do you think he would have saved them?" And I said, "Absolutely."

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg were sitting with us, what would you say to him?
A: I would ask him to look out in the yard where my granddaughter is playing. Look at my granddaughter. He saved three generations by now. The 100,000 he saved in 1945 can easily be half a million today.

Q: What do you think Wallenberg would say to the world today?
A: I think he would be sad. I think he would see that the world hasn't learned anything. We have not learned. I tell young people that the Holocaust—the experience of the Holocaust—is not just 60–plus–year–old history; it's all around us. The perpetrators are different and the victims are different, but ethnic cleansing is alive and well. That would be a very sad commentary for him, as it is for so many of us.

Q: What happened to you and your family after the war?
A: After the war, the Russians liberated us. It was a battle siege in Budapest; it was street by street, house by house; almost floor by floor. When our house was liberated, it was January 16, 1945. Within 24 hours, in a hail of bullets and in a terrible snowstorm, we started walking again. There was no public transportation anywhere, so we walked toward the Czech border. I was very, very weak, so my parents left me with an uncle and they went back to Czechoslovakia.

Then, of course, we went back to my hometown, and my father established himself. For two years, I thought I had died and gone to heaven because I was back in school, my father had a wonderful practice, and the Czechs provided us with a beautiful villa. And, so, it was lovely. But, my father was watching the political situation and he said to my mother, one fateful day, "One totalitarian regime for a lifetime is enough. We're going to the United States."

We were on the American quota before the war. As a matter of fact, our number had come up, which is why my parents were able to transport their furnishings to the United States. My father was director of

Patient Relations for the Czech Railroad and he had connections with the ministry, so when our quote number to go to the United States came up, he had shown them the papers and asked if he could ship some of our belongings, and he got permission to do so. My parents took a very small portion of their furniture and filled all the drawers and all the shelves with memorabilia. That's how my very precious photographs are here and, as I said, my Shirley Temple doll.

At the time, my father was such a law-abiding citizen that when the authorities wouldn't give us a valid passport, we remained behind as hostages. But, you know, when the name of the game was survival, we ran without regard to papers. After the war—that's after the process of dehumanization—we simply reactivated our quota number and, on Czech's Independence Day, October 28, 1947, we arrived in the port in New York.

My father was a physician; he was a psychiatrist. He had to study to take all the exams to practice medicine in the United States. It took him about a year and a half to get established, and he practiced until he died in 1972.

Q: And your mother?
A: My mom was a remarkable lady. She passed away in 1995 at the age of 93, still an active hospital volunteer. She ran the gift shop in one of the local hospitals two days a week.

Q: What happened to your extended family after the war?
A: My maternal grandparents, two maternal aunts and uncles and their children, and all of my father's seven brothers and their families perished in Auschwitz.

Q: You mentioned your maternal grandparents earlier. Tell me about them.
A: My mother's parents were a remarkable couple, at least in my estimation. My maternal grandmother's name was Sally Burger and she was, perhaps, the wisest and most compassionate person I knew. I adored her. I truly, truly adored her. The thought of how she died is something I still can't deal with.

My grandfather was William Burger. He was a small shop owner and an amateur psychologist. When one of his sons wanted to quit the university and help him in the store, he said, "Yes, I surely need you, but think of it this way: When your brother, the doctor, and your brother, the lawyer, and [your brother], the engineer, come and visit, will you be shining their shoes?" Nothing more was ever said and the son returned to the university. He was a man of vision. He saw that the young men of his sons' generation needed more than he had and so, he struggled with his little store and saw to it that all five of his sons went to the university. I hope my grandfather knows there's a State of Israel.

My grandmother, who raised six children, was his helpmate in his business and hid Flaubert and Baudelaire underneath all the good books she was supposed to read on the Sabbath. The couple studied Greek and Latin with their sons. They're still very much alive in my memory, but they died in Auschwitz.

Q: That reminds me of the story you mention in your book [*In Sunshine and in Shadow: We Remember Them*[38]] about your grandfather hiding the jewels in the hope that you would remember them later. Can you tell us that story?
A: I think it was the last time I saw my grandparents that my grandfather said to me, "Come with me." I went to the woodshed with him and he dug up the threshold, which was a plank of wood. Underneath it, he dug a little hole. He was carrying a little leather pouch in his hand and he placed it in that hole, sort of covered it over, and nailed the threshold back on. He said, "You know, when this nightmare is over, perhaps you can tell someone."

After the war, when my parents were going back to my mother's hometown (I was still staying with my uncle, recuperating), I said to them, "Don't laugh at me, but I have a very faint memory." I told them the story and where to look, and I said, "Look. You know, it can't hurt." And they came back with the satchel.

[38] Goodkin, Vera. *In Sunshine and in Shadow: We Remember Them*. Washington, D.C.: ComteQ Publishing, 2006.

Q: Will you tell us about your mother's siblings?
A: My mother was the only girl. Her oldest brother was a country doctor whose patients, for the most part, paid the going rate. But, not only did his poor patients not pay, he had his cook prepare nutritious meals to send them. His payment, because he was a social democrat, was his kidnapping in September 1938. He was kidnapped by the Black Shirts, the precursor of the Arrow Cross. He was held for ransom, which was paid, and he was killed. His wife and daughter died in Auschwitz.

My mother's second oldest brother was a very successful attorney in Budapest. He represented the Cardinal, the Holy See, and a lot of aristocratic families. He became what is known as *un entbehrliche Jude*, an indispensable Jew. By virtue of this decree, he was not exposed to the danger of deportation. He had two children; his son and daughter, along with their parents, suffered imprisonment and horrors during the communist regime, so their payback came not during the Nazis' reign, but later.

My mother's middle brother was a pharmacist who was a very sensitive man. He died at a young age because he found out what had happened to his parents, and he became an asthmatic. He and his wife had two sons. One is now a retired professor of chemistry in Koln, Germany. The other one became a professor of chemistry in Budapest, and just recently passed away.

The second youngest of the brothers was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army—in the emperor's army. He died in 1917 in the First World War. He held great promise; he was a concert violinist, and he was studying engineering because my grandfather didn't believe that violinists made a living. He didn't live to be more than 19. I have a postcard he wrote to my mother, in which he said, "There are so many things, dear, I would like to tell you. If I come back, I will. And if I don't, let this postcard serve as a reminder."

The youngest brother was also a pharmacist. His young wife was a pianist. She was 33 years old and she died of exposure when we were all forced to surrender our winter coats in the harsh winters of Slovakia. They had a daughter.

Q: Victims of the Holocaust were treated like objects, but you weave your family history and genealogy into this process showing that they were human beings; they had curly hair, they had smiles and different facial expressions, they had children, they had parents. It really gives your story another dimension.
A: There was a project done by a photographer, [Ann Weiss], who went to Auschwitz. Somebody gave her a key to a long-forgotten room and there, she saw piles and piles of photographs that belonged to the victims. She started working on them. She researched them for a number of years to find an identity for each face, to give each face a name. She has a video called *Eyes from the Ashes*.

Q: How did the war affect your family's religious and cultural traditions?
A: That's a question a lot of young people ask me. You know, "After all this, how can you believe in God?"

My grandparents were very religious people, but they were also worldly-wise. They were very remarkable people. In their memory, my mother, perhaps, became more observant after the war than she had been before the war. It was a tribute she paid to them. I had very little control over [how we practiced our religion]. I mean, I was 14, 15, 16, and I didn't make the policy. My father was never particularly observant, but since it's the woman who runs the house and sets the tone, it was an observant, kosher home.

Now, the relatives who survived and remained behind the Iron Curtain, on the other hand, became total atheists.

Q: What happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: Well, the same day we left the protected house, after we were liberated (on January 17, 1945), Wallenberg finally had an arranged meeting with General [Rodion Yakovlevich] Malinovsky of the Russian forces, essentially to buy food from him for the protected houses that had not yet been liberated. He has not been seen a free man since.

Now, people say to me, “What happened? Why?” We can only guess, and the guess is twofold: One is that the Russians could not believe anyone would put his life on the line for western civilization’s favorite scapegoat, the Jews, so therefore he must have had an ulterior motive; he must have had another agenda. These activities that were humanitarian in nature must have been used to cover up espionage. Once the Russians realized they were wrong, there was very little they wanted to do about it. Wallenberg knew too much by then.

Per Anger always said that Raoul carried papers, proposals for the rehabilitation of war-torn Europe, so the other part of it is that [those proposals] posed a threat to the Russians.

Q: You visit schools to share your story and teach people about Raoul Wallenberg. When did you begin doing so and why?
A: It’s very interesting. When I came to the United States, aged 16 going on 45, I was very anxious to share what had happened, and I got only two kinds of reactions: “Oh, you’ve suffered so much. Why don’t you just put it behind you?” which is very well meaning, but impossible. The other reaction was responsible for my keeping quiet for 37 years, and that was, “You must be exaggerating. Human beings don’t do things like that to other human beings.” What?

In October 1983, I got a phone call, and it came from someone in the Jewish community who knew I was European and even though I never talked about it, knew that I was a survivor. She said to me, “Would you consider helping to put on a commemorative event for a Swedish hero? His name is Raoul Wallenberg. Do you know who he is?” I laughed, and I said, “If I didn’t know who he was, you wouldn’t be talking to me today.”

This got their attention and got me the keynote speech at the event. It was held on the second anniversary of Wallenberg’s conferment as honorary United States citizen. He became an honorary United States citizen on October 5, 1981 and it was, essentially, a bill that was introduced into Congress by Congressman Tom Lantos of California, one of [the children Wallenberg saved]. It was a bill that was signed by Ronald Reagan.

The first anniversary event was held at Rutgers University. That was in 1982. In 1983, Rider University wanted the honor and so six weeks after this telephone call, I stood in front of 800 people and spoke for the first time in 37 years, and I haven’t stopped. I haven’t shut up since.

Q: Why do you think it important to keep Raoul Wallenberg’s legacy and story alive?
A: Because it’s a timeless story; because it’s unalloyed human kindness and it’s coupled with resourcefulness. But even without the resourcefulness, standing up for what is right and in the highest degree, putting your own life in danger is a much better example to set than those set by rock stars, for instance.

Q: You also wrote a book called *In Sunshine and Shadow: We Remember Them* and a companion teacher’s guide.
A: The book is a family memoir that was years in the making—50 years in incubation and one year in the writing. I wrote the book because I wanted to pay tribute to a remarkable family. That was my first consideration, but the considerations changed through the years. The other components, of course, are equally important.

The consideration I began with was to show the readers that we were not meant to be victims, but an integral part of vibrant society, and to [demonstrate] what prejudice, hatred, and persecution did to us. I wanted to show what happened during the ravages and the dichotomy of what happened afterward, even to the survivors—the ones who remained behind the Iron Curtain—who endured more hardships, more persecution because they had been capitalists before the Holocaust. The last consideration, of course, and certainly not the least, was to describe how I arrived at the place I’m at now, and my activities to try to convince young people that hatred is not the way to go.

When I wrote the book, I wrote it for general consumption. Then, a couple of people at colleges said they would like to use it as a textbook for their Holocaust literature courses. Then, teachers on the secondary level said, “Well, I would use it if I had a teacher’s guide.” The guide gives background material, assignments, and information pertaining to the book and the time in which it takes place.

Q: You have also developed another type of educational material pertaining to the Holocaust. What are the teaching trunks?
A: The teaching trunks are self-contained classrooms and they are available in three levels. We have an elementary school trunk, a middle school trunk and a high school trunk. Each consists of background, or study materials for the teacher to use in preparation for the unit he or she wants to teach. The trunks also include enough textbooks for a class of 30, video and audio materials, posters, newspapers, and extra books to read aloud and do reports on. Signing out one of these trunks means the teacher can concentrate on preparing and teaching, rather than scrambling to gather materials and so on.

[We Holocaust survivors] are disappearing at the rate of 2,000 a month these days. So, we have to train the next generation. There is a very active second generation.

Q: Your book and teacher’s guide and your willingness to do an interview are so important because they honor memories, whether they’re faint or strong. You’re telling the story for those who couldn’t, so, thank you. Thank you very much.
A: My pleasure.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?
A: Well, I suppose it’s the message I leave with students, and it’s twofold: Realize that we are all human beings first. Only then do we belong to a race, an ethnicity, a religious background, an economic background, an educational level, and so on. If we realize that what’s most important is the thing that unites us—which is our common humanity—then what divides us is not really that important. I tell youngsters if they can achieve that, even in today’s world, then this would be a world worth living in.

On a more practical level, this is a country of great diversity. Just look around, and you’ll see people very different from yourself. You need to get to know them as individuals, because if you only know them as members of a group who look different, eat different foods, worship differently, wear different clothes and have different customs, then you’ll be just a little suspicious of them, and suspicion breeds fear and fear breeds hatred, and hatred breeds persecution. And we, the survivors, know where that can take us. That’s usually my message to the young people I speak to.

Interview with Gabriel Hartstein

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is Gabriel Hartstein. I live in Burlington, Vermont.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: I am from Budapest, Hungary.

Q: Tell us about your family.
A: My parents were pretty poor. My father, who only had an eighth-grade education, was a superintendent of a small apartment building; as such, he was in charge of having the heating for the winter, as well as any kind of maintenance for the building. We lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the same building. There were only three of us at that time: my mother, my father, and me.

Q: Was your family religious before the war?
A: No. They were, what we call, just barely practicing.

Q: Can you talk to us about daily life before the war? When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: Hungary was a pretty good place to live even though there was a lot of anti-Semitism, and many laws were generated right after World War I that discriminated against the Jewish population. The Jews could not hold certain jobs, nor could they go to the university, [but they made up only like 5% of the population]. But in the city of Budapest, where I lived, 20% of the people were Jews, and most of them were professionals and businessmen. It is kind of ironic that even though there were all kinds of restrictions against Jewish people becoming professionals like doctors, or writers, or teachers, there were so many of them in Budapest. By law, they couldn't study at the university—so how did it all work? Many of these Jews went to foreign countries to study. Actually, they went to Austria, Czechoslovakia, even Germany, which was pretty restrictive too, but later on, after [Adolf] Hitler came to power. Once they had finished their studies, they were able to come back to Hungary to practice their professions. How is it that they were not allowed to study, but they were allowed to practice? At that time, Hungary was an agrarian country. There was not very much industry. While [Miklós] Horthy—the dictator who was ruling Hungary—was anti-Semitic, he also wanted these Jews to come back to Hungary and modernize the country. You know, smaller farms and smaller cities weren't even electrified. It was a country that had a lot of progress to do, and that's why the Jews had kind of a haven, both from anti-Semitism and for opportunities to advance in the country. It was in the interest of the Hungarian government to have Jews succeed. They couldn't belong to organizations and so on, but on a daily basis, the Jews had a pretty good life in Hungary.

Q: How did you experience the Nazi takeover of Hungary? What were your thoughts, feelings, and reactions?
A: Well, I lived in Budapest, and I was 7 years old when the Holocaust in Hungary started. It lasted only nine months. The Germans invaded Hungary and arrived in Budapest on March 19, 1944. Since I was just a child, I really didn't know what was going on. Up until then, I wasn't at all aware of my own Jewishness or my religion. I had friends who were Jews as well as friends who were non-Jews. As a matter of fact, on the day of the invasion, I found it very, very exciting because the Germans were parading up and down the street in their uniforms and tanks. It was like a military parade, so it was very interesting. The first day, nothing was going on other than Germans parading up and down the street. Those of us who were children—you know that boys like to play with soldiers; they are part of everybody's toys—played live. We would put white gloves on and march up and down, trying to imitate the Germans. To tell you the truth, my parents didn't know what was going to happen either. They were following the news and they knew that it was a bad sign, but in terms of precisely knowing how it would work, it took a little bit of time. The person who came to Hungary to implement the Holocaust, the rounding up of the Jews, was Adolf Eichmann. He had already implemented the system for deporting the Jews to the

concentration camps in other countries. We didn't even know the words "concentration camps" or anything like that.

Q: What changes did you experience?
A: Now, what I'm going to tell you is how the Germans set up the process of deporting Jews and taking them to the concentration camps. Like I said, nobody knew the first step, or the steps that were about to follow; you know, the whole method. There was a law in Hungary according to which you weren't allowed to listen to a foreign radio station, so the knowledge that people had about the war was very limited and it was controlled by the Hungarian government. Nobody could even anticipate what would happen once the Germans [arrived]. People really didn't know that the Jews and other minorities all around Europe were taken away to these concentration camps. Some rumors were heard, because there were people who managed to escape the deportation or from one of the concentration camps, but the information wasn't available instantaneously, as it is today. At that time, Hungary was an ally of the Germans. The government that existed in Hungary was a legitimate Hungarian government—not pro-Jewish, but not necessarily willing to cooperate with the Germans in taking the Hungarian Jews away to the concentration camps. But, the tide turned against the Germans by March 1944, and the Hungarians were starting to get cold feet because of the Russians. The Russians were advancing toward Hungary, and the Hungarian government didn't want to be in the same situation it was in during World War I, when they were on the losing side. Because of that, the Hungarian government tried to become a little bit more neutral, and that's why the Germans occupied Hungary. They took control of the situation and started setting up the rules that the Jews had to follow.

The very first rule that directly affected all the Jews was that we had to wear a Yellow Star. It was one of the signs that separated the Jews from the rest of the population. We had one or two, maybe several weeks, to have the Yellow Star sewn on all the garments that we were wearing outside. And why is it that every Jew had put the Yellow Star on? That's because it was very easy to identify us either through the police records or identification cards. The star made a very visible identification of the Jew, so all the neighbors now knew who the Jews were, and we felt bad about it. It was a very discouraging and disturbing sign. That was the first rule that the Germans implemented.

Soon after that, there was another rule. The Jews had to move to a certain area of Budapest. By the way, I haven't mentioned it, but we lived in Buda. Budapest is one city divided by the river Danube, so one side is Buda, the other side is Pest. Not too many Jews lived in Buda, but the rule was that all the Jews had to live in the Pest part of Budapest, and that area became the ghetto. Every house in that ghetto was also identified with a Yellow Star on the outside of the building. By the time all the Jews were supposed to move into the ghetto, they didn't fit. So, they moved into the houses, which were not encircled, but were very close to the ghetto and were identified by the Yellow Stars. How did we get an apartment there? What you had to do was find somebody who was willing to swap apartments with you. My parents found somebody who had a one-room apartment instead of a one-bedroom apartment, and that's where we had to move. To summarize, we had to wear a Yellow Star and we had to live in the specialized, specifically designated houses that were for Jews only. They called them Jewish houses, actually.

At the same time all this was happening, the Jews were taken away to the concentration camps. The Jews were picked up by certain criteria. The Germans would come to each of these buildings and look for people by criteria, for example—age, health, etc. The people who fit the particular criteria of the day were taken away. We now know that 10,000 to 12,000 Jews were loaded into cattle cars and brought to Auschwitz and other concentration camps, under horrible conditions. Ten to twelve thousand a day, seven days a week!

Another limitation that was implemented was that the Jews who lived either in the ghetto or in these Jewish houses could only go out for two hours a day, from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock, I think, to go shopping. Somehow, my mother realized very soon that there was one price for the general population and then another for the Jews. When the Jews were allowed out for those two hours, the prices would double or triple. So, since we were poor and had very little money, my mother went out when she wasn't supposed to be out on the street. She would cover up her Yellow Star with her pocket book. It was a terrible danger, but she was willing to take that risk in order to reduce our food bill by half or by a third. But if you were

found out, you were immediately taken to the police station and then taken away, whether you fit the criteria of the day or not. I can't even fathom how she paid for it and how it is that she was never found out. At any moment, the police or the Germans could ask for your identification papers, and if you didn't have them with you or if you were identified as a Jew, you were immediately subject to arrest.

Now, what kind of argument did they use so that people would go along and obey all the rules? You know, nobody objected to anything. After the war, people asked [why] everybody went off like sheep. The Germans said, "Do this," and people did it. How did it happen that the Jews were so easily picked up according to the plan? Everything was going very, very efficiently. The Germans were never brutal within the city. They wanted compliance by the Jews, so they made all the rules very neutral. They weren't threatening and they were saying that the Jews were taken away into factories, for work, so that they would have an opportunity to earn money. They presented it like it was for our benefit.

My father was taken away to serve as a waiter, or something like that, for an officer in the Hungarian army. My father had a very bad accident as a young man and wasn't eligible for heavy manual labor. The Jewish men were mainly taken away to do labor, to repair the infrastructure that was destroyed by the bombs that fell daily on Budapest, dropped by the Russians and sometimes the allies. In that sense, my family was very lucky because my father wasn't stationed very far from the Jewish house we lived in and could even come home once a week, so we saw him from time to time and we knew that he was not going to be deported.

So far, our personal situation wasn't that dire, because other than the fact that we had to move to these Jewish houses, my father was in a labor camp, and my mother took extreme risks every day being on the street when she wasn't supposed to be outside, it was not as terrible as it was for other people who had already been taken away.

As time went on, by around October, in Budapest, there was a coup against the legitimate government, organized by the Arrow Cross. The Arrow Cross was the pseudo government, and they were Nazis. They were Hungarian, anti-Semitic Nazis who acted like an army, supplementing the Germans. They weren't fighting like the Germans in the war, but their purpose was to help the Germans implement the deportation of the Jews to the concentration camps. And all my really, really bad experiences were associated with the Arrow Cross. The Jews who lived in the countryside or smaller cities were taken away very, very quickly. Budapest had 20% of the Jews, so it took a longer time and it didn't affect everybody equally right away. By October, life in Budapest was still manageable, and we were hoping that the Russians would come and liberate us.

Q: Who was Raoul Wallenberg?
A: By the summer of 1944, people in the United States realized that the Jewish population of Europe was being exterminated. So, they wanted somebody to go to Hungary and try to save the remaining Jewish community, which was still substantial. They went to Sweden, because it was a neutral country in the war, to find such a person, and that was Raoul Wallenberg. He actually saved our lives. Even today, the Wallenberg family is extremely influential in Sweden. They are industrialists, and at the time of the war, they dealt with arms and finance. Today, they deal with lumber and they manufacture paper. Raoul Wallenberg wasn't a diplomat. He was educated in the United States at the University of Michigan. He became an architect and his family was hoping that he would become part of the banking family. He didn't really have a clear mission in life at the time when he was picked [to work in Budapest]. And it's very interesting, almost miraculous, because Raoul Wallenberg wasn't the most obvious person to undertake such a mission, but he took it! He set down conditions that had to be met before he undertook the mission. One was that he be given diplomatic status and authority to negotiate as a diplomat on behalf of the Jews. Second, he wanted money in his possession to take along to Hungary. And third, he wanted the backing for this mission from the King of Sweden. So those were, let's say, the three key conditions that he asked for. There were others but they were less, less critical at the time.

He came to Budapest and used his diplomatic power to make appointments to negotiate on behalf of the Jews. The first person—at least according to my readings—that he saw was the foreign minister, who, at this time, was a member of the Arrow Cross. The active collection of the Jews was the responsibility of

the Arrow Cross, so if Raoul Wallenberg wanted to accomplish anything, he had to negotiate both with the Germans and with the Arrow Cross. He also had to act fast. So, he arrived in Budapest and invited the foreign minister to a dinner at his house, where they came to an agreement. Wallenberg had two key arguments. One was the obvious fact that the war was going to be won by the Russians and the allies; the other was money, which he offered to the foreign minister in exchange for his cooperation. They agreed that the Jews who had relatives in Sweden ought to be protected from deportation, and that Wallenberg would issue a document called a Schutz-Pass. A Schutz-Pass is like a passport, a one-way passport stating that the person who carries it has relatives in Sweden; and, when he or she has the opportunity to leave Hungary, Sweden will welcome him or her.[39] Getting this kind of document was a life saver. It was like a passport that couldn't be used at that time because Budapest was surrounded by Russians; but, nevertheless, it was good for the future. Also, Wallenberg suggested that he would buy certain buildings and designate them as safe houses for the Jews who had some Swedish connection. Theoretically, these people would move into these buildings, which were like an extension of the Swedish embassy or the Swedish consulate. The Arrow Cross, the Germans, and the Hungarian government would not be allowed to take away these Jews. They decided that about 5,000 Jews would qualify for this.

Now, the question was how he was going to find the Jews with relatives in Sweden. Wallenberg figured that the way to find these Jews—since he couldn't advertise and couldn't do it by word by mouth—was to go to those Jews who were being transported out to Germany, to Poland, or to where the concentration camps were. Those groups were most vulnerable. A well-known place where they gathered all these Jews on their way to the concentration camps was a brick factory. It wasn't a functioning brick factory, but an empty place. It was like a temporary concentration camp, in a way. The Jews were taken away from all parts of Budapest and were gathered in this brick factory. Their next step would be to walk to the Austrian border, where they could be loaded onto cattle cars. So, Wallenberg went to the brick factory and said he was a representative of the King of Sweden, and that he wanted to go take all the Jews who have a Swedish connection.

Q: Did you have any contact with Raoul Wallenberg?
A: Well, I never met Raoul Wallenberg personally, but my cousin did. I had indirect contact with him.

My cousin was in that brick factory on that fateful day when Wallenberg showed up. In the middle of the night there was commotion, and all of a sudden, somebody came in and addressed the Jews, and he spoke to them as human beings instead of using rough language. She hadn't heard anybody who spoke to a Jew in a kind way. So even though she didn't know who Raoul Wallenberg was, that was the most reassuring thing for her, to have somebody speak to that crowd as human beings, with respect and with optimism. Wallenberg asked that anybody who had relatives in Sweden, or that anybody who lived in Sweden, come forward and show a document [of proof]. Well, you know, this question that he asked was really unrealistic: Who would go around carrying a piece of paper or a picture, or anything of some distant relative in Sweden? My cousin and few others realized that if they showed any kind of piece of paper, it might be their chance to be saved. So, she went into her pocket and she showed him a piece of paper, and he looked at it and told her to get on a truck, which was outside the brick factory. She grabbed her mother's hand and they left. Then, other Jews started doing the same thing because they saw that they would get out of there.

Q: What was on that paper?
A: It was nothing! It may have been toilet paper; it could have been just a piece of paper. But you know, those Arrow Cross guys were plain soldiers, and Wallenberg was so convincing to these people. He had authority, so they complied. My cousin went back to Budapest on one of those trucks and she was actually taken to the Swedish embassy, where she got her official Schutz-Pass, with her name and picture on it. She then obtained Schutz-Passes for other members of her family, including my parents and me. It took her a while to deliver them to us because we were still in this Jewish house.

[39] The document Mr. Hartstein is referring is the Schutz-brief, issued prior to the Schutz-Pass. The Scuhtz-Pass provided protection by stating that the bearer was protected by the Swedish government. The document did not provide citizenship, nor did it work as a passport or visa allowing the bearer to enter and reside in Sweden.

Q: How did Wallenberg save you and your family?
A: I don't remember the date, but it was probably November of 1944. The Arrow Cross soldiers came into our building and told my mother that both of us, my mother and I, should come down within an hour, with very few things of our own, because we were going to have the opportunity to go to a doctor and have a physical exam. There were no more people left, other than children and mothers, in our building. So we were the last few who could be possibly taken away. There was no place to hide, there was no place to go, and my mother and I went down. My father was still away at the labor camp where he was working for that officer, so we had no way of talking to him or saying goodbye.

We formed a large group with people coming from other buildings and we were marched to a large square. Maybe it wasn't very large, but it appeared awfully large at the time because there were hundreds and hundreds of Jews. We assembled there and one of the Arrow Cross soldiers used a bull horn to shout out orders as to what we should do next. He started screaming that all the children had to go to the right side of the square, and the mothers ought to stay in place. And from best that I can remember, just about all the mothers who were there told their children to go to the right side, except for my mother. She said that I shouldn't move. Soon, they noticed, and one of the soldiers approached us, yelling at my mother for not following orders: "I'm going to kill you and I'm going to beat you to death with the butt of my rifle!" My mother said to him, "It's okay, but just make sure that you kill both of us." Then, more soldiers came to see what was going on, and they tried to pull me one way and my mother the other way. I still can't explain how it is that two or maybe three Arrow Cross big guys couldn't rip me out of my mother's arms. She was a little woman, but she was the kind of person who would go left if the authorities told her to go right. She always did the opposite. She knew more than she let people believe. She was a survivor. So, they agreed that I go with my mother.

We started marching. There were probably six to eight people in a row, but I don't know how many rows there were, endless rows. And we marched, and we marched. My mother knew that we should not go to that brick factory because it was on the outskirts of Budapest. She knew that if we left Budapest, it was going to be much more dangerous; we would be much more exposed than within the city. So, she tried to escape. She went to the right of the row, then to the left of the row, and people started complaining about her; that we were all going to be in trouble because she was a troublemaker. She'd gotten a lot of grief from the other Jews who willingly went—and they didn't know where they were going—but they did it without any objection or any opposition. They felt safe as long as they were doing what they were told. And they were mad at my mother. All the time, she gripped my hand and I was supposed to follow her. At one point she saw a car, pulled my hand, and we ended up hiding behind a tiny little car—all cars were tiny, they didn't have SUVs or anything like that. Of course, we were spotted immediately, because there were a lot of Arrow Cross people in front of the car, and we had to go back to that row of marchers. We would have continued, but by some miracle, my mother fainted and fell straight to the pavement. The Arrow Cross soldiers gathered around us, not knowing what to do. Finally, their leader gave one of the Arrow Cross guys directions to take us back to the building where we came from.

The chances would have been that the following day or in the subsequent days, we'd be taken away once more because there were still plenty of Jews in the ghetto and in the Jewish Star homes to be taken away. So, it wouldn't be any loss to any one of them to let us go back. It would have been just on a temporary basis, anyway. But literally, the next day, my cousin who was saved by Raoul Wallenberg gave us the Schutz-Passes. We got three: one for my mother, one for my father, and one for me. Once again, by some miracle, we delivered one of those Schutz-Passes to my father, so all three of us were protected.

Now, from the story that I told you, it was a miracle that my mother fainted and they got her back to the Jewish building, and that my cousin came and gave us the Schutz-Passes. Those were all miracles that I have no way of explaining. But, I will have to tell you that I never saw a person come back from the march we would have been on, had my mother not fainted. These were called the death marches. When I speak to students, there is a description about what kind of fate awaited those people who went to the brick factory and then had to march to the Austrian border, in the middle of the winter. I'm talking about November. A grandmother who survived the camps and was in one of the death marchers writes about it. I am very much affected by her story, and I'll tell you why. She describes how they were marching and how they didn't have any food or water, no fluid; at night, they got relief from marching, and they had to lie

down on the ground. It was so cold that some people actually died frozen to the ground, especially elderly people. And, in spite of their hunger and lack of water, they had to continue the following day. One day during this march, a farmer came toward them with a bucket of water and a ladle, and the Arrow Cross soldier yelled at him, “If you make one more step, I’ll shoot you!” This was outside Budapest, and it would have been no problem for this Arrow Cross guy to shoot him. But the farmer said to him, “Try me.” And he went ahead and gave people water out of the ladle. The reason that I always find this story very, very moving and I tell it to the students is that there were people who saved other Jews. This farmer probably never saw a Jew before in his life, and even though he had his family to take care of—which is why he could have easily just turned around with his bucket and ladle—he didn’t!

I don’t know where these people get all this heroism in them, and what’s amazing to me is that there were people at all who stood up, who were moral enough to stand up for these people. It was not for money, not for any financial reward, but it was only the moral strength or the way they were brought up, or their religion. I don’t know what it was, but today we are immune to that kind of thing. Yet, Wallenberg and this farmer exposed their lives every day to save Jews. I tell this story of rescue because it has so much significance to me. People did these things without questioning, and it would have been so easy to find one excuse not to do it. I had to tell you the story of the farmer because it’s a model for me to teach the students today about what people did at a critical time, at the right time, to save people. And that’s the reason some of us, including myself, are around.

Q: Did you live in a safe house?
A: We moved to a building, which was like an extension of the Swedish embassy, and the address of which was printed on our Schutz-Passes. We were designated an apartment, the same place where my cousin was, and it was so crowded that we had to lie down head to toe. There was no furniture and there was only one bathroom for so many people. I don’t know how we managed. By today’s standard, I’m wondering how so many hundreds of people were able to get along without killing each other. But, there was no violence or anything like that. I also remember that we had a limited amount of food. Daily, more and more people came because Wallenberg and people from the Swiss embassy just kept printing those Schutz-Passes and kept going to those marches, or back to the brick factory, or all the way to the Austrian border and grabbing the Jews from the trains. I think the number was maybe 15,000 or so. We were somehow safe being in these protected houses. The Arrow Cross couldn’t take us away from there. But, it appears that the different Schutz-Passes had different strengths. I don’t know how the Germans or the Arrow Cross knew that. One day, they came into our protected building and asked to see each of our Schutz-Passes, and they separated us into two groups. Even though we all had Schutz-Passes, one group was taken away from that building. They were marched out and nobody could say a thing; nobody knew why or what the criteria was. My family stayed safe, but our story doesn’t end there.

Q: How long did you stay in the safe house?
A: I have to emphasize again that my mother was a survivor, a kind of difficult woman who did things that were not rational. When she saw that some people were taken away from the safe houses, she said, “I’m going back to the old neighborhood where we lived, and I know a person who will do something for us.” Now, why was this irrational to begin with? Here she was, a Jew with a star, who had to take the trolley from Pest to Buda, because it wasn’t in walking distance; then she had to go back to Buda to the building where my father was the superintendent, and go to one of our neighbors. He or she could have been an unsatisfied neighbor who had it in for my father, because maybe the heat was not okay one day in the winter; we didn’t know. But, my mother had this feeling about a particular woman from our old apartment building. I know all this from my mother, as she was telling the story. She got in, rang a bell, and said to the woman who opened the door, “Mrs. Saylai, you must save us.” The woman almost fainted. She told my mother to never, ever come back, but she quickly jotted down the name of her brother-in-law. She said, “Go to this place and he will save you.” So, my mother took that address and went to this man who happened to be a well-known writer of plays and novels. His name was [Zsigmond] Remenyik.[40] I don’t even know if my mother knew how famous he was because, first of all, she was born in Poland; second,

[40] Zsigmond Remenyik (1900–1962) was a famous Hungarian writer and leader of the avant guarde movement. Trained as a lawyer, he travelled to Chile where he spent a few as a member of the literary scene there. He also lived in the United States for two years before returning to Hundgary in 1941.

she wasn't a well-read person. She had a fourth-grade education, even less than my father, who had an eighth-grade education. So, she went to Mr. Remenyik's apartment and said, "Mrs. Saylai sent me and gave me your address, you must save us." I can't understand it. Here was that woman, coming to the apartment of this famous writer, and asking him to save us. He told her that it was okay, that she should come back in a few days, and that he would have documents ready for her with further directions. By the way, the Arrow Cross had not returned since the time they came to our safe house and separated people, but my mother was afraid that if they came once, they could come a second time. She felt she needed more protection. When she went to see Mr. Remenyik for the second time, he gave her false documents that somebody made, and which Remenyik had paid for. The documents said that we were Christians. Our names were changed from Hartstein to Harsanyi, which is a typical Hungarian name. We had now a Hungarian name, and false papers saying that we came from the farms outside Budapest to the city to escape the terrible rushes. He also provided us with an apartment. We were supposed to tell our new neighbors that my mother was the maid of the Remenyiks. That's how we, all of a sudden, appeared in a strange building, in a strange apartment, close to Christmas 1944. We didn't ask any questions. Later on, after the war, we discovered that Mr. Remenyik was saving, in his own apartment, 10 Jewish families.

Q: How did you survive until the end of the war?
A: We were in that apartment and every day, planes were coming, bombs were falling, and buildings were destroyed. We tried to stay in that apartment in order to avoid questions from our neighbors, even though everybody went down to the shelter, in the basement. But, we sure enough brought attention to ourselves by not doing what everybody else did. One day, the doorbell rang and there was a neighbor who didn't know us, but he said to my father, "Do you have any documents that you tried to register for the Arrow Cross?" My father said no, and this fellow said, "You'd better go to register."

By the way, we weren't wearing Jewish stars anymore, and we could go out at any time because we had documents that said we were Christians. I was taught a new name. At that time, I didn't know what a Christian was; I just knew what a kid was. We tried to avoid drawing attention to ourselves, so my parents allowed me to go to other people's houses. If somebody was in their apartment, I was told that I could go and play with their kids for a little bit, and then I had to go home. They didn't want me to expose myself too much, because I could have said the wrong thing.

So, my father had to go register, which implied a physical exam. He was scared to go to the police station. Even though my father had false documents, there was one thing he couldn't explain about himself, no matter what document he had. In Hungary—I don't know about all countries in Europe—but in Hungary, if you were circumcised, you were a Jew. This situation was even worse than being hit by a bomb because if they discovered that my father was a Jew, we could have potentially exposed Mr. Remenyik and the 10 other families that he was hiding. Before my father left to go register, he gave us instructions that if he didn't come back within a certain time, we should go immediately to Mr. Remenyik. But, within a couple of hours, my father showed up and told us the story that I am going to tell you. He went to the first guy that he saw, who was some kind of Arrow Cross clerk, and said, "I came to register for the homeland." The guy asked about my father's personal data and typed it all up. Then he told him, "Okay, sit over there, and you are going to go to the doctor for a physical exam." My father sat down on the floor and said to the clerk, "Look, you don't have to be a doctor to see that I can't really go to the army; I will just be rejected if I go in there." So the guy wrote down something, I guess it was a document that he filled out, and my father got an exception that he didn't have to register till February 25. That was great. Now, he could go back to the apartment and show that he tried to register, and they gave him an exception. This document gave us further opportunity to be a little bit more safe, and it also gave us a legitimate reason to give up the apartment and go down to the shelter because we were no longer threatened by somebody asking us funny questions. We felt that we were protected against all eventualities.

When we lived in the shelter, people were listening to the radios, but not foreign stations, because you couldn't get short wave radios. Sometimes, the Russians advanced, sometimes they were pushed back. On January 15, in the middle of the night, there was a big commotion at the entrance to the shelter, with people speaking foreign languages. These were Russian soldiers who came in and were in charge of our street. We knew at that point that we were truly, truly safe; we were liberated. It was in the middle of the night when the Russians came, so the following day we went out, and people were on the street, all kinds

of people. The street was filled with Russian soldiers with machine guns and all that, but we felt safe because they weren't Germans; they weren't after us. We went back to see how many people were alive from that Swedish building, like my cousin and all the relatives that we had. My father ran into somebody that he knew from before the war. This guy said to me, "Well, what's your name little boy?" I remember that very clearly and I asked my father which name I could tell him because I knew I had to be very careful, since they drilled it into my head that I should call myself Horsanyi Gabor. My father told me, "You can tell him your real name." That was such a big deal for me as a child, as if I had just gotten the Olympic medal or something. It was so amazing that it's engraved in my mind.

Q: Do you know what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: We were liberated on January 15 by the Russians and, from that time on, they kept advancing, street by street. Budapest wasn't liberated all at once. There was no way of taking the Jews out anymore, because Budapest was totally surrounded by the Russians. Yet, there were still close to 100,000 Jews left in the ghettos. So, the Germans came up with a plan that they were going to make everybody move into a building within the ghetto, and they were going to dynamite all those people inside. When Wallenberg heard about it, he contacted the commander of the ghetto and used the exact same arguments that he used with the foreign minister and maybe many, many more times in between. He said, "Budapest is all surrounded by Russians; they are going to be here any day now, and you have a chance to save 100,000 Jews. If you don't, you [will be charged as] a war criminal, and I'll be the first to testify." The commandant thought about it and agreed with Wallenberg's proposal. But then a tragedy occurred. On January 17, two days after my life was saved, my parents' lives were saved, and other people were saved, an officer came to Wallenberg and told him that General [Rodion Yakovlevich] Malinovsky—who wasn't in Budapest, but in some small city behind—wanted to see him, and that the officer was going to give him a ride. He had no choice—he got in the car and was taken to the General, and that was the last time that Raoul Wallenberg was seen.

He was kidnapped and sent to Russia, and in the 1970s, people who were coming out from the Gulag talked about how they remembered being in the cell in Siberia next to some Swede. There is no conclusive or absolutely certain evidence that it was really Raoul Wallenberg. I read several books about how he was kidnapped by the Russians, tortured, and sent to the worst place in the Gulag. If he survived, he may have died in the 1940s, or 1950s; nobody knows. And even now that Russia is no longer the Communist system and theoretically, they allow people to see the papers, nobody can say for sure when he died and why he was kidnapped. There are some speculations as to why he was singled out and why he was a threat to the Russians. First of all, Stalin was so paranoid, and the Wallenberg name may have been a threat to the Russians. They didn't want any westerners in Eastern Europe, or certainly in Hungary; they wanted to have total control so that they could establish a Communist regime.

Q: How did you move on with your life? How did you come to America?
A: In 1948, the border was still open between Hungary and Austria, so people could leave. But, by 1950, all the borders were electrified and nobody was leaving. My parents never told me the real truth, but I think they had been dealing with an official in Hungary and they most probably bribed this person so that my mother, myself, and sister—who was 10 years younger and was born after the war—could be expelled from the country. It was a very unusual thing. In order for that to happen, my parents had to get divorced first, and because my mother was born in Poland, the three of us became what they call "homeless," without citizenship. In that way, we could be expelled from Hungary. We had 15 days to leave the country, and the only place we could go was Israel. In order to get some dollars for our trip, which was like a black currency that nobody was allowed to handle, we turned for help to one Jewish organization—something like a rescue operation that helped people right after the war. I found out that we were going to leave just a few days before our departure. It's funny how during the German occupation and the Holocaust, my parents trusted me, but in this particular case they didn't. They held the whole thing secret until a week before we left. They said, "You are not going to go to school anymore and you are not allowed to go out on the street. You are just supposed to live incognito at home until we leave." On September 15, when we had to leave, we went to a railroad station and took a train to Vienna. But, when it reached the border, nobody had permission to cross, so everyone had to get off. I don't know, they weren't necessarily going to leave, because nobody could leave. They had their own reasons for being passengers on that same train, but the three of us left, and we went to Israel.

Israel wasn't a great place to live in 1950; the food and clothing were all rationed, but bread wasn't. I didn't speak any Hebrew. I was sent to school, and I don't know how I learned Hebrew. I didn't take private lessons; I just picked it up from the kids. There was no housing for new immigrants, so we lived in a refugee camp. My mother took the two of us to an aunt—actually one to one aunt, and the other to another aunt. We were separated into three homes, and people lived under very primitive conditions. Israel wasn't a modern country. It was kind of a backward country that was absorbing a lot of immigrants from various countries who wanted to go there for idealistic reasons. But we lived out in the west. I mean, not the American west, but in Israel. It wasn't under Communist control. My father suffered an awful lot because we left Hungary. They called him a traitor, and wanted to expropriate his apartment and send him to some village without anything to do. It was very difficult for him. The people who made it so difficult for him were probably the same people who used to be in the Arrow Cross under the German rule. They became the most ardent Communists under the Communist control. You know, those people changed positions and became extreme no matter who rules or what system is in charge.

While we were in Israel, we waited for a visa to get into the United States. I lived in Israel from 1950 to 1952. From 1952 to 1955, I lived in France with an uncle of mine. There, I went to school and studied radio repair. In 1955, I came to the United States legitimately, after I had obtained my visa. The cousin who once saved my life by getting us the Schutz-Passes was in the United States as of 1948. She made sure that I got a decent education. She selected a high school for me, a very practical one where I could learn at an accelerated rate, which I did; then I went to university and I became an engineer. I went to Hunter College, which was part of the City College of New York, and then to NYU—New York University. I worked in the semi-conductor trade for 30, almost 40 years. I moved to Vermont because I wanted to work for IBM.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism when you came into the United States?
A: Yes, I did. But I don't feel threatened by it. I don't know what it is here that gives me that kind of freedom. I usually explain it with the separation of religion and state in this country, and I feel that's a very strong principle. It's a totally different experience than what I feel in Europe. First of all, in Europe I feel right away a little bit self-conscious about my Jewishness, maybe because I went through those difficult periods in Europe. Maybe in Asia I wouldn't feel that way.

Q: You visit schools, share your story, and teach people about Raoul Wallenberg. When did you begin doing so and why?
A: My cousin Suzan, this cousin to whom I keep referring, was part of a group that organized a Raoul Wallenberg committee, which publicized his life, his contributions, and his heroism. This group of Americans tried to bring pressure on the United States to try to find out what happened to him and make it known to the public. So, she spoke wherever somebody invited her. She spoke in Australia, in many places, but mostly in the United States. She spoke until the day she died. She spoke with passion about Raoul Wallenberg, the greatest passion. She wanted people to know not just about her experience with him, but about all his accomplishments. Since then, a lot more people know about Wallenberg. Today, there are memorials in various countries. If you ask people if they've heard of [Oskar] Schindler, you learn that just about everybody knows of him, because of the movie *Schindler's List*;[41] but there are other Holocaust stories. I don't know if Wallenberg is more heroic than others, but he is certainly significant. It's a funny thing that somebody good didn't direct a film about him. There was a TV series about him and it just wasn't good; it was too Hollywood. It didn't get the essence.

When my cousin died, I started speaking about my experiences with the Holocaust, which includes a story about Wallenberg. Actually, my cousin has been my inspiration to continue her legacy, because it's important that people know about it. That is why I've been doing it for 15 years already. The students and the teachers react well, and they invite me back. Those times are worth remembering. For example, I tell the students that one of my greatest pleasures, which I can have on a daily basis, is taking a shower. Students cannot understand that, because today you can always take a shower. But, you know, during the war, I couldn't do that. My hair was full of lice! And, so you know, my values are a little bit different.

[41] Directed by Steven Spielberg in 1993, *Schindler's List* is a biographical film about Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved the lives of more than a thousand Polish-Jewish refugees during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories.

But one thing is for sure—in the United States, I feel very free to talk about my experiences and my heritage. And I'm glad to share them with students.

Q: How do you feel about the representation of the Holocaust in the movies and books?
A: Raul Hilberg was a great scholar of the Holocaust, and just before he died he was on a talk show about the Holocaust and about his life. I don't know, he was pretty sick and maybe they tried to get that interview before he died. He wrote a serious book with statistics, and that was the first basic [account] that was written about Holocaust. It was a scholarly work and he was an extremely brilliant guy; it is not my interpretation, but all the scholars look upon him as the Einstein of the Holocaust. In that interview, Hilberg says that in the 1960s, when the first book was published, he couldn't get anybody interested in it. Here and there, maybe, a movie appeared where the Germans are always the bad guys and those hunting them are the good guys—that kind of thing. When I speak to students at schools and ask about their reaction to *Schindler's List,* they say, "Well, it's a great movie." If that's their only reaction, good guys versus bad guys, it disappoints me. Now, college students react differently, they are more serious.

Q: What kinds of questions do students most frequently ask you?
A: Their questions are always the same—what was my experience. I think that's it. You know, they relate better to a person than the chapter in a book. That doesn't mean that they are not interested in the Holocaust. Then I try to draw parallels between all the atrocities that are happening every day in the world. There are a lot of atrocities.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?
A: I was much younger when I saw *The Great Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin,[42] in Hungary. It was the first time that I saw a Jew onscreen who was the hero. There are two sides of the story. One is the Holocaust, and the other is just a human part, but nevertheless, the hero is a Jew… [regardless of] whether he gets dressed up as Hitler. In Hungary, I never had the opportunity to express myself as a Jew because I never trusted the people around me. There was so much anti-Semitism around, so I would never talk about my experience, or even myself as a person, and I had nobody to identify with. But when I saw the movie, I saw a Jew being the hero of the movie, and it happened to be a very important experience. It's like a black person who takes pride now about Obama being a presidential candidate. Where I can take pride, a black person today can take pride of the fact that another black person is running for the highest office. It's that kind of thing.

[42] Released in October 1940, *The Great Dictator* is a comedy film written, directed, produced by, and starring Charlie Chaplin. It was the first major feature film of its period to bitterly satirize Nazism and German dictator Adolf Hitler. Chaplin played the role of "Adenoid Hynkel," Dictator of Tomania—modeled on Hitler—and a look-alike Jewish barber persecuted by his regime. At the conclusion, the two characters swap positions, allowing the Jewish barber to address the audience directly in a speech, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone if possible: Jew, Gentile, black man, white."

Interview with Judita Hruza

Q: What is your birth name?
A: My birth name is Judita Ilkovics.

Q: And what is your married name?
A: My married name is Judita Hruza.

Q: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Czechoslovakia, on the Hungarian border. Our village, a tiny little village of about 100 inhabitants, was half-Hungarian and half-Slovak. My family spoke Hungarian, so that was my first language.

Q: What date were you born?
A: September 26, 1924.

Q: What was your life like when you were young?
A: My father was a lawyer, but he never practiced law. He rented an agricultural estate from a Hungarian Count and worked on the estate. It was surrounded by a beautiful park and big trees. I was born in a castle, really, that belonged, of course, to the Count. It was a really big estate, and when I had to go to bed, we had to go through six or seven rooms before we got from the living room to the bedroom where I slept.

We were the only Jewish family in the village, and we were probably the richest. I felt very out of place because I played with the peasant kids and they always treated me a little bit differently. When we played, I don't know the English name for it, the game where one person has to catch the others who run away…[43] they let me win. They always let me catch them. I was the only one who didn't have a chance to lose.

Many of the other kids took their little brothers and little sisters along because they had to take care of them; they were the babysitters, and I envied them terribly. Until 5 years of age, I was alone. I have a brother who was born when I was 5 years old, and that's when everything changed; then I felt much better. I was a helper for my mother. I felt that he was also my baby.

I also envied the kids because they walked barefoot all summer long, but I didn't because they were afraid I would step on a piece of glass or something. So everybody treated me very differently. Those were my surroundings.

Q: What was it like to be the only Jewish family in the village? Did you practice your religion?
A: Well, not very much. My mother came from a Neolog Jewish family, and she was raised in a non-kosher household. But, my father came from a religious family and when they got married, my mother had to promise my grandmother, her mother-in-law, that she would lead a kosher household. She did it all for my father, and she did it very correctly. We were not allowed, for instance, to ride bicycles or cut with scissors on Saturdays. So I hated Saturdays.

My mother also lit candles on Sabbath evening, and she lit one for each of us—for my father, for herself and for the children. She also lit one for one of my father's cousins, who participated. We had a joint estate with this man, and since he didn't have a family, he asked my mother to light a candle for him, too.

[43] Ms. Hruza is referring to a game called "Tag."

So that's how it was. Of course, I envied the kids who went to the church on Sundays, and sometimes they took me with them. They had to ask my mother if she would let me go, but I loved to go to the church.

Q: Were there no synagogues?
A: No, no synagogues. For the big holidays, a rabbi would come and use the school as a synagogue. It was a public school, but they still let him use it. There weren't many people who attended, of course, because we were the only Jewish family in the area. There was a little village nearby, and there were only two Jewish families there, so they came, too.

Q: Where did you go to school?
A: In my village, we had only two classrooms; four grades to a classroom, one for first to fourth grade, and the other for fifth to eighth grade. My parents, though, wanted to get me into another school so that I could get used to it before gymnasium. So I went to the fourth grade at a Jewish school in Prešov.[44] The city of Prešov, which was about 60 kilometers from our city, was where my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandparents were from. I went to school in there from 1934 until 1938.

Q: Was it a boarding school?
A: No. I lived with my grandparents, whom I adored. They were wonderful, so that was easy.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: The kids from other schools knew we were Jews only because we went to school on Sundays, not Saturdays. They used to scream obscenities at us like, "Stinky Jews," and all that. But it wasn't against just me; they usually screamed things when we were in a group. Sometimes we screamed some ugly words back at them. That was the first time I noticed anti-Semitism.

Q: Did it escalate?
A: Well, it didn't escalate because that was still Czechoslovakia, and it was a very democratic, humanistic country, so anti-Semitism wasn't allowed. But you know, kids would do it in the streets. Still, it didn't escalate.

Q: Do you remember what year that was?
A: That was in 1934, 1935.

As a matter of fact, my grandfather, who wasn't religious at all, used to tell me that I didn't have to be embarrassed or ashamed that I was Jewish because we came from a very old culture where people went to school and learned and wrote books; at the same time, the Christian kids could only do agriculture or something like that, and didn't even know how to read or write. So, I shouldn't be embarrassed.

Q: When did the impending war begin to affect you?
A: Well, in 1938, [Adolf] Hitler decided that he wanted part of Czechoslovakia. The Munich Conference took place and Czechoslovakia's allies, France and England, came to talk to [Benito] Mussolini and Hitler. We thought that war would start right away and that Czechoslovakia would begin a general mobilization.

Every man from ages 20 to 40 had to report to the army and my uncle (my grandparents' son), who was 36 and lived near Prešov, had to report. My grandmother was so very, very unhappy. She said, "My husband went to the First War, and I have to go through it again. He will be killed."

At the Munich Conference, they made an agreement, a treaty, in which they let part of Czechoslovakia go to Hitler so there would be no war. My grandmother was very happy about it when she heard and said, "My son is coming back, my son is coming back! Wonderful!" And he really did come back, of course there was demobilization. I remember how my grandmother said to him, "Oh, I am so happy! I don't care

[44] Prešov is a city in eastern Slovakia.

what happens to the Sudetenland,[45] but we won't have war, and you are at home again." And he said, "I'm not happy at all, and we are very unhappy and upset about it because Hitler won't stop with this part alone; he will want all of Czechoslovakia. And I would rather die on the front than live through this."

Then things went very, very fast. In October 1938, after the Sudetenland was taken and occupied, Slovakia wanted to get away from Czechoslovakia and be its own country. A Catholic priest, Josef Tiso, who was extremely anti-Semitic, became the president of Slovakia. And then, because Hungary was Hitler's ally, he rewarded Hungary with the southern part of Slovakia.

I couldn't stay in the Slovakian school because all of the sudden, there was a border between the town where my grandparents lived and my village, so I went home. But of course, I couldn't go to school there because I was already in gymnasium, in high school, so they sent me to a school in Budapest, where my mother's best friend lived, and I lived with her. I loved it in Budapest, a big city and all. But they already had two anti-Jewish laws. Then, when this part of Slovakia was given to Hungary, Hungary's [Jewish population increased], so they made the anti-Jewish laws even stricter.

Q: Do you remember what those laws were?
A: There was a "6 % rule." In every workplace, only 6% of the employees could be Jews. And in every university, only 6% of the students could be Jewish. We were still safe; nobody got killed and nobody got deported, but there were these restrictions. Budapest, though, was a city with a lot of culture, and a large percentage of its Jews—much larger than 6%—were playwrights, novelists, actors, filmmakers, owners of factories and companies, and so on. If you went to a concert—a classical concert, I don't mean a concert like it denotes today—the audience was mainly Jews. Doctors were also primarily Jewish. Budapest's entire financial element and also its artistic component mainly consisted of Jews.

So life went on in Budapest, and I enjoyed it. I came from a village, a small town, and in Budapest there were theaters, concerts, operas, exhibitions, museums and so many opportunities. I loved it. I was just drinking it in. I loved Budapest. Luckily, this was before the Germans came. The people were not anti-Semitic; they didn't treat us differently. I loved it.

Everything went fine until I finished high school. I couldn't go to the university; I couldn't get in due to the 6% rule. So I went to a one-year school that taught students how to be both children's nurses and kindergarten teachers. I graduated, and I thought, I'll get a job; I can go to a kindergarten or to a children's hospital.

Q: Did you still respect *Shabbat* when you were living in Budapest with your mother's best friend?
A: No, not in Budapest. My mother's friend didn't do it, so I didn't either. And by that time, even my mother had stopped keeping a kosher household because things had changed so much. We moved to another town. Everything was scarce and we ate what we could buy, even if it was not kosher. My father agreed with this because of the situation. It was war.

On March 19, 1944, all of a sudden, Budapest was occupied by the Germans. Immediately, we got a telegram from my father stating, "Children, we expect you home immediately." We picked up our bags and went to the railroad station, but they wouldn't let us in; they asked us for some proof that we were not Jewish, and we didn't have anything, so we stayed in Budapest.

We found out later that the deportations had started toward the end of April. On June 5, it was written in the papers, "There are no more Jews in the countryside." Our parents had been deported, and that was it. We never saw them again.

Q: Did you know where they were sent?
A: No, not until after the war. Afterward, we learned that my mother was killed in Auschwitz. We heard many, many years later that my father had died in Buchenwald.

[45] Sudetenland is the German name used in the first half of the 20th century for the western regions of Czechoslovakia inhabited mostly by ethnic Germans called Sudeten Germans. The name derived from the Sudeten Mountains.

We stayed in Budapest with this friend, and with the certificate I had earned, I went to babysit for a doctor. Then, some houses were marked with Yellow Stars and Jews were only allowed to live in those houses, one family per room; it was pretty crowded. Our house became a Yellow Star house and two more families, our neighbors, moved in. We were still able to live because I had my salary; I was the breadwinner in our family, which was two families, really.

What was hard at the time was that we had those air raids twice a day, at 11:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. We didn't have a real shelter; it was a subterranean store only about three steps under the surface, so it wasn't very safe. If we had been hit by a bomb, nobody would have survived, and that was a little scary. But at the same time, we knew that on the Russian front, the Germans were retreating. We just waited for the Russians because we thought that they would be our liberators.

During this time, we heard about [Raoul] Wallenberg. We knew who he was and that he was giving out those protective passports. We considered it, thinking maybe we should go there. But we couldn't go because people had to stand in a line, which was very long. Sometimes people went the night before to get a place in line, but I don't really know how they did that because Jews were only allowed to leave their houses between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Otherwise, we had to stay inside. We were locked in for 21 hours every day. Anyway, we decided that we didn't know what would await us. We just didn't know. We had no idea what would happen to us. We had been bombed, but we thought that the war would be over soon. So we didn't go, we didn't ask for protective passports.

Q: How did you hear about Raoul Wallenberg? Did other families mention him?
A: Well, yes, some other families mentioned him. Also, there was the Jewish Gemeinde, an association that had a weekly newspaper, and they wrote about that. Of course, they had to be very careful of what they wrote about. And then, October 15 came.

October 15 started out very well because the regent of Hungary, [Miklós] Horthy, proclaimed that he was making a separate peace treaty with the Soviet Union. He stated that they would bring home all of the Hungarian soldiers from the Russian front, and that the inhuman treatment against the Jews was against his will and that all the laws and illegalities against Jews were to be stopped immediately. All he could do was save the Budapest Jews; he couldn't do anything about the country Jews. So, we all went outside of the Jewish houses and we hugged each other. And the Christians, who did not wear the Yellow Stars, came and tore them off of us and said, "It is shameful what we did to you, and you will never wear this Yellow Star again." Everybody was happy, and everything was okay.

Then, in the afternoon, there was another proclamation. It was from [Ferenc] Szálasi, the ultra-Nazi who led a party [the Arrow Cross] that was, perhaps, even worse than the German Nazi party. He announced that they had arrested the traitor Horthy, and that everything was back to how it had been, except that he was introducing new laws against the Jews which, of course, started immediately. The women between the ages of 16 and 40 and all men between the ages of 16 and 60 had to report for work. We fell into this category.

Q: How old were you?
A: I was not quite 20.

We reported for work. At first, we said, "Well, we can work. We are strong. We will do whatever we can." But, then, they sent us on our way and we had to reach the first destination, a Budapest airport. It started to rain, and we were all soaked. Our backpacks were soaked; they were very heavy and we wanted to rest. But they said, "No, no, no. You have to go." We thought, okay, we will get to the airport and we will have a roof over our heads, and we will take off all the wet stuff and dry it somehow.

Finally, we got there. We saw the building and we had to go inside a gate. The rain hadn't stopped and because the roof was gone (it had been bombed away), we were still being rained on. We went upstairs and it was so tight that we had to stand. We stood there all night with the rain accumulating around our feet, and that was it. That was the first night. Later, we got used to it.

Q: Were you expected to work?
A: At first, we dug traps against the Russians, which was hard work, very hard work. I wasn't used to that kind of work, and I also used to be very thin; I was a very bad eater. When we would go on school trips out in nature somewhere, they would always leave me at home because they said, "You won't be able to go up this hill." I was always very unhappy about it.

We had to walk farther and we always slept outside. It was the end of October or November. We dug tank traps, but then the Russians got too close so we were marched back to Budapest. Eventually, we ended up in the brick factory.

Q: Can you tell me about the brick factory?
A: Well, it had a roof, but it didn't have any walls because they dried the bricks there. It was full of people and not just the people from our original group, but many others from Budapest as well. People were sitting there on their backpacks. We had to go upstairs again and it was dark; we couldn't even see when we stepped on somebody. We spent the night there. We thought that we had already gone through so much, but at least there we had a roof over our heads. Still, it was very windy.

The next day, we continued on the death march, as they called it, when they sent us on our way to Austria. We dragged ourselves along, so it wasn't really a march, but we weren't allowed to stop. Again, everything was the same. It was November and we slept outside. We got to eat every other day and we didn't get any water. We only got the water that came from the rain, and it was raining almost constantly. Then the worst part started when we all got dysentery. It was just running out of us. We weren't allowed to sit down and relieve ourselves; we had to march. So, really, our blood and liquids were just running down our legs. And we kept marching.

Then, this fantastic thing happened. We were about one week into our march when this car pulled up next to us. It was a diplomatic car with a little Swedish flag. I was somewhat close to it and I thought to myself, this is a Swedish car; that must be Wallenberg. He got out and he had a huge canvas bag with him. He put it down on the side of the road and said in German, "I am Raoul Wallenberg, and I brought you some unclaimed Schutz-Passes. Please look at them and distribute them the best you can. God bless you, and good luck." And everybody cried. It was so fantastic. It was as if an angel had come over.

At the next stop, we distributed the Schutz-Passes, but of course, not to everybody. I was so lucky that I got one. We got a pair of Schutz-Passes for a mother and daughter about our ages. From there, we told the guard, "We have passes; we cannot be deported." He said that at the end of the march, they would examine the papers. So we marched for another week, but somehow, there was such a difference because we said, "Oh, this will come to an end and we have these papers in our hands." Finally, we got to the border.

There was a room with an Arrow Cross supervisor. In the yard, there were two or three trucks with Red Cross signs on them, so we knew, "Oh, they are here to take us home and we have these papers." We stood in line and I thought, "I survived, I survived. If my parents survived, as I have, then everything will be okay." We got closer and closer and I held tight to the Schutz-Pass. I handed it to the man when it was my turn, and he looked at it and tore it apart. I didn't know why. I thought that maybe they knew that it was not my name, but it was because that Schutz-Pass had been issued after October 15. By then, Szálasi was in power, and he didn't accept those papers. Those who had papers issued earlier could go home on the trucks. We had to continue marching.

Then, something happened and I know now what it was and why. We got through the border to Austria, which was then Germany. That was the first time that I started to get really desperate. I thought, "Why? Why do I do this? Why do I go and march and drag myself?" My feet hurt because they were full of blisters from the marching, and I thought that it would be much easier if I let myself be shot. Then it would be over. I started to look for a convenient place to sit down because they shot everybody who sat down, no questions asked. While looking, I heard my mother's voice. At that time, I didn't know about hallucinations, but she was talking to me, and she said, "Oh, sweetheart, don't do that. You will survive this and then there will be a time when you will talk about it with your children and your friends. This will

just be a very, very heavy piece of your life when you were 20, so don't throw it away." That was what I heard. So I calmed down because I knew my mother had never lied to me. I got back my strength and I thought, "Okay, as long as there is one other person still walking, I will be the second one still walking."

I think I had to go through these extremely desperate conditions and situations to get my strength back. I think Wallenberg helped me make it to the border in the first place because of the hope I had in the Schutz-Pass. I'll never forget him for that. Then, if I hadn't gone through these experiences, I wouldn't have been in such a condition that I could hallucinate. I had to get into such a condition that I could hear my mother.

Q: A lot of people we talk with say that one of the most important outcomes of meeting Raoul Wallenberg or knowing about his existence was this idea of hope, as you mentioned. It didn't matter if Wallenberg was absolutely responsible for their livelihood or not; he gave them the hope that they could be saved, or the knowledge that somebody cared about them.
A: Yes, it was fantastic.

Q: How was Raoul Wallenberg when you saw him? Do you remember him physically?
A: He was a young man; he was about 10 years older than I was. He was very sympathetic, and he was smiling.

I read a lot about Wallenberg later on. It is so unbelievable that he was so daring and that he was able to outsmart and achieve what he did with the SS. He was such a young man. And it had to be our liberators who got him.

I read a lot about how, later, it seemed that the entire world looked for Wallenberg and tried to get him back, but not Sweden. My daughter showed me an article about how his family got no help at all from the Swedish government. They didn't give his family any information. His family tried to get to the Swedish authorities, but they didn't want to get involved with the Russians. They said, "No, we are friends and we cannot." What the Russians told them, which were all lies, they just accepted. Sweden said, "Oh, he is okay, don't worry. He is alive, and they are working on it, and he will be back."

When I lived in Sweden, I was also very much surprised when I told people, "I love your country because the greatest person in the world is your Raoul Wallenberg," and most of the younger people didn't know about him at all.

Q: Did you see his driver? He usually went everywhere with his driver.
A: No, his driver stayed in the car. Wallenberg got out on the right-hand side.

Q: How did you get out of Austria?
A: First, they put us in Kőszeg, a slave labor camp on the Hungarian-Austrian border, and we were there for four months. We got used to everything, but the worst was the lice. When you wore knitted wool garments, like t-shirts or sweaters, they would make nests in the seams. Every evening, when we came back from digging, we had to kill them, and we counted them. I was once the winner because I killed 212 lice. But we got used to it.

Somehow, we even got used to the work because we learned how to make believe and just go through the motions. But some terrible things happened there, too.

One day, they called us so they could count us. Everybody had to be there, and they always counted us once, twice, and there was always a mistake. On this day, the guard went to the barracks and said, "Everybody out, everybody out." In one barrack, there was a doctor, a young man, who was taking care of somebody. This doctor had to amputate the leg of a prisoner, and he was busy operating. The guard said, "You, too. You, get out. [The patient] doesn't have to, but you, get out." The doctor said, "I am almost ready, but I have to stop the bleeding here." The guard said, "Okay, I'll give you a choice. You either come out as you were told, or I let you finish, and then I shoot you." The doctor didn't even look up; he kept operating. I was very close to what was happening, so I heard it all. We stayed outside, praying with all

our hearts, “Oh my God, don’t let him, don’t let him. Please save him; don’t let him be shot.” And then we heard the shot and he was dead. I haven’t prayed since.

I decided that I would become a doctor. I don't think I would be brave enough to do what that doctor did, but I thought that doctors must have known a secret that we didn't. They always behaved in a certain way, even on those marches. Whenever we made it through a night, people would always come and put up a Red Cross flag. They couldn't do too much, perhaps clean some wounds, and they ran out of everything they had. They would say, “Oh, you will be okay. Try this…” and I just thought, I have to find out what that secret is. So I became a doctor. Both my children are doctors.

After four months, they evacuated this camp as well, and in March and April, sent us on a 17-day death march through the Austrian hills. We slept outside as always, which, in the mountains, is severe. Many people never woke up; they froze to death.

One day, before we got to a very steep hill, they gave us a fantastic meal. It was a very thick soup and quite a generous piece of bread. I ate the soup and hid my bread for when times got worse. Then, we went up the hill, which was really hard work to climb. When we were almost to the top, we heard a lot of shots. We were used to hearing individual shots, from when somebody sat down or something and was killed, but these were uninterrupted machine guns—*ra-ta-ta-ta*. We didn’t know where they were coming from.

We got to the top of the hill and we started to descend a winding road, into the valley of Eisenerz,[46] when we realized what was happening down the hill. We saw a lot of bleeding bodies and we stopped, but they screamed at us, “*Lass, lass, Sau Juden*,” which means, “Rush, rush, Jewish pigs.” On both sides of the road, there were guards who had their guns pointed at us and they were just shooting indiscriminately. We all thought the same thing (we later compared our experiences), which was that they wanted to get us here, on this mountain, where there were no houses, no witnesses and no interferences. There couldn’t have been a better place. They had given us food so we would have the strength to climb all the way, and now they were doing what we were afraid they would do the whole time—do away with us before the Americans or the Russians came to liberate us.

I was past being scared. I was sure that I was going to die and I had these thoughts that were not quite logical. I still remember them and I will never forget them. The first one was, “I will be dead and I will have a piece of bread in my pocket.” Another was, “I will be dead and I have never seen the sea. Then, the worst was, “I would like to take 20 more breaths. I have lived for 20 years and how many zillions of times have I taken a breath and never even given it a second thought? I would just like to take 20 more breaths, but I won’t because I will be dead.” Then I thought the last thought, “I don’t know how one dies, and now I will find out.” It was as if I were going for a test and I was not prepared.

We were running and jumping, trying not to jump on the bodies. We were just pressing together so nobody would get some guard’s attention, because if somebody was shot but did not lie down, they would come and shoot him again. [My friend] Anna fell over a body or over a backpack, and a man and I pulled her up so they wouldn’t see her lying there. She was full of blood; I asked her, “Did they shoot you?” and she said, “No, I just hit my face on something on the ground.” I took my bandana off, and I wiped her so they wouldn’t see her bleeding.

This lasted for 40 minutes before we got to the valley, where they stopped shooting and let us stay. They walked around and talked amongst themselves. Apparently, they just wanted to scare us because they said things like, “Oh, not yet; we will wait for dark.” But when night came, nothing happened.

We found out later that an SS soldier had gone by on a motorcycle and asked whether they had an order to shoot at us like that. One of the guards said, “Oh no, we are just having a little… they’re just Jews.

[46] Eisenerz is a market place and old mining town in Styria, Austria, situated in the deep Erzbach Valley. During World War II, a sub-camp of Mauthausen concentration camp was located here. It provided slave labor for local industry.

They have to go to Mauthausen, so we just thought that maybe they don't all have to get there." The soldier said, "No, not without an order. Don't do it. Stop it immediately."

That happened in 1945. Twenty years later, my brother, my children, and I were on our way from Vienna to Italy when I saw an arrow that read, "Eisenerz." I said, "Take me there. I have to see it," and my brother did. We went up the hill and he stopped. I got out of the car, and I walked around. I said, "Oh, it's wonderful." I could still hear what had happened in 1945, the screaming and all that, but I said, "But I am here and I can breathe more than 20 times. I can take as many breaths as I want."

Then we went down to the village of Eisenerz. It is a beautiful place, the mountains and all. We went to a little store to buy some cards and nobody else was inside, so the shopkeeper made small talk. "Oh, don't we have a beautiful place here?" he asked. "Is this your first visit?" I said, "It is the first time for my family, but I was here 20 years ago on my way to Mauthausen." He said, "Oh, I remember, I remember. Those were bad times during the war. We all suffered from the war." I said, "Well, in the valley it wasn't so bad, but what happened when we got up there…" and I told him that 250 people were killed there. He got very upset and he said, "That is a lie. Don't spread any Communist propaganda in my store. They may have killed one or two people who tried to run away, or maybe they killed them in Mauthausen, but not here in Eisenerz." I got so angry that I just wanted to scratch his eyes from his fat, pink face. My brother hugged me and said, "Don't do anything to make it worse," so I stopped and I just cried and cried and cried. We had looked for something, some memorial somewhere that noted what had happened there. After that, we understood why we didn't find one.

In 1993, somebody sent me a Hungarian newspaper clipping that said a man named Michael Zuzanek, from Austria, was looking for survivors of the Austrian death marches because he wanted to make a documentary. He wanted to get in touch with people who were willing to go back to death march locations and talk about their experiences in front of the camera. I immediately wrote to him and told him what I went through and that I would be more than happy to go back to those places and tell the world what had happened. He and his two colleagues immediately came to New York to see me, and they stayed for about a week. Every day, we talked about what had happened. He would show me pictures and I would show him where we had been. Then, in the spring of 1993, they invited me to Austria and they took me to all those places, and I told them again what it had been like.

About five years later, I got a letter from the students at a school, a gymnasium, in Austria who had seen the documentary and decided that a memorial or monument should be erected. They went to the mayor of Eisenerz and showed him the movie and said that something should be done about it. They started an action and the mayor called the mayors from neighboring villages and towns, and they decided they really should do something. They created a competition for the memorial's design and it was won by an organization called "Angry Youths Against Violence and Racism." Then, they started advertising in the newspaper that they were looking for people from the neighboring villages who remembered what had happened, and would like to take part in the action to erect a monument. They got people together and many of them wrote about their memories.

They invited me to the unveiling of this monument. It was a big celebration. Beforehand, they had sent me a list of 30 questions about my life before, during, and after the war, and a German teacher used my responses to write a performance that was part recitation, part musical, and part symbolic movements. This performance was presented by children at the unveiling. There were a lot of speeches given too. It was wonderful. It was a fantastic thing.

The program started at the point where we had been given the food before climbing the hill in 1945, and we walked the same route. I was the one who started the march, and a man took my hand, and he said, "Now you will say, 'Rush, rush.' You tell them." Those who couldn't walk were taken up by car. We went up, and the young people overtook us; they overtook me, at least, because I wasn't 20 years old anymore. After a while, I had to stop and catch my breath, and a car came to pick me up. Cars were cruising there to pick up people who could not walk anymore. I was the one to unveil the memorial, and it was beautiful. I'll show you the pictures. It was really wonderful.

Q: That's a great ending. I hope the shop owner was invited and saw it.
A: When we made the movie, the man who wrote it wanted to go to the shop, but I didn't know which house it was—I had been there so many years before that I couldn't find him.

Q: From which camp were you liberated?
A: The last camp we occupied was Gunskirchen. I wrote down my remembrances of the day of liberation and I sent it to the 71st Division of the U.S. Army, which had liberated me. Somehow, they found me, perhaps because I wrote a lot, and a man called me and said that they were having a reunion of the 71st Division and they would like me to come. I couldn't attend because I had to be somewhere else, I think a family member of mine was graduating, so I wrote and told him what I remembered about our liberation. They made a poster of what I had written and they put it up at the reunion so everybody could read it. After that, a lot of them wrote me and I got a lot of letters saying how happy they were, because after what they had seen in Gunskirchen—where they couldn't tell who was alive and who was dead (mostly the people were dead)—they couldn't believe that one of those people had turned out to be a normal person. When they found out that I have a family and a career and that I've seen the sea, they were so grateful to me and I became their mascot. Many of them have since died.

Q: You mentioned that you went back to Eisenerz with your brother. How did he survive?
A: My brother was wonderful. He was 15 years old and he didn't really have to report for work because he wasn't 16. But, they came to get people from the houses, and they came to our apartment because the super told them that a young boy lived there. They came and we said, "He's 15; he doesn't have to go," but they said, "Oh, we don't want to see any papers," and they took him.

My brother told me afterward that in the camp, they would put the prisoners in a row, and every tenth prisoner had to step out and was shot. Luckily, my brother wasn't shot, but he decided that he would run away, and he did. He didn't have any papers, so I think he stole somebody's Christian Baptist certificate. Nobody would have thought that my brother was Jewish, but he took these papers and reported to a refugee center in Budapest. There were many non-Jewish refugees who, as the front approached from the east, went to this refugee center. My brother told them that he was from such and such a town (which was a lie), and that, running from the Russians, he had come to Budapest with his parents and their train had been bombed. (He found out which train had been bombed a few years before and gave the name of that train.) He said that both his parents had been killed and that now he was there alone, and that he didn't have any money or anything; that he just had this paper they had given him, which he was told he should always have with him, and he had nowhere to go. They said okay, and they gave him some papers that assigned him to a factory where he was to work. They also let him rent a room in which to stay.

He went to the factory and he started working, and everything was okay. But, he had kept his old papers and some letters from our parents, and one Sunday afternoon, he was sitting in his little room going through the papers and looking at the pictures, and the landlady came in for something, and she said, "Oh, do you have some pictures? Let me see, let me see. I am curious to see pictures." She looked at them, which were in an envelope with a letter, and she looked at the envelope and said, "So, this is your name? So, you are not such and such? Oh, you must be a Jew." And he said, "No, no, not really." But she opened the window and called out to the street, "Brothers, brothers, come. I caught a Jew for you."

The men came in, took my brother's Jewish papers, and brought him to the headquarters of Szálasi (the ultra-Nazi), where nobody ever came out alive. Of course, he was terribly frightened. The guards took him to a higher officer and handed over the Jewish papers. As the officer examined them, another guard brought in a bunch of men who they said were deserters (if you weren't Jewish and were between the ages of 16 and 60, you had to be in the army). Somehow, my brother got mixed in with the deserters, and when it was his turn to go before the officer, he took out his certificate and said, "Brother, this other brother didn't believe that I'm not 16, but I'm not 16 yet, so I was brought here by mistake." The officer looked at the certificate and said, "You are right, brother. You don't belong here." He took him out to the guard in front of his office and said, "Take this boy downstairs and let him go because he was brought here by mistake." Then, of course, he couldn't go back to where he lived, and he couldn't go back to the

factory, so he went through the whole thing again at another refugee center and they sent him somewhere else to work.

Q: How did you reunite with your brother?
A: Well, we were liberated on May 4 and before I got back to Budapest on August 15, we were in a displaced persons' camp. Somehow, there were negotiations between the Russians and the Americans about who would take care of the camp. Finally, the Russians took it over. They marched us toward Budapest. We were starving, sleeping outdoors and exposed to the elements. They [threatened] to shoot us if we tried to escape. Anna and I succeeded in running away and arrived in Budapest in August of 1945.

We got to Vienna, where the joint commission took care of us and put us on a train to Budapest, where we arrived late in the evening. We first went to see Anna's ex-mother-in-law, who wasn't Jewish and who she thought had probably survived. She was very happy to see us and, of course, Anna asked about her son, who was only a few years old. Her ex-mother-in-law said, "He's okay, he's fine." He was in an orphanage, so he survived. I asked about my brother, and she said, "Oh, yes, he is okay. He is fine. Sometimes we have him over for dinner, and we help him." My brother was only 15 but he worked, repairing the electricity in people's dorms and houses. Money was of no worth because of the inflation, but they gave him bread or salami or stuff like that for his [services]. She said, "We take care of him a little sometimes because he has no parents." I just let that go. I thought I must have misheard her. I thought that perhaps she had said that his parents were not yet home.

The interesting thing is that I forgot that I had heard her say he had no parents. (I recall it now.) My brother told me he hadn't heard anything about our parents, so I insisted that we go every day to the rail station where the trains came in, bringing the survivors. Then, after a while, we looked at each other and said, "No, I don't want to go anymore," because it was always just a disappointment. So we stopped. We thought that if they were alive, we would hear from them.

So, my brother went home to our town. He went to our house, but the people who had moved in wouldn't let him inside. He said, "I don't want anything. I would just like to find some pictures or some letters or something from my parents," and they said, "No, they're not yours anymore. The pictures and the letters, everything is ours," and they wouldn't let him in. He went out to my mother's garden and put some soil in his handkerchief and brought it back with him. I never went back there; I couldn't.

Q: How did you arrive to America?
A: We moved into Anna's place because she went to live with her sister, who had come back from Russia. Anna's sister and brother-in-law had lived in the Soviet Union since World War I, and he was in a very, very high position after the war. He changed his name so Anna never knew that the minister of transportation was her brother-in-law. We came home and we had nothing to wear, and all of a sudden Anna went to live in a very fancy mansion. So when Anna left, my brother and I moved into her old apartment.

One day, my brother came home and gave me a registration paper, a certificate, for an American school in Budapest. I asked, "How did you do that?" and he answered, "Well, I took your papers and I registered you." I said, "No, you can't do that. How will we live? What will we live off of?" and he replied, "Come on, how do we live? Now we will live like kings if you compare it to what we went through. So don't worry." He didn't want me talking about it. "So now you are a doctor," he said. That's how I started.

Then, one year later, my father's youngest brother said he and his two sisters who had survived were in Prague, and that we should go there so that our family would be together. This brother had disappeared before the war started and nobody knew where he had been. It turned out that he was a Czechoslovakian soldier with the headquarters in London. It was an illegal army, but he had gone there and had fought.

We went to Czechoslovakia and I continued at the university in Slovakia, but there were so many anti-Semites that I could not stand it. Eventually, I transferred to the university in Prague, which was good because I found my dear husband there, and I had my two children there. Later, it got a little difficult to

live there because it was such a dictatorship. It was not as bad as the Nazis were, but you know, if somebody wanted your apartment, they would just report you, saying that you were listening to the BBC. Then you would be arrested and thrown out of your job and your apartment. It was very hard, and we didn't want the children to grow up there. Most of the intellectuals, doctors, and engineers were very unhappy there and always talked about getting out somehow.

My husband was invited to New York for research. I took our kids (15 and 11 at that time) to Sweden and waited for three and a half years for our visas for the USA. We learned Swedish, my children went to school, I got a Swedish medical license, and in 1970 we arrived in the United States.

Q: How do you feel about telling your stories to your family and other young people?
A: It is interesting that, until I moved to Sweden, I couldn't speak about my experiences—not because I didn't want to, but because in the Communist states, they said, "Oh, come on. We have heroes of Communism who did something. You just went as sheep; you didn't do anything." We heard that and we all suffered. Somehow, it wasn't decent to talk about it, so I didn't. Of course, I talked with my friends and my family about it. But when I got to Sweden, somebody I'd become friends with once asked me, "Listen, I don't know if I should ask you or not. I understand if you don't want to talk, but could you tell me how you survived, and how it was?" I said, "No, I can't tell you," but I started to talk, and I couldn't stop, like now. I found out that it's therapeutic for me and then, after what happened to me in Eisenerz with the shopkeeper, I feel that it's a relief for me to talk about it. Now, I have become obsessed, thinking, "How long will I be able to talk? How long will I be alive?" It's like an obsession. I have to. And whenever anybody calls me, I'm glad to speak about it.

I talk with eighth and ninth graders at schools and I say, "I just want to tell you what it was like for somebody who came from a really pampered environment, surrounded with love, to suddenly be thrown into the dead." Even worse, I don't dream about what happened to me, but I dream a lot about my mother. Whenever I think about it, I just have to cry.

My daughter is quite active as a second-generation survivor and she also speaks at schools. My grandchildren are also very much interested. It's a part of me.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?
A: I have some habits that remain from the time of my Holocaust experience. For instance, whenever I know I will be traveling by car for several hours, I have to take a piece of bread with me. I can never leave without a piece of bread. Then, there is another thing: If I'm outside and the weather is terrible, raining and windy, and I'm wet and cold, I get very elated because I know that in a few minutes I will be inside, and it will be dry and safe, beautiful and warm. And there's something else: Whenever something happens to me that could make me depressed, I find myself counting my breaths, and I know that I can take as many breaths as I want. With the time I have left, I am doing and making and learning what I want to. It is terrible that I lost my family, but I have such a wonderful new family. So I am a really happy person.

Interview with Kayla Kaufman

Q: What is your birth name?
A: Leifer. It is my father's name. I was born in Ukraine on July 12, 1935, which makes me 71 years old. It is Kayla Kaufman now.

Q: What is your married name?
A: My first married name was Grosz; the second was Kaufman; the third was Etzyon. But, I stayed with Kaufman because my publishers feel that Kay Kaufman, the name under which I write, is a better byline. But Kayla is my name, from the Hebrew Chayala.

Q: What city were you born in?
A: I was born in a little town called Khust.[47] This is in Ukraine.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I basically grew up in Budapest. I came to Budapest in 1940, and we were there until the end [of the war], until 1945.

Q: Who did you live with?
A: I lived with my mom and dad. I was the oldest child of four. I was 9 in 1944. My sister was 6, my other sister was 2 ½, and my baby brother was two months old.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: Yes, Budapest was a very Jewish community. My father was a rabbi, and we were Hasidic Jews. My mother wore a wig; my father wore a beard and a *shtreimel*. They were very Hasidic. My family was very religious before, during, and after the war, as we all are today.

Q: What kind of school did you attend?
A: Interestingly enough, I attended a Hebrew school that was Reform. The reason was that my mother was very modern. She was a Viennese woman and when we went to investigate the Jewish Orthodox School, she didn't like the behavior of the kids there. They were too boisterous. She said, "I am not sending my daughter there." So I went to a Reform Hebrew school.

Q: How did you learn your Jewish customs and Jewish religion?
A: In the home. I learned everything that I know in the home, from my mom and dad.

Q: What activities were you involved with before the war?
A: I ate a lot of candy, went to school, played the piano, took dancing lessons; stuff like that.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: You hear little things. The first time I noticed in 1942, it was as if a bomb had been dropped, when we went to visit my father's mother in Khust, and the deportation began. The night before my grandmother was taken, we heard screaming from neighbors who were being deported. I remember my grandmother sitting up in her bed and crying to my father, "Moishele," she begged, "What should I do?" He could do nothing. It was over for her and her family. The next morning, [the Nazis] came. She could not hide because they knew exactly who and how many [people] were living in each house. Also, she was a Polish citizen and they were taken first. My father, mother, and we kids hid in the attic even though we had papers as Hungarian citizens. But, they could become void at any moment and we did not know if they

[47] Khust is a city located on the Khustets River in western Ukraine. In 1861, Rabbi Moshe Moses Shick established what was, at that time, the largest yeshiva (Torah academy) in Eastern Europe, in Khust.

were still valid in 1942. Later that morning, we heard my grandmother screaming, begging the Nazis not to kill her children: a 14-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter. Then they were gone. We don't even know where they were buried. My father would have been very happy to know where their graves were. Imagine, being happy with a grave. There is no grave. We don't know when they were killed. That was the beginning of my knowledge of the Holocaust. Then you put it away, because you need to go on to the next day. I figured we were going to go home and things would be okay there. Which, of course they were not. That was the beginning, 1942; I was not quite 7 at the time.

Q: How did you first hear about what was happening to the Jewish people?
A: I personally did not. I began hearing about it after we were liberated by the Russians, and we came to the American sector in Austria. I am sure my father knew more, but he certainly didn't tell us. When you are that young and someone says, "6 million," what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. I knew my grandmother was gone. I had no idea what 6 million was. I don't think I even totally comprehend it today.

Q: What were your thoughts?
A: It was a combination of things. For a little kid (this was 1945, and I was almost 10), here I was now in the American sector of Austria. I spoke German. There were new people I had to get to know. There were old people I had to get to re-know. The war was over. I had to forget about the hunger, the horrific fear. Then I had to get up in the morning and learn not to be frightened. We had to relearn to put on pajamas, to brush our teeth, because during the Holocaust in Budapest, when the bombs came, we never took off our clothes. You had so much to learn that you really couldn't process it all. It took years and years for me to process it. And as we speak, have I really processed it? God only knows.

Q: What other changes did you experience?
A: I went from a having a serene childhood to becoming this frightened little girl. Every morning I would get up with this pit in my stomach. And when you're a kid, you can't explain it. When you are a grown-up, you still can't explain it. It really never goes away. It just doesn't go away. Until today, not every morning, but until today it will be there because you almost feel at home with that pit in your stomach. That is what you know; you don't know anything else. Of course, again, until today, I will not go out without some food in my bag for fear of starvation. I cannot pass a policeman on the street without saying to myself, "I have done nothing wrong; I have nothing to be afraid of." That started way back then and goes on until today. Good legacy, Hitler.

Q: How did the war affect your family's religious and cultural traditions?
A: We were and are a very closely connected, strong family. It's probably one of the reasons we survived. We were one of the few families whose immediate family came out whole. We kept the religion as if it were an oxygen source, as if it were a shelter, just to keep us going to the next day. My father never, ever blamed God. He taught us that it wasn't God who brought us this cataclysm; humanity allowed this to happen. Today they allow Darfur; then they allowed the Holocaust. Today, even though you see the horrors on TV every morning and every night in full color, how many [people] are doing anything? We eat our burgers, go to movies, buy cars, boats and houses. We are busy; too busy to notice. We must never ever blame God. People allow bad things to happen.

Q: How did you and your family manage to keep your religious traditions during the war?
A: There is a law in the Jewish religion that says the preservation of life is the only thing that matters when in danger. You can eat on *Yom Kippur*, and you can travel on *Shabbat* if your life is at stake. There were many times when we found food that was not kosher, but we ate it to save our lives. Many times we could not even observe the lighting of the *Shabbat* candles because there were no candles to be found. But, we carried the religion in our hearts. We felt two things: either we would survive and continue the religion, or we won't survive, and God will know that we carried the religion in our hearts. So one way or another, it was inside us. That was the strongest source that kept us going—our faith, our belief in God.

Q: Was your family divided at any point during the war?
A: Other than my father, who was taken to labor camp in 1944, thank God, we were never separated. The Germans came into Budapest in 1944 and he was taken soon after, I believe in March or April. Five of us

stayed together. My mother found a place in the Red Cross that was safe for the Jews for about two and a half minutes. When my father was taken, it became terribly difficult for us, as we felt we lost our protector, our father. He was the anchor of our lives. Strong, determined, tall, and very handsome. It was very, very difficult.

Q: Do you know where was your father taken to?
A: I don't know. Most Holocaust survivors, as my father, did not talk about their experiences. It was just too much to remember, to deal with. I started to talk about it because I will soon be gone, and then who will tell my story? My father never told us the name of the labor camp, which was really a concentration camp because they worked you to death and when you were over, the next batch of Jews came in. Very easy. Enough Jews left. What is the big deal?

Q: Can you tell me the role the Red Cross played in helping you, your mother, and your siblings?
A: We were supposed to go to the ghetto in Budapest. The Germans were very clever; they said, "We'll take you to a place where all Jews will be together. It's going to be 'real cool.' You will all be in one place. You will not experience any anti-Semitism." So a lot of people went. But my mother had this sixth sense; it just did not seem right to her. Even then, she didn't like the word ghetto. She started looking for some place to go, to hide, and she found that the Red Cross was run by a friend of ours from better days. For the moment, it was a safe place. But by the time we asked for admission, it was already overcrowded. My mother offered to wash floors to get in; this from a woman who never picked up a broom. With our friends' persuasion, they took us in and that saved us from the ghetto, which we later learned [was where] the death march to Auschwitz began.

Q: When did you first hear about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: You are in a hospital and you are very sick and someone injects you with something. You wake up and feel fine. Then, maybe six, seven years later you realize what saved you was penicillin. Raoul Wallenberg was our Penicillin.

My dad was in the labor camp. He was very sick with kidney failure and was on the way to be annihilated. He was a rabbi, and most of the people in the camp knew him. Raoul Wallenberg came into the camp and my father later told me he was very tall and very good looking and had this magic, this charisma, about him. He came in with his entourage, walked to the side with the healthier men, and started giving them Schutz-Passes, which were the ticket to life for the moment. Everything in those days was for the moment. My father was on the other side, the sick men's side. Raoul was about to leave when some men pointed to my father and told Raoul's interpreters to take care of that man; he is a rabbi. For some reason, my dad told me later, the Germans allowed Raoul to do as he pleased, perhaps due to diplomatic immunity. So Raoul gave my father papers as well. My dad told the interpreter that he had a wife and four kids someplace in Budapest, but the last time he tried to contact them, they were no longer living at the old address. He did not know that we had moved to the Red Cross.

Through some wonderfully brave Jews who had infiltrated the Nazi regime, they miraculously found us after several weeks of searching. One Friday morning, they came to the Red Cross—Nazi uniforms and all—and knocked at the gate, which horrified us, but we had to let them in. They then explained that they were Jews who had come to take the Leifer family to a [Swedish] safe-house. My mother was summoned. She was told that our father was safe and that we had to be taken in shifts to him so as not to cause attention. At 5:30 they would come to take her, my 6-year-old sister and 2-month-old brother. And, at 7:30, they would come to get me and my 2-year-old sister. My mother protested, wanting to be taken last, but they insisted that she come first because should something happen, my father was too sick to care for anyone. At 5:30, as planned, they came and took my mother, sister, and brother. They told us to be ready at 7:30 when they would return for us. 7:30 came. No Nazis. The clock kept ticking, 8:00, 8:30, 9:00; still no Nazis. I think it was at that point in my life that the permanent stamp of fear became a part of me. I just lost my mother, had no father, and here I was, with a two-year-old for whom I was totally responsible. What if something happened to me? I saw that my sister was becoming frightened, so I had to push down the fear and put on that calm, everything–will–be–okay smile. That was also when I learned how to suppress fear. It was now 9:30; was it over for the two of us? At 10:30, they came.

It seems they ran into some trouble on the way over and were held up. My mom and dad did not know what had happened and why we were so late, and they figured the worst. It's interesting; talking about keeping the faith, it was Friday night and my father knew he had to make *Kiddush*, the Shabbat prayer over wine. My mother later told me that he stood for a very long time, waiting, praying for our safe arrival. After 11, he was about to begin *Kiddush* when in we walked. I have said this a million times; I have seen hundreds of movies, TV shows and such, and never, ever in my life have I seen such a torrential downpour of tears on a human being's face than when he saw us. He managed to finish the *Kiddush*, then he took a sip of wine, and stretched out his hands to embrace us. We ran to him and to my mother, baby brother, and sister, who, until then, seemed paralyzed, and joined in the family group hug. And we sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. This was Raoul Wallenberg's miracle.

Those six people he saved are now, *Baruch Hashem*, 159 souls. What I have been trying to find out for many years now, is how many are alive today because of Raoul's 100,000 souls saved? How many? One million? Two million? Who can design an algorithm to answer that question? This man, who was not Jewish, risked his own life so that he could save Jews. Because of that, and who knows of some other reasons, he disappeared.

Q: How old were you when you and your family were saved by Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I was not quite 9 years old because we were saved in June 1944, and I would turn 9 that July.

Q: Can you describe daily life in the safe houses?
A: The safe houses, I believe, were like [Swedish] property where the people possessing proper papers were safe. They were a row of tall apartment houses in a rather nice neighborhood of Budapest. Interestingly enough, my best friend, Tamar Gil-Ad, who lives in Jerusalem, was in one of these houses. We never knew of each other till we met in Israel.

At first we were able to live in the apartments, but when the bombing became too intense, we ended up in the basement shelters, where there were no bathrooms and we had to go upstairs to use the facilities. As the war intensified, the food and water became scarcer.

Everybody was given a corner. We slept on blankets on the floor. All day, there was nothing to do. There were only emergency lights so reading was difficult, if not impossible. Because there were so many people, the space was tight. Many were crying, some from hunger, some from fear. The babies didn't cry anymore. Some people, due to the overcrowding, did not get along, while others truly went out of their way to help each other. Many, not only the religious, kept praying for the Messiah. I remember going upstairs to the bathroom one day and sort of peeking around the corner, sure that I would see the Messiah. Of course, he never came. Instead, 6 million of his souls perished. And he still did not come.

At times, we had someone come in with some soup and old bread, but this was not often. That was why there was starvation. There was also sickness. Once in a while, we would get a treat of good bread and some fruit, but it was so very, very seldom. We all knew that Raoul did the best he could. As for clothing, most of us had brought a change of clothes with us, which we washed whenever possible due to the bombings and the shortage of water.

As the Nazis shipped more and more rations to the front, starvation became rampant and people began dying. Every morning, we woke up and more bodies had to be dealt with. I was 9 years old. I was one of the strong ones, so I was on body duty, helping to drag the dead upstairs to the courtyard and pile them up like logs of wood. When I went to the bathroom, I would see those bodies and would have to say to myself, "No, no, no, don't let that get into your head now. You have to go to the bathroom and then go downstairs again, where you will be safe." Today, if I see a dead mouse, I totally freak. The mind has this way of learning how not to deal with things it cannot handle at the moment. It's our instinctual way to survive. Later on, I did have to deal with it. With the dead, the sick, the terror, the bombs. It often is in my head, until this very moment, unfortunately.

Q: In addition to reuniting your family and providing shelter, Wallenberg gave you Schutz-Passes. Can you describe them for me?
A: These were papers. A Schutz-Pass is an actual passport or a piece of paper that says you are a citizen of that country. I have never seen them. I know it was the most important document those Jewish people owned. Even today's survivors feel that our papers are our tickets to life. I know that when the time nears for my passport to expire, oh my God, talk about a pit in my stomach. How would I travel? How would I run to safety? All survivors guard their papers with their lives. Nothing else matters.

I am sure that my father had kept those Schutz-Passes someplace. The fact that the documents were good enough to release some Jews from the cattle cars is all that I know. All those rescued ended up in the Safe-houses and waited for the war to be over.

Until today, I don't know if my father and family were rescued under our name or some other. Again, I am so terribly sorry that I never pressed my dad to tell me more about his experiences, especially with Raoul Wallenberg. There was just so much going on in my life; new things to learn; old things to forget. I guess most of us kids who survived were terrified to ask. We were afraid. Would we find a box full of treasures or skeletons? Today we know better. No matter what, you should always seek the truth.

Q: Do you know how they were created and distributed?
A: I read that it was Raoul Wallenberg who created these documents that looked very official, almost domineering. I believe the emblem was printed in blue ink. I can't recall reading about the other colors. I don't know how or where they were produced. He might have had it printed in some underground place. It did make an impression because it fortunately fooled the Nazis.

Q: Do you know if the process changed with time? Did they catch on to it?
A: Apparently the Nazis did not catch on, because [Wallenberg] was able to save so many victims. I assume he had to work very quickly. He must have known that time was running out, because on the other end, Eichmann was trying to murder as many Jews as he could before the war was over. So here we had two people, two extremes: Eichmann the killer, and Raoul the savior. Never let it be said that the world is not balanced. We can choose which side of the scale we want to be on. Hopefully, most of us will choose to be on the side of life.

Q: Were there any stories about Wallenberg during his rescue missions?
A: As these rescues were taking place, none of us knew about anything. Later, we read about it, mostly in the States. But I don't know or remember reading about how he did these things. We only know the results; that his power to influence, his charisma, his magic saved 100,000 Jews.

I have a feeling that Raoul Wallenberg had a sense of how to do things right, how to knock on the right doors for the right request, at the right time. To do what he did, he had to be a very talented person in many areas. He had to have that instinct to know how to deal with people and get the best from them.

Q: Do you recall any stories about what happened at the Danube River?
A: That was spoken about almost immediately after liberation. Again, they wanted to get rid of as many Jews as possible. They would line up Jews several rows deep and take long, heavy logs with Nazis holding each end. Then they would press the log against the backs of the Jews standing, and just push them into the Danube. The method proved speedy and went on until liberation. I don't know how many were murdered in that manner. Many, I am sure.

Q: Were all of the people who worked with Wallenberg Jewish, or were there others among them?
A: From what I understand, most were not Jewish. Even in disguise, Jews could not move about town easily. Raoul knew a lot of people both in the diplomatic corps, as well as out. He had a lot of volunteers from many sources and, I would think, countries. Those who saved me and my family happened to be Jews. But, I am not sure how many were successful in infiltrating the Nazis that way. I am sure he had many people who were what we call today righteous Gentiles.

Q: What happened to your family after the war?
A: At first we felt great. After all, we were liberated. We were free. We could look at the sun and breathe free, fresh air. But as it turned out, after they were victorious, [the Russians] started their drinking and we began our odyssey to leave Europe for America.

We were liberated by the Russians. They took the food that was still left to the front for their soldiers, so the starvation continued. Also, the Russians were a wild bunch. They would forever be drinking and shooting their guns all over the place. They also took a lot of the people to clean up the rubble; people who could not even stand up from hunger. So the dying continued.

It was a door–to–door fight between the Russians and Germans. One day, I went up to the bathroom and saw a Russian soldier and a German soldier coming at each other from opposite directions. Instinctively, I ducked. The German was killed. The Russian came over to calm me. Some were very nice; at least he was not drunk, as I don't think they were while they were still fighting. One day, a bullet found its way to a neighbor. The bullet passed the mother, over the heads of the kids and miraculously did not hit anyone. After that, my dad said, "We are out of here! The Russians are the Red Nazis." From there, we went to a small village in Hungary where the Russians had not yet taken the food. So, for a moment we were safe. At this point, though, I had stopped walking from weakness and just lay on a cot and slept. My mom kept pushing bread and honey into me, with some milk. Until this day, I hate honey.

From the village, we went to the Russian side of Austria. The borders were not that controlled yet.

My father knew he would have to go to the American sector in order to be able to get to the United States. Getting from the Russian sector to the American sector was a bit tricky, as there was this no man's strip in between the two, divided down the middle. We started walking toward the American sector. We knew that by and large, the Russians would not stop us, but there were those flying bullets that could start at any time. My father kept cautioning us not to look back. Already conditioned to terror, we kept walking, walking, and walking. We could hear screaming, singing, yelling from the Russian side, with fear, our constant partner. The moment we reached the American half of the strip, a jeep sped toward us, picked us up, and threw us into the car. A few moments later, we were on the American side. For the first time in a very long time, I suddenly felt truly free.

A few weeks later, we went to Germany because that was where the DP Camps were. We ended up in Heidenheim.[48] Seven months later, we would leave for the U.S. from Bremerhaven.[49] While in Germany, my father and I visited many DP Camps to try and find family, friends or anyone we knew who had survived. We found a few, far too few. [My father's] entire family, other than one sister, perished. Four brothers, three sisters, and countless nieces and nephews were exterminated. They lived all over Europe, all gone. They did not have a Raoul Wallenberg.

My mother's family—four sisters and three brothers—survived because Hitler threw them out of Vienna when he annexed Austria to Germany. So, they went to England and the United States. When we arrived in America on April 1, 1947, they took us in, still in shock that we had survived. We stayed with them for a few weeks, then found our own apartment in Williamsburg. I started school, a yeshiva, learned English very quickly—I am good at languages—and I made new friends. I only wanted to make American friends. I wanted to become Americanized as soon as possible. I still could not get over the fact that I could go to the store without fear, talk to people without fear, walk the streets without fear, and say my Hebrew name without fear. Well, almost without fear. As I said, some of the fear will remain forever. I am never quite sure what I am afraid of—that pit. But I was free. My life, at long last, was about to begin. This, I knew, was due to one man and one man only: Raoul Wallenberg.

[48] Heidenheim is a district in the east of Baden-Württemberg, Germany.
[49] Bremerhaven is the seaport of the city of Bremen in Germany. Located at the mouth of the River Weser on its eastern bank, it is one of the most important German ports, playing a crucial role in Germany's trade.

Q: Did the war affect your relationship with religion?
A: It didn't. I stayed the same affiliated, religious person. I completely believe in God. I keep the holidays, pray, and eat kosher, though I am a vegetarian. If anything, because God sent us Raoul Wallenberg to save us, it is a positive answer that there is a God. I am grateful to both God and Raoul for keeping me and my family on this earth.

Q: Do you know how old Wallenberg was at the time you met him?
A: He was 33 years old, a very young man to have done all that. He was a man from an extremely comfortable home who went out on such a limb to do this until his unfortunate demise.

Q: What did he look like?
A: From the pictures I see, he is an extraordinarily handsome man—tall with very deep, wise eyes. My father described him that way as well. He had this vision; as if he knew what he had to do and did it! At any cost; in this case, his life. Raoul was an unbelievable man. There was just nobody like him then, or has been ever since. The looks matched the deeds of this man. From what I heard and later read about him, Raoul Wallenberg was a multi-talented, determined, strong individual.

My father told me later that when people heard that Raoul Wallenberg was in a building or a particular place, those who could and felt safe would come running just to catch a glimpse of him, as if he had a message: "I care and I want you to care as well." I know that this man was chosen by God. He was God's messenger. I believe this very strongly.

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg were sitting among us today, what would you say to him?
A: What do you say to someone who gave you back your life? There are no words. No music. No prayers or poems that one can recite for such a person. Still, I would say, "Thank you, Raoul, for my parents, my siblings, for my two daughters, my seven grandchildren: one a doctor; another one a designer; a business man; a future lawyer; a rabbinical student; and two young ones with unlimited opportunities, because of you. I am also blessed with a great-grandson and another on the way." I would say, "Thank you for my siblings' kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids, and for all the future souls that will come into this world because of you. On the other hand, I cannot begin to thank you; I will leave that to God."

Q: What do you think he would say to the world today?
A: The world is hemorrhaging. Do something! This cannot continue. Everyone's blood is on everyone's hands. And he, himself, would be putting his life on the line all the way, just as he had done before. This is what he knows—to matter; to stir; to save.

Q: Do you have any photos or documents that you would like to include in this footage today?
A: Sadly, I do not. Unfortunately, most of the pictures were left behind when we ran for our lives. My mother took some family photos that would be irrelevant to this interview. We did recover some jewelry when we went back to our apartment after the war. Jewelry my father had hidden in the attic before we left. But, all of that was traded in for food. Like, a gold bracelet was exchanged for a loaf of bread. Yes, that was how scarce food was. And life certainly meant more that gold. The pictures were destroyed when the Nazis ransacked our apartment looking for valuables.

Q: What happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: If anyone has that answer, I wish he would share it with the world. It's almost like one of those fantasy movies. A man comes to earth to accomplish something. After he has done his job, you see him walking away, turning back once or twice, and then waving *Shalom* as he disappears into the fog. I know the Russians took him. I know that some people claim to have seen him in prisons in the Gulag. I don't want to see that image of him. It is not fair. Of course, the word *fair* is only in the dictionary. I prefer to see him in that mist, with a smile on his face, satisfied that he had done what he was sent here to do, then move on.

When I was 15 or 16 and we were settled in the United States, living in Cleveland, Ohio, where my father was the rabbi, stories about Raoul began to surface. People now felt a bit safer or less afraid to talk about "those days." At any rate, the stories started to come out about Raoul Wallenberg—stories of a hero who courageously just walked about, at every risk to his own life, and plucked victims from the furnace. The survivors would sit in our kitchen and recall stories of how they were saved.

There are some people who walk the earth who you know are there for more than just walking the earth. They are there to do something, to be something, to discover something. In Jewish folklore, it's supposed that there are 36 righteous people who keep the world going. Each time one dies, another is born. There are always 36, which is twice 18. Eighteen stands for life, according to the Jewish people. My father always maintained that Raoul Wallenberg was one of the 36. After being saved by him, my father never saw Raoul again. I never saw him at all. Most of the young kids did not. Through the years, we learned about it in school. I went to yeshiva and learned about it there, but I put it away. I could not deal with it yet. I had to learn English, make new friends, get married, have kids of my own, the kids had to go to school, I had to get a job. There was just so much, too much. I was running on such a fast treadmill up the hill that there was just no time to look back. I knew that if I did look back, I would stumble and have a fall from which I could never recover.

It is time, now I can do it. Now I have to do it, I must do it. I must talk about Raoul Wallenberg and his messianic work. The human is the most phenomenal being. He can walk on the moon. He also does the most horrific things, like slicing off people's heads. So you have the two extremes. Now I have to talk about the tragedy and the triumph. Hopefully, I can help.

As I said, I never met Raoul Wallenberg. I only saw his picture. As a result, I see him in my heart all the time and through the stories of my father, and from stories of other survivors who still speak about him, in the same way my father had: angelic, heroic, courageous. The man was not Jewish and yet he saved 100,000 Jews. He was one of the few who mattered. I so regret never having met this unbelievable human being.

Q: You often share your story with students. Why did you decide to start doing that?
A: For 71 years, I kept quiet. I was afraid to go down that road. What if I go there and crack and can't come back? But suddenly, Holocaust deniers were cropping up like poison mushrooms in dark cellars, and I knew I had to begin to tell my story. There are so few left who can confront these evil deniers and say that it was true. I was there, I suffered, I saw death, I saw the immeasurable hate. I felt the fear, the hunger, the panic. My kids will only be able to say, "My mother was there, she told us so." How many would believe that? And who would tell them about Raoul Wallenberg? Who? It is my job now, and the job of those who are still left to bear witness before our voices are silenced forever.

Q: Why do you think it important to keep Raoul Wallenberg's legacy and story alive today?
A: The memory of certain people must be kept alive because of what they did, and to show others how to get it right. This man saved 100,000 Jews, maybe more, but definitely not less. We keep our heroes alive because the world needs heroes. We need to reward them and keep them in our memory, talking about them, writing about them, making films, TV shows, and plays about them. That is a must.

The Talmud says that when you save one life, it is as if you saved an entire world. Well, Raoul Wallenberg saved 100,000 lives, 100,000 worlds. If that is not a good enough reason to keep his memory alive, then what is?

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us today?
A: I hope that we can come to a point in this world where we hold life dear, every single life. We don't have to love each other—no one can love everyone—but if we can hold life dear, and remember men like Raoul Wallenberg who held life dear, even at the risk and eventual loss of his own life, then we will become a world of people worthy of life. We must say, "Enough! Enough!"

Again, I want to thank Raoul Wallenberg for saving me and my family, and thank him in the name of the 100,000 whom he saved. I also want to thank the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation for honoring me and letting me tell my story.

Interview with Adela Klein

Q: What's your name?
A: My name is Adela Klein.

Q: Where were you born?
A: In Budapest.

Q: How was your family composed?
A: My parents, and we were eight siblings.

Q: Did you go to a Jewish school?
A: Partly. After a while, Jewish schools were closed and so we were sent to public school.

Q: What kind of activities were you involved with before the war?
A: There were not too many activities because anti-Semitism was [widespread], so we were very limited.

Q: Even when you were very young?
A: Even if we wanted to, it was very limited. They did not accept Jewish people in public places so if you did something, they accused you of being anti-German. So, It was best to be quiet and unseen. We lived—we tried to live—with Irish papers, but then it got really dangerous. We went to the ghetto, but beforehand, we got the Schutz-Passes. It was very interesting; we never heard that name Wallenberg there publicly. He probably didn't want his name to be used publicly, but we knew somebody very important was behind it. He saved a lot of people. That Schutz-Pass gave you courage to run; you felt you had something to protect you. How much did it protect you, well…. But we survived. And I think we owe that to the Schutz-Pass; we owe that to Wallenberg, definitely.

Q: Do you know how you got a Schutz-Pass?
A: My Schutz-Pass was given to me by a lawyer who we knew before the war; not personally, but we knew he was Jewish, and was working with Wallenberg. [Wallenberg] had a lot of people working with him on the underground.

Wallenberg's people also dressed in Nazi uniforms and rode their cars on the streets. If they saw Jewish people who were really in need, they would just give them [the Schutz-Passes] from the car. They just handed out the Schutz-Passes without names on them, because they didn't know any names.

Q: Do you know if there were also Gentiles working with Wallenberg?
A: Probably, but a lot of Jewish people were there. Extra gentiles helped him out.

Q: You said that in the beginning you didn't even hear Wallenberg's name.
A: He kept a very low profile because they were afraid that they would catch him and kill him. Whatever he did, he did it quietly, without a name.

Q: Did you ever see him later?
A: No, no, but I know that he was working on a project to take young children to Switzerland. It was also his undertaking. And a lot of people went on that train to Switzerland. We did not go; it was too complicated for a large family to be separated, and we wanted to stay together, which was not right; we should have gone. But luckily we survived, and it was really very, very rare that a family should stay and survive together.

Q: Did you hear about the safe houses Wallenberg organized?
A: Yes. I've never been there, but I've heard of them, sure. The Swedish houses, yes. It was not as bad as in the ghetto. They weren't as crowded, and they had more food. But it was very hard to get into those houses because they [could only hold] a limited number of people. Most people ended up in the ghettos.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg got food and clothes to give to people?
A: No idea how he got it. I read about him and I know about him, and he was a remarkable person. And we all owe our lives to him. For us, he was holy.

Q: If he was in the room right now and you got a chance to talk to him, what would you say?
A: I would thank him that he saved my family.

Q: What do you think he would want to say to you?
A: I think he would be happy that he did it. He would not regret it. He was really a remarkable person. We all owe him a lot. His memory should be holy forever.

Q: You spent some time in the ghetto; how was daily life there?
A: The ghetto was a terrible, terrible place. People died and there were 30, 40 in a room—the dead in one corner, and the living in another corner. They barely had time to remove the dead. Luckily, it happened in the winter and the bodies were frozen. But when spring came, they tried to remove most of the bodies, but of course, that was after liberation. Otherwise, there would have been a terrible epidemic.

We left Budapest as soon as possible. It was very unsafe, health-wise, to be there; an epidemic could have broken out at any time. You could see dead people, mountains high—a mixture of Jewish, Russian, [and] German. It took months and months to bury them. It was something you could never ever forget. Luckily, we were all saved. We left Hungary very early [after] the war and came to America.

Q: What happened to you and your family afterwards?
A: We were in Austria for four years, waiting for the visas to come to America. Austria was not so bad because we were under the Americans. They provided everything and they saw that we should come to America. Coming over was very primitive, in these little war boats, but we made it. We arrived in America in 1951.

Q: The whole family?
A: Yes. My parents were there and one of my brothers, but we came out as a whole family.

Q: How did what happened to you during the war affect your relationship with your religion, or your family's relationship with your religion?
A: We more or less kept the religion. Not to the extreme, but it was possible, with food and everything. We tried to eat kosher, but it was not 100% kosher. We tried to avoid things that were forbidden. It was not so bad, Austria was not so bad. But in America, we started again from the beginning.

Q: Do you talk to your children or grandchildren about Wallenberg?
A: Yes, they want to know. They insist that they interview me. And I have to tell them the tales of how I survived and how I was hiding because the street was full of Germans and I wanted to survive.

Q: And you tell them about what Wallenberg did?
A: Yes, sure. They know about it, from school. The new generation is very interested in it. They know that there's not too much time for us. They want to continue. My children, I share with them everything. The grandchildren [once] came to interview me.

Q: Are there any other specific stories?
A: I'm not strong enough to repeat them. You have to be in a certain mood.

Interview with Vera Koppel

Q: What is your birth name?
A: I was born Veronica Hausen in Budapest, Hungary on August 19, 1935.

Q: Your married name is Koppel?
A: Yes. I was born Veronica, but everybody always calls me Vera.

Q: Tell us about your family. Do you have any siblings?
A: I am an only child. In those days, around 1935, people were already starting to worry about the war, so I don't think people could or wanted to have many children.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: We lived in District 7 of Budapest, which had a lot of Jewish people. I think all of my friends were Jewish, but the subject didn't come up, or if it did, I don't remember it.

We were religious people. I went to a religious all-girls school, but only for three grades before the Jewish school was closed and the persecution started.

Q: What was your life like before the war?
A: I went to school. Because I lived in the big city of Budapest, I walked to school, as far as I can remember, from at least the second grade on. It was far away, and I had to cross major streets. I still remember my mother would give me two slices of salami and five cents or something like that; and, every day on my way to school, I would go to a bakery where they cut my roll, and I would take my lunch with me.

Before I was old enough to attend school, my mother would take me to City Park, which was the central park, every single day. Every afternoon we went ice-skating; it was a nice middle-class life.

My parents tried to leave the country in 1938. They sold everything they had and they bought tickets on a ship to Palestine. I'm not sure about the exact date, but that ship was the first to be stopped and the passengers were told they could no longer leave. So, we went back with a little furniture and whatever we had left, and we lived our lives in hunger.

Because I was young, I was not aware of what was going on at that time. In Budapest, there were not really many restrictions until late 1943 or 1944. After that, we were not allowed to have too many things because of the war.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: I first noticed anti-Semitism with the advent of the labor camps. Still, it did not hit me because all of my friends' fathers went. I didn't know these camps were strictly for the Jews, and that all of my friends were Jewish.

Anti-Semitism really hit me for the first time when the notice came that the Jews had to move to certain houses designated with Yellow Stars, and our house was not one of them.

I don't know how they communicated with each other, but my mother found out from a friend of hers, who had a son and whom she knew from the park, that she had a house or building that was designated with a Yellow Star. We moved in there not knowing that it was still a luxury that we got a room of our own, and that we were able to take one or two pieces of our furniture with us. Life was different because, at that time, the whole building only had women, children and elderly individuals.

I do remember that one day, an ordinance came stating that all the women had to pack food and clothing and go to a large soccer field, I think it was. Everybody was worried that they were never going to come back, and they wondered what was going to happen. My mother told me much later that the superintendent in our building, who was not Jewish, said to her as she was leaving, "Don't worry! We will all be in charge of your children," meaning [she believed] they would never come back.

The women left, and then the building only had children and the elderly as occupants. Luckily, late one night, the people who had been taken came back. The transport hadn't gone where they were supposed to go. What was supposed to happen, I don't think anybody knew.

That was in 1944. The men were already in Hungarian labor camps where they did coal work.

We knew very little about what was going on, but every day on the radio, we heard which city or which little town was clean of Jews. This meant the Jews in these towns had had to pack their clothing and were taken to working camps. The towns outside of Budapest were the first to be "Jew-free."

One particular day, my mother heard that the towns her sister and mother lived in had been taken, so she said to her friends, "Okay, I am going. I want to be with them," and her friends said, "Don't be silly! Don't go! You never know who you are going to meet." Nobody knew where they were going. That's what I remember.

Q: Can you tell us how your mother received a Schutz-Pass?
A: I don't know how people knew because you could only go out during designated hours. I don't know where people met. This was before cars, before telephones. People would tell you things and you never knew, I suppose, if the news you heard was true or not.

All I know is that one day my mother went out and didn't tell me where she was going. The next day, she went out again. Only after the war did I really find out that she had heard that in one embassy, they were giving certificates and with them, you could move into some protected houses. Her friends kept telling her not to go because it was dangerous. As people stood in line waiting for those certificates, the Nazis would come. They obviously knew that everybody standing there was Jewish and if you were not lucky, then they would take you away, who knows to where.

One day, my mother came home with this winning face; she had gotten this certificate. At the time, we didn't know it was a Schutz-Pass. I had no idea what it meant. To tell you the honest truth, I didn't know, and I'm not sure my mother knew, that it was Mr. Raoul Wallenberg who had issued it. All we knew was that there was this man who gave her this certificate.

Q: After receiving the Schutz-Pass, did you moved into a safe house with your mother?
A: Yes. A few days after we received the Schutz-Pass, we packed and moved to this beautiful neighborhood close to the Danube River. This time, nobody had his own room. There were lots of people already there and we had a corner of a room. I still remember where that corner was. I don't remember how we ate; I don't remember what we ate; I don't remember how we got the food. The only thing I remember was that the European houses had high staircases all made out of marble.

At least once a day, every single day, the Nazis would come to check the people's identification papers. Even today, I can still hear them as they came upstairs, step by step, in their boots. One day, as they came closer and closer, everybody in the room got more and more scared, except for this one family with several children. Everybody was scared when the Nazis came, no matter what, but this family was less scared than the rest of us because they had legal documents.[50] When the Nazis came, though, they took this family away because their papers looked different than the rest of ours. I never heard from them again.

[50] In addition to distributing thousands of Schutz-Passes from the Swedish legation, Raoul Wallenberg authorized and was in favor of the forgery of the document by the Zionist Underground Movement and many other groups.

Q: Did you know Wallenberg was the person who had established the safe house?
A: No. That is a very good question. We had no idea, and I'm not even sure if my mother found out before we left Hungary. I'm not sure. But when we came to the United States, we started to hear stories and we knew that we had been in a Swedish protected house. That's when I found out.

Q: How long did you stay in the safe house?
A: I'm not sure how long I was there before my mother heard of an orphanage that was also protected by somebody, and took me there. Again, I don't know how she received this news and found out about it.

I'm not sure how many children lived in the orphanage during peacetime, but by the time I got there—I can't forget it—there were mattresses from wall to wall, and we slept on them next to each other.

The other thing my mother was always able to do, though I don't know how, was get us kosher food when kosher food was hard to come by. I'm not sure how this came about, but my mother gave me a small piece of salami when she took me to this orphanage and said, "You eat this only when you are starving." I took it and put it under my mattress, and every night, when the children went to sleep, I took out my salami to smell it.

I remember this long, long hall in the orphanage, and at the end of the hall, behind this window, there were women. I am not sure if they were nurses or what their positions were. One night, I heard them say they were going to take the children to the ghetto. There was no ghetto in Budapest before so I had no idea what the ghetto was, but by the way they were talking about it, it didn't sound good. I woke up the girl who was sleeping right next to me, and I said, "They are going to take us to the ghetto." As an adult, I realize the girl I woke up didn't know what the ghetto was either. She was even more scared than I was and she started to scream, "Vera said they are taking us to the ghetto!" That was the one and only time in my life that I was beaten by somebody. I said I had lied and the subject was closed. However, I wrote this little, open postcard to my mother telling her they were going to take us to the ghetto, and I sent the postcard, but she didn't receive it.

Weeks later (I don't know how long afterward), we were lined up so they could take us to the ghetto. I was the smallest child there (I was only 9 years old), and a policeman (the police took us, not the Nazis) was holding my hand. (The Hungarian police [Arrow Cross] were probably worse to Jews than the Nazis, because the Nazis did what they did because it was their job. The Hungarians took pleasure in it.) We were standing in a line, and I was in the front, and then I saw my mother. I said, "Mommy, Mommy," and my mother said, "Don't call me Mommy." I didn't understand why she said that. Much, much, much later, she explained that she hadn't been wearing a Yellow Star. She told the policeman that she had promised my mother, a Jew who was dying, that she would come and look for me. Here, our stories are different. I said to the policeman, "Somebody was looking for you over there." My mother told me he knew what was going on, so he left. My mother grabbed my hand, and we left the place.

That was the first day there was no public transportation because the bombing was so severe. We probably walked three hours. It might not have been a long walk, but I was still a child. I didn't know it at the time, but my mother had left Raoul Wallenberg's house because it was not safe anymore. There were too many *razzias* and they came to make the Jews' lives miserable.

Q: What are *razzias*?
A: *Razzia* means raid. The Nazis would come, as I said, to make sure everybody had papers. They checked more than once a day. By that time, there were lots of people who came from Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland and had no identification papers of any kind. Even in the Wallenberg house, it was not enough to be a Hungarian Jew. You had to have the Schutz-Pass [or you would be taken away by the Nazis].

Q: What did you do after you and your mother reunited?
A: That was when the bombing was really severe in Budapest, and nobody had basements or shelters. Everybody who was able left the vicinity and went as far away from Budapest as possible. My mother

talked to this lady who told her she knew where all the empty houses in the suburbs were. One particular family had left and their house was empty. My mother and I moved in there.

Q: How did you survive before the end of the war?
A: People ask me, “What did you eat in those days?” Europe is different and certainly was different. There were no refrigerators, so everybody bought supplies for the whole year. [In the house], there were potatoes, there were onions, there was flour, and there certainly were beans. We ate that food first. I do remember that during the last couple of days, we had nothing left but beans, beans, beans, and beans.

One night, we left our apartment to get some fresh air and the next day, there was bombing between us and the neighboring house. There was a tall, big fence between our houses and that fence was bombed, so then we couldn’t even get out. We looked between the curtains and we didn’t know whether or not the war was over because we saw soldiers moving all the time.

One day, my mother said, “You know, I didn’t see anybody moving yesterday.” The following day, we specifically made a point to look outside, and there was no movement; so, the day after, my mother got dressed as a peasant woman, putting on a handkerchief. She went out and when she came back, she said the war was over. That was how we found out the war was over, though it was not really over officially because Hungary did not declare peace until April 4, 1945.

When my mother returned, she also came back with meat. As I told you, we kept kosher, but that was not part of the picture during the war because there was hardly any food anyway. My mother cooked this meat and made some kind of stew, but I couldn’t eat it. I’m pretty sure it had nothing to do with whether or not it was kosher. My mother begged me. She begged me to eat it, but I just couldn’t. I couldn’t eat it.

Later, after the war, I tasted meat like what I had tasted in the stew and I found out it was horsemeat. My mother told me that while she had been out that day, she had happened upon a street where horses were dying from the bombings, and that’s where she got it. Anyway, I paid for it because a couple of months later, I came down with a vitamin deficiency. My whole body was covered with sores.

Q: And then the Russians entered in January 1945.
A: It was about that time and we knew so little that my mother said, “We have to go back to grandmother’s house. I have to make sure we clean it up before she comes back.” It was not far away from the suburb, so we walked there.

When we arrived, somebody was living in my grandmother’s house; there was a family with children there. We went back through our rooms and kitchen. I don’t really remember much of what we saw, just that there was no furniture, nothing. I don’t understand all of the politics, but by that time, the Communist regime was in place. Of course, the family living there said communism did not allow for two women to have an apartment with several rooms like that to themselves, so we left and went from house to house, to the good friends of my grandmother. Everybody was very sorry and they said, “Don’t worry. They will be back soon.”

We left one house and I said to my mother, “You know, that lady has grandmother’s bedroom set.” We went back and my mother looked, and it was my grandmother’s bedroom set. But by that time, the Communist party was in charge, [so there was nothing we could do about it].

Q: Was the lady a friend of your grandmother’s?
A: No, she was just a neighbor.

Q: Where was your grandmother?
A: My grandmother was taken to Auschwitz, but we didn’t know that at the time. They never came back. Nobody from my mother’s family came back.

Toward the end, my grandmother, who lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, had neighbors who were helping Jews. I was a child and even I knew that.

Q: What happened to your father?
A: We did not know it for a while, but my father had escaped from the working camp and had gone into hiding. During the very last days of the war, the peasant, or the person who was hiding him—I don't know who it was—got scared and reported him to the authority, and he was caught. By that time, the area was already Jew-free and it was too late to take him to the prison.

Interestingly, my father died on the day of liberation. He was buried in Sopron.[51] He has a grave with two other people who died on the same day. There was a priest in that town who kept records of Jews. He had a tiny little book that had the name of every individual who had gone to Sopron, and when I looked up my father's name, there was a note: "Hausen from Budapest. Died at age 34."

Q: Did you go back to Budapest after the war?
A: No, we stayed in grandmother's house. We were in the Communist regime, so if you already had an apartment, you could not have another one. So, we stayed there in the suburbs. All the Jews who lived in this suburb before the war were taken to Auschwitz. I don't know what happened to our apartment in Budapest. I didn't go back until five years ago. That's another story.

Q: What did you do after the war? Did you go back to school?
A: I had been in the third grade for only a few months before the war started, and by the time the war was over, I should have been halfway through the fourth grade. Somehow, I skipped some schooling and I started the fourth grade in a public school.

There was one other Jewish girl in my class. (I found out later they were in hiding during the war.) This girl was the one and only friend I had. We went to the fourth grade together and soon after we started, the United States sent money and they made a home for children. We didn't have much food, so the Americans sent us food, and there was a woman they hired to cook at this home. She cooked meals every day. My friend and I spent the afternoons there. I'm not sure, but more than 10 children of varying ages may have survived after the war because of this home. That's what happened to me. In fact, my friend lives in Israel and we still correspond with each other.

In Hungary, the fifth grade is considered junior high school, so my friend and I went to a new school but kept up with this afternoon activity of going to the children's home. Soon enough, teachers arrived. They were sent to teach our group. We learned a little bit about Israel and a little about Jewish holidays and a little bit about other things. This was in 1948, when Israel became a state. Israel, at that time, was considered a Socialist country. Suddenly, we went to Budapest every day. We took three cars, and we met other Jewish children from Budapest. We learned Hebrew.

By the way, I forgot to tell you one thing. When I went to the fifth grade, we were under Russian control and learning Russian was mandatory; though, I cannot tell you why because we were saved by the Russians and yet in no time, everybody hated the Russians. As children, we were so foolish that we did not really try to learn the language; I can hardly read Russian these days.

So, we went to the sixth grade in the Hebrew school. All of sudden, I'm not sure what happened, but the [Communist regime] didn't allow people to go anywhere. I don't know why, but they just didn't allow anyone to leave the country. It was not any different if you wanted to go Israel, or even to the neighboring country. As a matter of fact, my father was buried in Hungary, but it bordered Austria. Until I came to this country as an adult and went back to Hungary with my husband, my mother never told me that my father was buried there because she could not get [permission] to visit my father's grave in a town that bordered a non-communist country. She had no reason to tell me this, but when I went back with my husband, she told me to visit my father's grave. That was the first time I heard about this.

[51] A town in Hungary, Sopron is close to the Austrian border. Its Jewish community dates from the 10th century and is the oldest in Hungary.

Anyway, from this school of mine, some people slowly started to leave illegally to go to Israel. One day, I got a letter from a friend of mine, hand-delivered by her sister. It stated that she had left the night before, but couldn't say goodbye because it was too dangerous.

I also wanted to leave. In those days, people were sure that once you left the country, whomever you leave behind would never see you again. My mother had said, "You should go also," and I didn't realize or appreciate my mother's sacrifice until I had a child of my own. So I saw my mother for as long as I could, and when it was time to leave, I said goodbye. My group got to the border and was caught. The group leaders got 18 years in jail. When I met one leader later in Vienna, he told me it was not a coincidence that we were caught. Someone from the movement didn't want to leave and told the authorities, "If you give me a good job, I will tell you about the group."

There is another side-story I never told anyone, [about what happened after we were caught]. At that time, I was 13 years old, and we were taken to the police station. We were children (I was probably the youngest), and that's why they did not bother with us; they only wanted the group leader. I don't know how the leader arranged it, but we had a few minutes alone, just the two of us, and he said, "Take this suitcase. It is full of cash," and he gave me an address. "Take it back, and tell them we couldn't make it." I was a 13-year-old girl who took a train and, like in some spy story, was continually looking behind my back to see if anybody was following me. I got to the place where I was supposed to go and I gave them the money.

Q: What did you do after your trip to Israel fell through?
A: Life went on. I made new friends and had a new life in 1956 and 1957, after I got out of Hungary.

Q: Did you try again to get to Israel?
A: I was a swimmer on a high school team and I got pneumonia. By the time I returned to school, there was no one left from that group I was going to go to Israel with. Again, I could have gone to Israel easily, but I was a child. I was startled that my group had left me behind. Plus, the Egyptian war that was occurring in Israel discouraged me from going.[52] An uncle of mine in Israel told me, "Don't come in here now. They always come to Israel. Go to America if you ever have the chance."

Q: So you went to the U.S. with your mother?
A: Yes, just the two of us. That, too, is a story in itself. We were listening to the radio in Europe and heard, "Dear Mother, I got to America. Your loving son, Janoshi." My mother was like, "Come on, that's just a story," because whenever anyone thought about leaving Hungary, they always thought about going to London, about going to Paris. Nobody really thought about going to America.

But mother had a cousin who lived in Vienna. One day, she heard, again I don't know through whom, that the cousin had hired a truck and was going to pick up a family and take them to Vienna. This was already weeks after the [Hungarian] Revolution. The borders were not fully watched, but the Russians were still there so it was still dangerous. So the cousin asked my mother if she could go with them so that they wouldn't look suspicious. The family was supposed to be picked up on a certain corner. If a man with two suitcases and two children would stand on a corner, everybody would know what it was for sure, so her cousin said, "Could you just come along?" My mother walked with one little boy up the street and I walked with another boy on the other side of the street. The truck driver came and lifted up the boy and gave me his hand. I looked at my mother and we winked and got up on the truck. We stopped in one corner and in another corner, and coming close to the border, the truck driver said, "I don't know you people. I have two extra passengers, and I'm not going on unless you tell me who you are." Of course, today I know better; I know what we would do. But, we were honorable people, I guess, and we told him who we were. We gave him all the jewelry and money we had and told him our cousin would pay him whatever we owed. That's why, when you asked me if I had any documents, I said no. Even if I had had documents, they would have stayed in Hungary.

[52] Upon independence in 1948, Israel was invaded by the armies of six Arab nations: Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (later Jordan), Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The Israeli-Egyptian conflict continued throughout the following decades including the Egyptian seizure of the Israeli ship Bat Galim (1954), the Gaza Raid (1955), the Sinai War (1956), the Six-Day War (1967), and the War of Attrition (1968–1970).

Q: Do you tell your friends and family about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I can only tell you that there are, obviously, horror stories about the war. Everybody knows these stories by now. It is so unfortunate. All of us know that, but the story of what happened to the Jews is probably the worst. There is no justice in life at all. Jews were persecuted only because they were Jewish and Wallenberg didn't have to do the things he did. He put his life at stake. I think the Wallenberg story is publicized, but never enough, never enough.

Interview with Ester Mejer

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is Ester Mejer.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: Budapest, Hungary.

Q: Who did you live with while growing up?
A: I lived with my family; my siblings, parents, and grandparents lived together.

Q: How many siblings?
A: Eleven siblings.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: Yes.

Q: Did you go to a Jewish school?
A: Yes.

Q: What activities were you involved with before the war?
A: I was a child in school when the Germans came.

Q: What were the first signs of anti-Semitism that you noticed?
A: We had a villa near Budapest, and these German people lived [in this village]. They swore at us all the time and called us names. That was when I first started noticing anti-Semitism.

Q: How did that affect you?
A: I felt very, very bad. I didn't understand why they were doing this. I did not know the implications of what they were doing, but I could never have.

Q: Were there changes in your family's religious practices?
A: They were very, very religious. Not Hasidic, because in Budapest we had no Hasidic individuals.

Q: Can you tell us what happened to your family during the war?
A: I was separated from my family. They went to the safe house and I saved myself. I did not look Jewish; I was very blonde, with blue eyes, and I did not even act Jewish. My father told me, "We're going to a safe house, but we don't know how safe it is." Nobody could know. "Save yourself. You don't look Jewish and you are a very young girl. Try to save yourself. We don't know what's going to happen to us."

So I went out in the street. First, someone who knew me and was also pretending not to be Jewish said, "Follow me, follow me." We went into a dark area down in the basement, and he told me he was working for the Resistance. He said if I wanted to, I could become a part of it, "because you don't look Jewish, and you have a lot of guts, and you are a child—they wouldn't even suspect you." I thought about it a little and realized I had no other choice because I was on the street and I did not know where to go. I agreed to the idea and [members of the Resistance] would send me all over Budapest, where they knew people were working and hiding. They gave me the address, but I had to memorize it because they did not want to give me anything written. And that is what I did for a few weeks, until October when the [Arrow Cross gained power]. They were even more extreme than the Germans were; I got a little afraid, so I started thinking about what to do. Eventually, I went to the convent and they sent me to a place outside

Budapest. They did not know I was Jewish and I did not tell them. The place they sent me was very far from Budapest.

Q: How did your parents learn about the safe house?
A: [Raoul] Wallenberg came to our house. He would collect everybody who was working in order to save them, and my father was one of these people. [Wallenberg] didn't know where to start, so he set up a meeting with all the people he had on the list, and they suggested that maybe we should have houses that we could designate to be "Swedish diplomat houses." He realized the idea was very good and he organized everything. First, he bought houses in the section where most of the Germans lived.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg composed that list of people? Where did those names come from?
A: Yes. When they elected Wallenberg as the person who would go to Hungary, he came here, to the U.S., first. He met a lot of people who suggested names of those they were in contact with for the list. My father was one of the names suggested. Together, they had established a way to save people.

Q: How did your father get in touch with the Americans?
A: He was always involved since he was a big businessman. He was also an only child and he wanted to do something for others. His parents taught him that if you are working only for yourself, then you are not doing anything; so, from a very early age, his life was meant to do something. He began by doing anything, starting from when he saw that there were a lot of people who did not have enough food. These were very impoverished people. Then he went on and on, and did more and more. In 1941, the deportations began in Poland. A lot of people came to Budapest to escape them, and my father tried to help. The [Polish Jews] liked him because nobody wanted to do anything, even the Jewish people, since the Germans hung big, big signs that read, "Whoever hides the Polish [Jews] will share the same destiny as them." That meant the people who tried to save others would also be deported, not just those they were hiding.

Q: Did you meet Raoul Wallenberg personally?
A: I met Wallenberg personally. He came to our house and I opened the door. My father was there and invited him in; that is how I got to know Mr. Wallenberg.

Q: How did Wallenberg look?
A: He was a very tall man. Right away you could sense that he was someone important, a diplomat or something. He made a very, very good impression.

Q: A diplomatic type of personality?
A: Personality, yes. He projected a diplomatic personality.

Q: Did you have a Schutz-Pass? Or your family had a family Schutz-Pass?
A: My whole family had a Schutz-Pass. Wallenberg worked the date around when my father moved into the safe house, because our apartment was in the ghetto. So, then they moved in. They were afraid to stay in the ghetto because they heard that they were starting the deportations there. So, they moved into the safe house Wallenberg had established. From that point on, my father worked with Wallenberg. He also had copies of the Schutz-Passes and wrote all their names because he knew the people in Budapest.

Q: How did the Schutz-Pass look?
A: The Schutz-Pass was [yellow]. On the inside, it had "Schutz-Pass" written in German, not Swedish; that way, the Germans would understand what was going on. Instead of visas, they were Schutz-Passes.

Q: Do you know if all the people saved by Wallenberg were Jewish, or if there were Gypsies, resisters, etc?
A: No, most of them were Jewish. That is why he came, to save the Jews, only to save the Jews. That

was all he wanted to do, to save the Jews. There are a lot of pictures [of him at] the train stations where he gave out the Schutz-Passes. He really went very far outside of Budapest. He had his car, a diplomatic car, so nobody would threaten him.

Q: How did you reunite with your family?
A: We [people at the convent] were liberated, I would say, about 15 days before Budapest because the Russians came earlier. We were freed between December 25th and January 1st, but I knew that Budapest was not free at this time. It took them three more weeks. After that, I prayed every day that I would find my family. And I made myself promise that I would continue to pray until I found them.

I knew when it was over because of the reports in the papers about Budapest. At this point, I did not want to stay [at the convent] anymore. I told them I was Jewish and they were very, very shocked. They told me I did not act like a Jewish person, or what they thought of as Jewish, but they understood. I told them I wanted to be with my family, and they understood and let me out. The first thing I did was go to the apartment where we lived, and my family was already there. This was a week, exactly a week, after Budapest was freed, since before, nobody would have been able to have gotten out. There was fighting, house-to-house—not street—fighting. There was chaos and tons of fighting in Budapest, so it took me one week to get back to my house.

Q: What was that like? Going back to your house and seeing your family there?
A: It was very, very, very emotional. My grandmother called me over; she was extremely weak. She did not want to eat, and no food was available. No food at all, and she did not want to eat. She thought the family's needs should come before hers because we were younger than she.

At this time, and before the war, they did not have commercial garments. Our family always had someone who came to our house, or we went to their shop to get clothing made, because all of the Jewish people had a separate kind of clothing for work. My grandmother called me over and told me to go and get the seamstress. I looked, but I could not find her. Naturally, I went upside-down to get people to help me find her, but they had moved to other places, so I could not find her. When I came back, I told my grandmother that I was sorry, I could not find her, but I would look for her tomorrow. She answered, "There is no tomorrow for me." And that night, my grandmother died.

Q: Did your parents and siblings tell you anything about life in the safe house?
A: No. Not a thing. They could not. Everybody was so overwhelmed. They could not talk and everybody was very weak. No food. None at all. We got only bread, a thin, thin, thin slice; that was the ration for the whole day—one piece. Sometimes a potato, one potato; that is all. That is all we ate for a whole 24 hours.

After the war, the number one thought was, "We are hungry; we should have something to eat." Nobody was thinking for longer than just that moment. We thought, "We have to survive. If we don't have anything to eat, then we won't survive." After a few months, they started to bring in food from outside. It started to get a little better, not too much, but a little better. Then, people started thinking, "I don't want to stay here. What will I do here?" So, we wanted to leave; we wanted to get away from the area. If we stayed there, we would always think about the past, because we went through so much.

Everybody wanted to get away, except my father. He was involved so very much; he was the president of the synagogue and the president of the community. He did not want to leave all that behind. He did not want to leave the people behind; he wanted to settle.

The young people, naturally, wanted to get away. They did not want to stay there. My father opened a business. He had one before, so he opened his business and after two years, the [Communist regime] arrested him and took it away, like they took away everybody's businesses. This time, my father was arrested. He was there a few months before [he was released], and it was a great, big miracle because usually, the only way to get out was to escape. My father's release happened during the day, in a normal fashion. He was on the blacklist, and he could have easily ended up in Siberia like so many did; his

friends ended up in Siberia. He could have ended up there, but fortunately, he was freed. It was very, very interesting. It was a big miracle.

After his release, we wanted to get away. There was no question about it, because they could have done the same thing again later. We got a passport and left at the end of 1949. At this time, we went to Vienna. From Vienna, I first went to Switzerland because I had a brother there, and he arranged for me to come. After that, the family followed from Vienna, though it was not the whole family because my older brothers escaped when the young people started to [flee Hungary]. Only my younger brothers were there with me.

Q: How long did you stay in Vienna?
A: Until we got to Switzerland. From Switzerland, it was much easier to get to America because the quota in Switzerland was very favorable. So we got to [America] in two years. But, I married there, and I stayed there; I stayed behind in Switzerland.

Q: Your father and Wallenberg were close during the war; did he know when Wallenberg disappeared?
A: No. But, he was in contact with him until the last day because they wanted to work to get the people some food. At this point, the war was over, so he did not need to save them from deportations. He wanted to save the people now from dying of hunger. So, my father and Wallenberg were in contact. He sent people out and he tried to get food from outside of Budapest, since they could bring in food from farms, etc. A little food came in, but the prices were so unreal that nobody could buy them.

My father knew of Wallenberg's disappearance when he did not show up as he usually would, at the place they usually met. They would meet in different places and when he did not show up, my father thought that something happened. He tried to find out, but there was no way to. No way.

Q: What would you say to Wallenberg if he were sitting with us today?
A: What would I say? Naturally, I would say that what he did is unbelievable; what he did saved so many people. We Jewish people believe that even if you save one person, it is the same as saving the whole world. So, how many worlds you saved, and look here in America at what is happening to all those people who you saved. How many people survived? The whole nation survived. That is what I would say.

Q: What do you think he would say to you?
A: My father told me that he was extremely modest. He never wanted to talk about himself or what he was doing. He tried to get people to join him, but that was very hard. So I think he would say that he did what he did because he felt the necessity, and he was really sorry for the people. He would say, "I saw the whole situation. I saw that I was very much needed." I do not think he would have blown it out of proportion or would have especially talked about himself. I do not think so because he was very modest.

Q: Why do you think it is important to keep Wallenberg's legacy alive?
A: People should know. This was not the first time it happened to the Jewish people or any other nation. It is no different, and it is still going on in the world. It's so important that people know about Wallenberg's courage because persecution does not just happen only to Jews. This is happening to other nations now too, like in Darfur, Sudan, so we must continue the story of Wallenberg to spread the inspiration and the courage to do something about it.

Interview with Otto Romberg

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is Otto Robus. I was born on December 16, 1932, in Budapest. I changed my name, or rather, I took a synonym because I worked as a journalist and when I used to spell it, it was difficult for others to understand. So, I took the name Romberg, which is much easier: "Rom," like the eternal city, and "Berg," which everybody understands.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in Budapest.

Q: With whom did you live?
A: I was an only child, and I lived with my parents.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: No, we were not religious. I went to a civil elementary school, and afterwards, to a boarding school where I stayed until 1944.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: In school. That was the first time they started to tease us. My father taught me to tell them three times that Jesus Christ was, himself, a Jew. If that did not help, then I should beat them up.

Q: How did you first hear about what was happening to the Jewish people?
A: That was in March 1944, after the invasion of the Germans. I was at the boarding school in Esztergom.[53] My father picked me up and on the way back, he told me what might happen to us and to the Jewish community in Hungary.

Q: What was your reaction?
A: I was very affected. I was 12 years old. I always knew that we, Jewish people, were not loved and had been marginalized through anti-Semitism and racism for hundreds of years, but this caused very deep pain.

Q: What changes did you experience?
A: At first, we did not experience too many changes because during the First World War, my father was a highly positioned soldier. Also, the Jewish laws did not apply to us until July 1, 1944, when things changed because [Adolf] Eichmann no longer tolerated exceptions for those groups of Jews who had fought bravely and heroically for their fatherland.

Q: What happened to your family during the war?
A: My mother and I had to go to a [designated] Jewish house, and my father had to go to the labor force.

I have to add that my father was drafted in 1941 as a reserve officer to re-conquer the Hungarian areas that were separated through The Treaty of Trianon. He was a soldier during the invasion of the Germans and on July 1, a first officer went to him, ripped off his badge of rank, and told him, "Shit Jew, you have to go to the concentration camp." That was the appreciation he received for his Hungarian patriotism.

Q: What happened to your father?
A: He had to go to a certain place to be registered for the labor force. My mother and I remained in the Jewish house.

Q: Can you explain what a [designated] Jewish house is?
A: It is a house where the Jews were crowded together. Inside, you had to wear the Yellow Star, and

[53] The capital of Hungary from the 10th till the mid-13th century, the city of Esztergom is located 46 km north-west of the country's current capital, Budapest.

three to four families had to share one apartment. Everything came about very suddenly, and later, the ghetto was established around these houses. Many Jews lived in the ghetto area.

Q: Did you ever hear from your father again?
A: I did, and it was very dramatic. We saw him in July or August, and that was when we heard about [Raoul] Wallenberg, and that he had the ability to help us.

Q: How did you hear about the Schutz-Passes?
A: It spread around like a fire that not only the Swedish people, but also the Swiss and the Spanish people were giving out Schutz-Passes. Even the Vatican gave them out, but only under the condition that you were willing to get baptized. But that was not an option for us.

Later, we found out that proper protection was only verified through the Spanish Schutz-Pass because [Adolf] Hitler and the dictator [Francisco] Franco allowed for diplomatic relations between Germany and Spain. That was not the case with Sweden.

When we heard that [Wallenberg] had Schutz-Passes, we went to Buda. I don't remember the name of the street; I think it was Pickel Street, if I remember it correctly, but I am not sure. There, my mother and I waited in a queue for days to get the Schutz-Passes.

I don't know 100% if [Wallenberg] was there, but according to the pictures I am seeing today, he was probably one of the people who gave us the Schutz-Passes. But, I was 12 years old; I am not certain if that was Wallenberg, but I think so when I look back.

That was in a very big office. There were many people, and all of them were very busy. There was a lady who asked my mother for our names and other personal information like date and place of birth, etc. Then, we received the Schutz-Passes. Afterwards, there were two or three gentlemen who shook our hands and wished us all the best. That was how it was.

Q: Did you and your mother each receive a Schutz-Pass?
A: That's how it was. Then, with the Schutz-Passes we moved into a Schutz-haus (safe house). That was also very dramatic because in an apartment with three rooms of about 100 square meters, there were 50 people or more. In the bathroom or at the restroom, it was a horror.

Unfortunately, this did not last long because on October 15, the Arrow Cross gained power and did not always respect the Schutz-Passes. They wanted to deport us, and they forced us to the brick factory.[54] It was about 20–25 kilometers from Budapest to Pilisvörösvár. There, they separated us according to age and forced us into wagons.

Just a second before the train was to start, Wallenberg appeared and yelled into every wagon that if you possessed a Schutz-Pass, you could immediately step out and would not have to join the transport. Then he came to the wagon, while my mother was already out, and yelled again, "Just show anything because this gendarmerie, they are all analphabets." He spoke German, "They cannot read. Just show any kind of document or paper. It does not matter; just come out!"

Then, from this brick factory and this transport, they brought us back to Budapest and all of us returned to the ghetto. That was after October 15, sometime at the end of October. And on this walk back to the ghetto, suddenly my father appeared. We don't know from whom or from where he knew that we were participating in this march to the ghetto.

[54] Brick factories were used by the Nazis as gathering places from where Jews were sent to the death marches or deported.

When we arrived at the ghetto—Klauzál tér [Klauzá square][55] it was called—there were big boxes, and we were forced to give away everything that we possessed: watches, rings, just everything; all belongings!

Later, we went to a different house and we were again asked our ages. My father was 46 years old and they said if he were 48, he would have been able to stay with us. But, my father was very "Prussian"[56] in this aspect, and he was afraid that if he gave them a wrong age, it could have disadvantages for him and for us. He said he was of the age where he had to go, and they deported him again. He did not stay in the ghetto, and we were divided into different houses again.

Q: You and your mother were saved and united?
A: And many, many others as well.

Q: Wallenberg saved and united you and your mother and on the way back from there, you happily met your father again?
A: That's how it was.

Q: Was that the last time you heard from your father?
A: No, my father sent us a postcard on December 6, 1944. It was probably thrown out of the train because the postcard reached us in very bad condition. He said they were forced to do a slow march toward the west. That was the last message from him. The card [was dated] December 6, and we received it sometime at the end of December.

Q: Do you know how the Jewish people were able to use these documents once they were rescued from the cattle cars and returned to Budapest?
A: Nobody asked for [anything on the basis of the document]. We did not dare, maybe others did, to go to the gendarmerie or the Arrow Cross and tell them, "You do not have the right to deport me because I am a Swedish citizen." If somebody dared ask that, they could be shot right there. Nobody was messing around. Everybody who tried to escape from the authority, gangsters, they did not hesitate long.

Q: You were about 12 years old when you met Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I was exactly 12 years old. I turned 12 in December 1944.

Q: And your mother?
A: My mother was born in 1900; she was 44 years old.

Q: Can you estimate how old Raoul Wallenberg was when you saw him the first time?
A: I don't know. I would estimate about 30 years old.

Q: What did he look like? How did you feel about him?
A: He was a very nice guy, open-minded, very friendly, and trustful. I don't know how else to put it.

Q: What are the Safe-houses? How were they different from the Jewish houses you mentioned before?
A: There was a sign above the house that read, "This house is under the protection of the Swedish crown," I think. I am not sure; I am not certain.

From the Jewish houses, people were constantly forced to go to the Danube or somewhere else. They were shot or deported from a railway station or from the brick factory and sent away. But in the Safe-house, nobody was allowed to enter until November 15, October or November, because [Miklós] Horthy's

[55] Once the historic center of the Jewish Quarter, Klauzál tér became the square around which the Budapest ghetto was created in November 1944. Today, Klauzál tér is still the largest square in the neighborhood, where the Holocaust Memorial Museum and a monument dedicated to Carl Lutz—the Swiss Consul General to Budapest during World War II—are located.
[56] The people coming from the historic state of Prussia, Prussians are known for their organization, discipline, sacrifice, and rule of law. The term is sometimes used by non-prussians who identify themselves with those characteristics.

government respected the protection of the Swedish crown. But when [Ferenc] Szálasi's Arrow Cross gained power, the protection lost its validity. The Arrow Cross did not respect the protection.

In our case, we were allowed to move into a Safe-house from the Jewish house. Then later, after the proclamation of the Arrow Cross government (which did not accept the protection anymore), the [Arrow Cross] came to pick us up and deport us. Wallenberg heard about that and how people from the Safe-houses, the ghetto, and from other places were forced together in the brick factory. Later, after the occupation from the Arrow Cross, the ghettos were established; when Wallenberg found out that the people from the Safe-houses were also forced to leave, he came into this kind of detention camp [brick factory] and saved the people who had Schutz-Passes at least from the transport.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg found out that people were forced to leave the Safe-house for the brick factory?
A: I don't know. Probably somebody in the Safe-house had a contact telephone number. He had confidants there and they probably informed him.

Every house had a manager who reported to Wallenberg about the condition of the house. We were also provided with food and medical services, and somebody from this circle probably called Wallenberg and told him that now, after the proclamation, the Schutz-Passes were no longer valid.

Q: That means he had to act within only a few hours.
A: Yes, he did so. You know, the walk lasted a whole day. It was about 20 kilometers from Budapest, and we slept there two or three days on the floor, without any food. He appeared when the train was ready to leave and rescued us.

Q: Do you remember seeing Raoul Wallenberg in the Safe-house?
A: No, no. I can't remember that.

Q: Do you know what happened at the Danube in 1944 and 1945?
A: Only from other people. When there was no longer any possibility, for whatever reasons, of transporting people, the Arrow Cross and the SS forced Jews to the shore of the Danube. The Jews were forced to take off their clothes—that meant everybody had to take everything off—and they were shot into the river.

Q: Do you know if all the people Raoul Wallenberg rescued and those who worked with him were all Jewish, or if there were resisters as well?
A: The people said that many resisters and many non-Jews supported him, but I did not meet any of them. This is information I learned from other people. You know how, afterward, you heard about many positive things? We did not know about many things at the time.

Q: If Raoul Wallenberg were sitting with us today, what would you say to him?
A: That he is a hero, and that he should try to vaccinate humankind with his courage.

Q: What do you think he would say to the world today?
A: I think he would be worried about Jewish persecution, and would think that the world has not changed very much. Only the headlines have changed.

Q: Do you think so?
A: I think he would say that, yes. I think about how in Hungary there was always the fight of the big liberty land with the Soviet Union, together with China, fighting against western imperialism. And the first headline I read in Vienna in 1956 was about the fight of the democratic west against Soviet imperialism. That means they only changed the words and definition. That means everything remained the same.

Q: We talked about your father. What happened to you and your mother after the war?
A: We could not go back into our apartment because non-Jews [were living there], and all our belongings

were destroyed; they lived very wildly. When they finally moved out, we went back to our apartment. Immediately after the war we got our rights back, but it still took three to four months until they left.

We were left with nothing; everything was taken from us. Everything was stolen. Those things that remained accidentally were then taken by the Russians. We had the luck, but I do want to add that the Russians saved our lives. But with our property, they did not care.

Q: Did you get any kind of compensation?
A: My mother received the so-called—I don't like the word—"compensation" for damage caused by health problems. My father was the president of a big foundation and they paid a property loss and a compensation for the damage caused by health problems for my mother.

Q: Do you know what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the war?
A: Yes. This we only found out in the west; we did not know it in Hungary. That was a very well-protected secret. Here, in the west, I found out that he was imprisoned in Russia and was treated as an American spy. The people thought he was a German spy because he also tried to buy the Jews freedom and that was odd to the Russians; to them, it meant that he was an ally of the Germans.

And I also know that in Russia, for the Soviet Union, they tried to use him as a middleman for business connections, but because he was not willing to do that, they kept him imprisoned.

Q: Why do you think it is important to keep Raoul Wallenberg's story alive?
A: Because we are slowly reaching an anti-Semitic level like we had in Nazi Germany. Today, we have an unpredictable alliance of right wings, left-wing slobs, and Islamists, and that is a very explosive mixture.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?
A: Only that if Wallenberg had not rescued us from the train, you would not be sitting here with me today. That is the only thing I have to add.

Interview with Judith Saly

Q: What is your name?
A: My birth name was, in English you would say, Judith Maria Garai. In Hungarian, you say the last name first. So my name was Garai Judith Maria.

Q: What is your married name?
A: I was married twice. The story that I'm going to talk about concerns my first husband very much. His name was John Kudar. My second husband was John Saly. So my name today is Judith Saly.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary, on August 21, 1921.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in Budapest. The summers we spent somewhere in the country, on the lake, on the Danube, but I grew up in Budapest.

Q: Who did you live with?
A: My father was a dentist. He was very well-appreciated and loved. He and my mother and my younger sister—we lived together and we had family nearby. We lived near the Margaret Bridge, across the Danube that divides Buda and Pest. We lived in Pest.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish Community?
A: Not really. I grew up very much in a simulated Jewish community. Most people and my friends were born Jewish and did not convert. But there was very little of the Jewish tradition kept. I am sorry now that we didn't have more connection to the Jewish heritage because, maybe, it would have been easier to deal with everything that came. But in school, we went to the Jewish religious instruction class; however, we had a Christmas tree because my family, especially my mother's family, was very much intermarried with Catholics. I had great-uncles and uncles who married Catholic women, and one of my great-aunts sent us a Christmas tree with decorations every year. It was part of my growing up that we always had Christmas.

Q: What kind of schools did you attend?
A: At that time, elementary school was four years and high school was twelve years. I went to a private school for both elementary and high school. The high school was for girls only, but the elementary school was co-ed. I loved to go to school; most people don't like schools, but I loved it.

Q: Did you celebrate any Jewish traditions?
A: As I said, very little. My family did celebrate *Yom Kippur* and the Jewish New Year, but that was just once a year. We did not even celebrate Passover, except once—I was at my relative's [house], my father's brother in the country, and there was a Passover meal. My uncle was impatient and he wanted matzo ball soup faster than the ritual would allow.

What was interesting was that when the Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944 (of course, already before that we knew that there was big trouble approaching, so, actually, it was after the *Anschluss*), we felt that we had to come closer to our Jewish heritage. So, my parents, an uncle and aunt, their two sons, and us two girls—we were very close—decided we would have a Passover Seder. I still remember, which today still stirs me most, when one says, "Today in captivity." As you see, I'm still teary about this because the longing of the Jewish people, of the Jewish past, is so much in this. I just read a very interesting book about Jewish history, about how the Jews were always expelled from one country to the other, and then they think, "Now, here we can make it." And before you know it, there is another anti-

Semitic wave, and again, they move to another country and hide again, or try to make themselves melt into the population. Or, on the contrary, keep your heritage and, you know, it's our history. That's why I also think that the existence of Israel is the most important thing. As long as there is Israel, there cannot be another Holocaust. That's what I think.

Q: What activities were you involved with before the war?
A: I wanted to be a doctor, but I was not admitted to the university because I was Jewish. You see, there was a rule[57] that Jewish students enrolled in schools had to be in proportion to the total Jewish population in Hungary, which was 6%, so you can imagine. I was an A student and I applied to seven universities in the country, but I was not admitted into any of them. So, I enrolled in a training course for surgical nurses, what you call here scrub nurses, at the clinic of the University of Budapest. I thought I should be at least in that kind of profession, close to being a doctor, so I did that. And I also did other things. I went to University as "not registered," but could attend classes in art history and philosophy. I did stuff like that.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: It was in the air. Before World War I, there was an era of liberalism in Hungary and Jews were allowed to do whatever they wanted. It was very much encouraged for Jews to change their names to sound more Hungarian. For instance, my father's name was Goldstein, but before World War I, as a young doctor, he changed it to Garai. There were a lot of people who did the same thing.

There was anti-Semitism after World War I. Then, for a brief period of time there was a Communist regime, which was rather brutal towards many of the leaders who were Jews. When [Miklós] Horthy, the Regent of Hungary, came to liberate the country from that regime (I mean, it's more complicated than this), a right wing took over. Then is when there were all these decrees against Jews. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that. But one could still have a normal life. I personally never encountered anti-Semitism; nobody said to me, "You dirty Jew," but it did happen. For instance, when my favorite cousin—who ended up in Brazil—was in elementary school, another kid hit him and said, "You dirty Jew." As I said, it was in the air. One was very careful; one should not become too conspicuous and should behave well and should know one's place.

Q: When did you first hear about what was happening to the Jewish people?
A: I don't know exactly when it was, but obviously before the Germans invaded Hungary, well before that. Also, there were a number of Polish non-Jewish refugees in Hungary, and from them we heard all kinds of stories. We knew about gas chambers; we could not imagine what that was like, but we knew about it.

Q: What was your reaction?
A: Well, incredulity. One can't really believe that this was happening and that nothing was being done against it.

Q: How did the German occupation affect your family?
A: The Germans came into Hungary on March 19, 1944; I think that was a Saturday. That day, I went over to my very good friend who lived in the next building. She was a concert pianist and her husband was a physicist. There, I met my future husband, who was not Jewish. He came to ask, "What can I do, how can I help?" The next day, he came over to our house and there was such an instant connection that the minute we were alone, he asked me if I would marry him and then he could save me. He was going to go to Sweden; he had been there before and spoke Swedish. He worked on some of his patents in optics at a Swedish company, but because there was a war going on, you could not get flights or find any other way to get from Hungary to Sweden. But, he said, "Well, we could get married and we would find some way." Of course, we could not get married because there was a law against Jews and non-Jews getting married. Then a friend of mine asked, "Would you like a set of papers? There is somebody who has two

[57] Ms. Saly is referring to the Numerus Clausus Act, first introduced in Hungary in 1920, with the aim of restricting the number of Jews to 6%, which was their proportion of the population in Hungary at that time. The rate of Jewish students was 25-40% in the 1910s in different faculties. Because of pressure from the liberal capital and the League of Nations, a less-explicit version of the act was passed in 1928. In the period of 1938–1945, the anti-Jewish acts were revitalized and worsened due to German Nazi pressure.

sets of papers." She bought one set, and my parents bought the other one for me. So I had another name. A wonderful French artist, with whom I studied a bit of textiles and designing, forged documents that showed that Yanjey Kudar and Erjay Behtmuschani (my new name) were married. I referred to him as John [earlier in the interview], who is Yanjey, my first husband.

Meanwhile, I went into a very strange kind of hiding with Yanjey. Budapest is surrounded by high hills, not very high, but they're mountainous and they're very lovely. On top of one of them was—and I'm sure there still is—the observatory, which was part of the University of Budapest. The director, who was a very close friend of Yanjey, had asked him many times to come and teach, because they had students. Yanjey was a mathematician and an astronomer, originally, before he got more interested in optics. So, he told him, "I'm ready to come, but I just got married and I'm bringing my wife." Okay very nice. But of course, nobody knew that I was Jewish. He was always very careful; he really didn't like to leave me alone anywhere. And so I went with him to this villa, which was close to that mountain but further down, where he established his office.

Q: When did you first hear of Raoul Wallenberg?
A: I heard about Wallenberg as soon as it was known he was coming. As soon as [Yanjey] heard about Wallenberg, he immediately went and offered his services.

Q: What were your husband's tasks when he was helping Wallenberg?
A: To go and talk to people and see who had a connection and where, and to compile a list in order to help save more people. One time, he went to a brick factory; for some reason brick factories were used as places where Jews were gathered before being sent on a death march. In one of these places, he found my best friend, her mother, father, and little brother and he got them out.

Q: How old were you when you met Wallenberg?
A: I must have been 23.

Q: Do you have an idea how old he was at the time?
A: In his 30s.

Q: What was he like? Was he serious? Did he have a sense of humor?
A: He was a very modest kind of person. He came in, said hello, and immediately went to work. I mean, he wasn't just hanging around. He was very focused and devoted to his task. He really meant it. The funny thing was that sometimes, people thought that Yanjey was Wallenberg because he was tall and blonde, but Wallenberg was not that tall and had dark hair.

You must have heard how the Jews in Hungary had been deported earlier, and there was not much anyone could do there; but, with Wallenberg's help, the Jews in Budapest were trying to withstand this. Still, a lot of them were herded on foot towards the Austrian frontier. One time, I remember it was November and it was raining. I was in the car with Wallenberg and his driver. They were in front and I was with my husband, Yanjey, in the back, and we saw these columns of people in the rain that looked like red mud. They were just herded, and some of them were wounded. [Wallenberg, his driver, and my husband] got out and tried to pull out everybody they could. I don't remember what happened to those people, how they came back, whether they still had to walk—it was horrible. Yanjey saw a friend of the family there, a woman, but didn't tell me because he knew he couldn't do anything at that moment.

I had little contact with Wallenberg, just a few words; never a conversation. I was very respectful. I once saw an interview with Archbishop [Desmond Mpilo] Tutu on television, and he was asked which was worse, imprisonment or torture. He responded, "No, the worst thing was that if you hear often enough that you are inferior, you will believe it." And this was, I think, [the case] with the Jews also. While growing up, you hear all the time that there is something wrong with being Jewish and no matter what you know, you are in some ways stained and inferior; and then you come to believe it. So here comes this Swedish gentleman from a distinguished family who is willing to risk—we do know that he was risking his life—who

was giving us back some of this feeling that maybe we are worth saving. Maybe we are not the scum of the earth. That was a very important message that his mere presence gave us. I had so much respect for him I wouldn't even try to talk to him. There wasn't anything to talk about, really, because he was so focused on his task.

This is still a bit embarrassing for me to tell. One day, back at the observatory, the director told Yanjey that there were two men looking for him who looked like detectives. One was tall and the other one was short. So, Yanjey said, "I can't imagine why anybody would look for me," and went back to our room. Immediately, we packed our things in a small suitcase and split. We didn't even dare to take a tramway car; we just went down on foot through the fields. We were thinking, "Is this possible? Did this man figure out there was something [wrong]?" We were really careful. We never said anything when there were talks about the weapons that the Germans had and were going to deploy very soon. To this day, we are not sure who those two people were, or if the director invented it. Very quickly, we went to the house where Wallenberg's office was because we didn't know where else to go.

We asked, "Can we stay here for the night?" One of them took pity on us and said, "Look, hide somewhere on the top floor. I am supposed to walk through the building and see that everybody has left at night before we close, but keep very quiet and stay for the night. But be very careful. Don't flush the toilet and don't turn on the light." Well, they discovered us the next morning because I did flush the toilet before there were enough people [in the building]. Wallenberg wanted to see us. Everybody was around, and he said we jeopardized his whole mission. He had an agreement with the Hungarian government that this was an extraterritorial space and he was not to hide anybody there. And since we slept there, we had to go. We had to leave. It was very embarrassing. I still somehow see this whole scene. You know, like, we were standing there and trying to be as small as we could. And we left. That was my closest contact with Wallenberg.

By that time, my parents and sister were in one of the Swedish houses, where those people had passes to the house.

Q: Can you tell us what a Schutz-Pass is?
A: Yes. This is a photocopy of my sister's Schutz-Pass. This was an ingenious invention that Wallenberg and his friends concocted. It was a provisional passport that said that the person [in the photograph], who is also the owner, is protected by the Swedish crown. Miraculously, this worked most of the time. Not always, though, because these hooligans—the Arrow Cross—did not always respect this; but others did. And then the Swiss embassy and the Portuguese got the idea, and they also issued Schutz-Passes, but in smaller numbers.

After we left Wallenberg, Yanjey still wanted to continue saving Jews, so we went over to the Portuguese embassy and he offered his services there. That's when we got a Portuguese pass. My husband was very smart and he said, "Let's have one [passport] together." This way, I would be with him on an official document. When we left Hungary, we traveled with this passport to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, and England. While in Budapest, I also met a lovely man named Angelo Rotta. He had a round face and rosy cheeks. I don't remember why, but I once went to see him with the mother of a friend of mine who was a devout Catholic and who had some connections. I don't recall what we were asking him for, but I remember he did his best to help us. Gennaro Verolino was also there as a member of his staff, and both of them were wonderful.

Q: You mentioned that your sister and parents lived in a safe house.
A: Well, you can call it a safe house, but it wasn't that safe. When the Germans came and everything was taken over because of those [anti-Semitic] laws, Jews were forced to move into designated Jewish houses. My aunt, a dentist, lived close by in a designated Jewish house, so my parents left to stay with her.

Unfortunately, my aunt was deported and died in Auschwitz, but that's another story. There were also buildings designated as being protected by the Swedish crown, and everybody who had the Swedish Schutz-Pass could move there. Ultimately, my parents, my grandmother, and my sister moved into one of those buildings.

Q: How long were they able to stay there?
A: I can't tell you exactly because I don't know. When they moved there, it must have been late spring, early summer. They lived there until the Russian troops liberated Hungary, which was in January of 1945.

Q: Would you know how the safe houses were organized and maintained?
A: Well, there was a kind of a person who was in charge. Each family usually had one room and sometimes somebody, a friend or a relative, would arrive and they would make room for them. It was very crowded, but they did the best that could be done in such circumstances.

Q: It was mentioned that Wallenberg had opened an orphanage in the area with approximately 78 children. Do you know anything about that?
A: Yes, I know a little bit about it. I'm not sure, but it's possible that my sister was there for a while because there was a time when we thought that my sister would be safer not being with my parents. She went to some kind of a children's home even though she was not a child, but I don't remember much about it.

Q: How did you get from Hungary to Yugoslavia?
A: After the Russians liberated us, Yanjey, who was a genius, said, "Let's get out of here." He was 19 years older than I was, so he had seen more. He said that when he was a young man, he used to sympathize with communism and all their ideas. But, in the 1930s, there were these mock trials in the Soviet Union, where many people were made to confess crimes against Stalin and were condemned and executed. That was a dictatorship, and Yanjey said, "Everything that's happening there is going to happen here. In order to travel, one will need not only a passport, but also an exit visa, which would be very difficult to get. Let's get out now. Let's try to make our way to Sweden." He mentioned Sweden because he had a contract with the Swedish company called Nifer. But, how can we go there? So he said, "The only way to get there is to go to someplace by the sea first. How can we get to the sea? By going south towards Yugoslavia, there will be, somewhere, a boat and we can make our way by sea to Sweden." Of course, it was absurd because the war was still going on, but there was no other way.

Obviously we could not have gone through Germany. So I said, "Sure, whatever." I trusted him so much. As there were no trains to go to Yugoslavia, somehow we managed to get on a cattle car. There were no animals there, but people. That was our first attempt. Then we got into another train that had a little more shelter and there were Russian soldiers, but they didn't care about us. There was a little space where we were standing for 24 hours or so (I don't even remember anymore), until we got to Yugoslavia. There, we were questioned by the police who were in charge, and eventually they let us go. From there we wanted to go to Turkey, and to do so we had to go through Bulgaria. The police in command said, "Okay, we are not going to arrest you. But you have to get out of the country." We were not sure how to get out of the country and into Bulgaria, as Bulgarians didn't give us the visa, but we got on the train anyway. It's a long and interesting story. From there, with the help of the British, we got to Greece, and then to England.

Q: How long did you remain in England?
A: Five years, actually. Not that long after we settled in London (where I had relatives), Yanjey suggested that maybe we should go to America. The Swedish company that he was in contact with had decided they didn't want to develop this invention that he had, so he thought we should go to America instead. His patents had to do with high-speed cameras and film projectors. So, we went to the American Consulate, and a very nice American young man told us not to apply for a visitor's visa because we would only get into trouble. In order to stay, we would have to leave and enter the country again and apply for an immigration visa. We thought it would take very long, but he said it wouldn't. It took five years. We were just about ready to apply for British citizenship when we got this letter that our turn had come, so we came here. That was in December of 1950. I wrote about all this with many more details.

Q: Is it published?
A: No.

Q: Would you ever think of getting it published?
A: Well, I've been thinking of it. I also wrote another book that people want me to publish, which is a recipe book that came from my mother's recipes. She started to gather them when she got married. Most of them state who gave her the recipe, and include the stories of those people. I intermingle that with the recipes because some of them ended up in Auschwitz or similar places, and didn't survive. And there are photographs. My son put that together.

Q: Do you talk with your children about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: This I told them—I said if they want to take just one thing [from this], it is not only how one person can make a difference, since [Wallenberg] started everything and the Portuguese and the others followed, but that there were some very good people. For instance, there was a young friend of mine who was a teacher of philosophy in the high school where I went, and also a pianist who helped. He lived with his mother and sister, and they took in a number of Jews—seven, I think. They hid them and fed them in their apartment. You had to be very careful to not allow people to notice that there was more food going in there, and more activity going on. Not only did they save them, feed them, and house them, but they didn't let them do anything. They treated them as honored guests. Now this is something really very special. There are people like this. And of course, Yanjey Kudar, I think, should really be remembered somewhere. And there are others I have known to have hidden Jews and risked their lives. But it is easy to forget them; it's easier to remember only the people who were cruel and put Jews in cattle cars and shipped them out of the country. I didn't want to go back to Hungary for a long time, but then I did go back and I realized that there are good people everywhere.

Interview with Marta Sebor

Q: What is your birth name?
A: Marta Koranyi.

Q: In what year were you born?
A: I was born May 24, 1921. Next month, I will be 88 years old.

Q: Were you born in Budapest?
A: Yes, I was born in Budapest. I apologize for my English; I didn't learn it until I came to this country when I was 38. However, I speak German, Hungarian, and a little bit of Slovak. After the war, I lived in Israel for six years.

Q: Can you tell us about growing up in Budapest with your family?
A: I went to Maria-Theresia-Gymnasium[58] [high school]. My father had an electro-technique factory and we had a very good middle-class life. We had a condominium in Pest and a beautiful summer home in Buda.

Q: Was your family religious? Did you go to a Jewish school?
A: We were not religious. My gymnasium was in Hungarian and was not religious. I do believe in God though; I am here, and only God could do that.

My brother went to medical school, but then had to stop because he was Jewish. With the German occupation, there were lots of Polish and Czechoslovakian Jews who came over since there were no deportations yet in Budapest. At that time, there were only deportations in the countryside. A lot of immigrants were coming to Budapest and my father would find them on the streets and hire them to work in [his] factory. It was very nice of him to hire people. It was dangerous for the men to walk in the streets, since all the young men were already either in a forced labor camp or in the army, and they could be taken to a camp or the army. The man who would later become my husband was one of those immigrants. He was from Czechoslovakia and used to be an actor in Prague before he came to Budapest in 1942.

Q: Did you meet your husband in the factory?
A: No, I met my husband when he was trying to sell coffee in Budapest to make some money. Budapest didn't have real coffee yet and we loved coffee. [My husband] went over to his friend, who said to him, "Let's go ask Mr. Koranyi, maybe he will buy it." [He] came upstairs and my father bought the coffee because he wanted to help him out. When I looked out the door and saw him with his friend, I said to myself, "Oh, Marta, if only he could be your husband." He was very, very good looking and a very intelligent man. He had gone through a lot; [the Nazis] killed his parents and then he lost his job. He was a very famous actor. He had quite a few films.

It was in 1942 that [my husband] came over. During those two years, we became friends and my father and I tried to help him. Later, we fell in love. We couldn't get married because he had no papers since he was an immigrant. But, life was still pretty normal in Budapest in 1942, unlike life in the countryside, which was not easy. Here is a letter from my girlfriend that says, "We don't know where they will take us. Think of me and pray."

Q: How did the German occupation affect your family?
A: On Sunday, March 19, 1944, the Germans came to Budapest, but thankfully my whole family was already gathered together. My brother decided to marry his colleague, Alice, whom we all called Lizzy. She lived in the countryside with her parents, and my brother married her so she could have a Budapest

[58] Situated on Regerplatz in the Munich district Au, the Maria-Theresia-Gymnasium is one of Munich's oldest schools.

address; all the people who didn't have one were not allowed to stay in the city. On one occasion, when my sister-in-law was in the countryside with her parents and sister, she went out onto the street a minute or two after curfew. The Arrow Cross caught her and took her to the police station.

When my brother heard what happened, he went to Wallenberg's office. I think that the office was in the Buda part of town, and he went to Wallenberg. I think he was one of the first persons to get a Schutz-Pass. He got one right away for his wife and they sent the Schutz-Pass to the police station. The guard came over to Alice [and said], "Mrs. Koranyi, please come. You are a Swedish citizen. You are free to go." She didn't understand. She was thinking, "Am I crazy, or is he crazy?" But she was happy, and left for Budapest with the papers.

Q: Where did your brother and sister-in-law live after that?
A: They had a furnished apartment in Buda, but time was running out. In the mean time, the Nazis had deported Lizzy's parents and sister. It was a very tragic thing to learn, but they lived in Buda and we lived in Pest.

My husband lived in a furnished room. He managed to get some false papers and was allowed to work. He helped us as much as he could, and that was dangerous because if somebody got caught helping Jews, he would be sent to Auschwitz or to a different camp.

When the Germans came on March 19, we moved into a little restaurant not far from us. There, all of the immigrants came together, young and old, girls and boys. We had a secret code for when there was a *razzia* [military raid] on the street.

My brother was still going to the university, but one day, the professor advised him not to return. He said he should go and take care of himself. Soon after, we had to move to a Jewish Star house. Not far from our old house, we found a small apartment—not the type of house we had before. We left our furniture, pictures, everything, and went to this Star house. We had a very small apartment that we had to share with other families.

One day, the Arrow Cross came to the Star house. They came in, caught me, and started to hit me. The police knew me because my father used to have an office near their station. We had known them for a long time. I was taken away, but they said, "Don't worry; we are taking you to the police station." They took me to the police station and then let me go. That was already October. On October 15, [Ferenc] Szálasi came into power. We decided that we couldn't stay in the Star house and that we should go to Buda, to our summer house.

Q: Was the situation different in Buda?
A: In Buda, our next door neighbor was the Budapest Mayor. He said, "Take out the fence that separates our estates. When somebody comes, then you can just run over to my house." We also went to another neighbor, but he wouldn't let us in. He told us that Szálasi was saying that every Jew was the enemy and that every enemy should be killed. So, it was a terrible day, but we were all together. Then, one night, Mr. [Tivadar] Homonnay, the Mayor, allowed us to hide in his garage. We were all there: my brother, his wife, my father, my mother, me, my fiancé, and a 6- or 7-year-old little orphan boy. He was a very sweet little boy. We were all in the garage for one night. Then, somebody gave us an address in a very tall building and my parents, my fiancé, and I went. It was an empty apartment with nothing there, just a curtain, so we slept on the floor with curtains. We were there for a few days. Then my brother said, "We can't stay here because they think that it's empty, but everybody else in the building heard that people are here."

I came up with an idea because my brother said that we had to do something. I can't perfectly remember why, but I went to 1 Jokai Street since people were saying that Wallenberg was there. I went to that address and started to climb the stairs. I think I was on the second or third floor when I looked up and saw a very handsome, tall, brown-haired, and brown-eyed gentleman coming down. I asked him, "Excuse me, where is the office of Mr. Wallenberg? He said, "Go up one more flight of stairs. But, by the way, I am Wallenberg." I had never seen him before, and he was very handsome. I was 21 years old. I was a young woman. He was very kind to me. He asked for my name, and said, "So what do you want? I am

Wallenberg." I said, "Oh, Mr. Wallenberg...." I had already heard a lot about him. I told him I needed papers; that my fiancé did not have papers and was a Czechoslovakian actor who had been in Hungary for many years." Wallenberg told me to follow him and I went to his office with him. People who were there immediately started to ask for his attention, but he said, "I want to talk to this woman." He was very nice. He asked me, "Do you know how to type?" My husband always said that I should say I know everything, so I told him I did and he offered me a job working in the office. I accepted and he said, "Come tomorrow. We don't pay anybody for work, but you will get a room here and you can bring everyone from your family. This is an extraterritorial house."

He was such a good man. So I said, "Mr. Wallenberg, thank you very much. I will run and get my family and bring them over right away." Then he told the people who were in the room, "That woman over there, she will come to join you." One of the men there was Robert Markovics, a hat factory owner, who later on committed suicide.

I was so excited; it was worth more than a million dollars to live there. [Wallenberg] asked me how I liked my new home and I responded by saying, "Thank you very much. I am very, very thankful."

I ran to get my family and we moved there right away. All we had brought with us were a few pairs of underwear. We had one room for my father, my mother, my fiancé, my brother Erwin, his wife Alice, and me. The little boy was with us, but later, somebody took him to the orphanage. We heard later than the boy said, "Please let me go. I have one bangle [one dollar] in my pocket. I want to live." He thought they were taking him away, but he was going to a good place.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg managed to organize the safe houses?
A: He knew special people. Wallenberg knew everything, he was a Messiah. He was really, I think, a Messiah.

Q: How was working with Wallenberg?
A:. We would wear name tags and we worked in this long office. The room next to us had another three or five women working. We typed all day long. It was crazy, but we were happy.

Q: What were you typing?
A: Schutz-Passes. There was a line of people around the house. Mr. Wallenberg came to me and said, "Marta, fast, fast, fast!" He spoke German. People were lined up all around the house and I didn't want them to have to wait to get their papers.

Q: Did somebody keep a file with the names of the people receiving Schutz-Passes?
A: I don't think so. People just came in and said their names. We would just put their names on the Schutz-Pass and that was all.

Q: Was Wallenberg in the office every day?
A: No, he was a busy man. He went to every house and would take Schutz-Passes with him to the train stations. Those were empty Schutz-Passes with no names on them. He would take them and go to the trains and distribute them. He didn't eat, he didn't sleep, and he had one gun. But, everybody respected him because of his voice and his appearance. That one young man saved hundreds of thousands of people. Can you imagine?

Q: Who would accompany him to the train station?
A: I forgot his name, but it was his driver. He was a Jewish boy. He took him also on his last journey on January 17, 1945.

Q: Do you remember any stories from that time? What did people say about him?
A: Everybody loved him. Everybody prayed for him.

Q: What happened next?

A: It was safe until January 8 at 2:00 a.m. The Arrow Cross came in—the building's superintendent was a sympathizer of the Arrow Cross and he helped them. I was with my mother in the cellar when they entered. My father, my brother, and Alice were in the rooms upstairs. We heard screaming and shooting. The Arrow Cross was lining people up in the courtyard and interrogating them. I took my mother's hand and I pulled her upstairs. My fiancé disappeared. I held my mother's hand the whole the time.

We went upstairs to the office, and there was a door there. Behind the door, there was a built-in closet. I opened it and it looked empty, but then I heard something. Someone was already in there and he said, "Be quiet." I went in with my mother. This is the prayer book I got from my mother that I had in my hands then. I was holding my mother and we were very quiet because there was shooting and screaming all around us. They shot an 8-year-old girl. She had run under the piano in the apartment. They killed an elderly man and they went through the entire house in search of people. We were very lucky to not be found.

Q: Was Wallenberg there at the time?
A: No, they tried to call him, but he was sleeping at different locations every night and they could not find him.

Q: What did the Arrow Cross do with the people from the Jokai Street building?
A: They took them to the Arrow Cross building at Varoshaz Street. Every day they killed some of them, either by the Danube River or in nearby streets. My fiancé was there and they took him away with other people. I don't know how long he stayed there. They took him, but he had already experienced what it was like to be an immigrant, and he knew how to get around. He claimed to be Aryan, so they treated him better. Markovics [the hat factory owner] wasn't as lucky. First they tried to poison him, and eventually he jumped out of the window.

As for my fiancé, he was among the few who survived. The Arrow Cross was retreating to the Buda part of the city, and they decided to take with them the people from Jokai Street who claimed to be Aryan. They made the "Aryans" carry their stuff. My fiancé had to carry two suitcases. He said that they were full of gold, money, and other stolen things. It was very, very dark in Budapest; there were no street lights. At dawn, he threw away the suitcases and managed to escape with two other men from the group. He went back to Jokai Street, but they took us from Jokai the next morning.

Q: What happened to your father and brother when the Arrow Cross entered?
A: My fiancé took my father, hid him in the sofa, and covered him with the pillows so it looked like nobody was there. And Erwin [my brother] was in a chute on the third floor. Erwin was very strong. He was a gymnast and his wife was perched on his shoulders for two hours on the third floor. In the morning, when we came out of the closet, it was quiet already. My father came in the morning. He, my mother, Erwin, Lizzy, and I were there. Only my husband was not there.

Erwin and Lizzy had decided to go to another safe house on Revai Street, but the Arrow Cross came there and took all the people from the building. Luckily, someone managed to inform Wallenberg, so he came and successfully negotiated for all the people to be returned to the safe house.

We stayed at the Jokai Street house. The next day, men wearing police uniforms who worked with Wallenberg came and took me, my mother, and my father to 4 Ulloi Street, where the Swedish office was. We were there in the building when the Russians came. The Russians were on one side of the building and the Germans were on the other [side]. There were a few hundred of us sitting in two very big rooms. I was with my mother. My father was in the basement, closer to the Russian side. My father had a hammer or something of that sort, and he made a hole so all the people escaped to the Russian side. A lot of murdering was going on in the streets. There were dead people and horses everywhere.

We decided to go back to the Star house at 13 Vorosmarty Street. Erwin, Alice, and my fiancé all came too, so we were reunited. Alice and Erwin witnessed the liberation from a safe house that was next to the Opera. They went there from the Revai Street safe house during the night. The next day, the Russians came. Lizzy's shoes were so worn out that she had to tie them up with some string, and Erwin had a

beard and a Red Cross on his arm. When the Russians came, one of them gave Erwin a bottle of champagne. He stood there with no shoes and with champagne as the Russian was going away. Another Russian came and said, “Give me that,” and he took the bottle.

Q: What happened to your extended family members, like your grandparents?
A: They were all killed. They lived in Czechoslovakia. We were the only ones in Budapest.

Q: What did the rest of your family do after the war?
A: I got married and we went to Israel with my mother and father. Erwin and Alice went back to the university. They studied in Innsbruck, Austria. We stayed in Israel for six and a half years. Then I went from Israel to Canada with my parents. My husband had a sister in Hollywood, and he went there. His other brothers and sisters went there as well. We were separated for half a year. Then he came to pick me up. I traveled from Montreal, Canada, on an American visa.

We came to New York and we started a life here. He was working on the Radio Free Europe.[59] He was not acting anymore because of the language barrier, but he was broadcasting in Czech and Hungarian. We were together for 56 years until he passed away. He was the greatest man I ever met and he was very, very handsome.

Q: What would have happened to you if it weren’t for Wallenberg?
A: Oh, I would be in the other world.

Q: Did you hear what happened to him after the war?
A: No, but whenever I hear “Wallenberg,” I feel emotional.

Q: So nobody knows what actually happened after the Russians took him?
A: People told him, “Don’t go, don’t go.” But he didn’t listen. Two Russians came and took him. I think the Russians killed him. Who knows?

I met his sister Nina. They found a note from Wallenberg that had the Koranyi name on it. Wallenberg mentioned that he had met Erwin Koranyi, my brother.

Q: Do you talk to your grandchildren about Mr. Wallenberg?
A: Oh, yes. They all know. I told them.

[59] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) was established at the beginning of the Cold War to transmit uncensored news and information to audiences behind the Iron Curtain. It currently broadcasts in 28 languages in 20 countries.

Interview with John Schiffer
with the participation of his wife, Marianne

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is John Schiffer.

Q: In which city and country were you born?
A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary.

Q: When were you born?
A: November 22, 1930.

Q: What was your early life like? Could you describe your family?
A: My parents were both physicians. My father's family was from northern Hungary, which is now Slovakia. They settled in Budapest in about 1905, while my father was still in high school. He finished gymnasium [high school] and was the first of his family to go to university. He was a medical student when World War I began, and he served in the Austro-Hungarian Army. He was a lieutenant on the Russian front, eventually in charge of a medical unit.

My mother came from southern Hungary, from a town called Mohács,[60] which is on the Danube. Her father was a district judge in Mohács. She was one of four children, and the youngest. Her brother was killed in World War I. She also was the first of her family to go to university. She went to a girl's gymnasium among the first of these university-track secondary schools for girls, since women were beginning to be admitted to university. The one for southern Hungary was in Fiume,[61] on the Adriatic [Sea]. She then went to medical school and met my father in Budapest after World War I in the 1920s, when she was an intern and he, the equivalent of a resident at the Jewish Hospital in Budapest. They married in 1928. My father became a radiologist, which was then a brand-new technique in medicine. He studied in Vienna and Budapest and then he spent time in Stockholm, which was his Swedish connection and the basis of his application for a Schutz-Pass some 20 years later. I think he was in Sweden for something like six months.

Q: How did Judaism survive in the [Austro-Hungarian] Empire? Was your family religious?
A: What I know is mostly from books I have read here and from what I had learned in school in Hungary, and it fits what I observed in my childhood. The Austro-Hungarian Empire came into being in about 1863 or 1867. This was the time of *rapprochement* between Hungary and Austria. In 1848, there had been a big nationalist revolution in Hungary against direct Austrian rule. The revolution almost made it, but then Austria called in Russia (based on the Holy Alliance Treaty) and the Russians overwhelmed the revolution. Until that time, Jews were seen as somewhat outsiders, although change was in the air and quite a few Jews fought with the Hungarians in the revolution. It was 1848, the year of revolutions all over Europe.

Following the Russians' defeat of the Hungarian revolutionary army, there was repression of Hungarian nationalism for almost 20 years, and then in 1867 there was that *rapprochement*, and Hungary was given full rights as a monarchy. The Habsburg Emperor became the King of Hungary, but Hungary had its own legislature, and Hungarian became the official language of the empire. Hungary then was much larger than it is now. It included Slovakia, bits of Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and so on from the Adriatic Sea to the Russian border. There was a strong movement to have Hungarian the official language to replace German, and Jews were more flexible than many of the other minorities—they willingly spoke Hungarian. There was a sort of sympathetic tie between the Hungarian-speaking majority and the Jews, who were

[60] Mohács is a town in Baranya County, Hungary, on the right bank of the Danube.
[61] Fiume is the Italian and Hungarian name for the city of Rijeka in Croatia. Both names mean river in Italian and Croatian.

adapting to the Hungarian language easily. Also, the commercial and industrial revolution took place in Hungary at that time; industrial revolution came rather late, but many of the bankers, industrialists and traders were Jews. They didn't feel particularly put down as a separate class. They spoke the same language and there was relatively little competition in trade, manufacturing, or the professions of the Hungarian middle class. The atmosphere was quite different from Poland or Russia in that respect. My grandfather from my mother's side was a judge. It was fairly unusual that a Jew would be appointed district judge at that point. In fact, my grandfather changed his surname from a German-sounding name to a Hungarian name, as did many Jews. But, he would not change his religion, I was told, even though he was advised that this would reduce his chances of promotion.

The ideas that came to Western Europe at the time of the French Revolution gradually had an impact by the end of 19th century in Hungary. The revolt against the Orthodox religion and the more rational, scientific way of looking at the world started to be accepted. Many of the younger Jews were not as religious as their parents. My maternal grandfather was actually president of the Jewish congregation in Mohács, yet, the household was not particularly observant. I remember my mother telling me stories. She went to a Jewish elementary school. She hadn't fasted on *Yom Kippur*, so she asked her grandmother about what she would say if her teacher asked her about whether or not she fasted. Her mother told her, "Don't worry about it, they won't ask," and they didn't. This secular view of religion, which is more or less the way many Americans see religion, was coming in. There were people who were much more Orthodox and much more observant, but it wasn't unusual to have this less Orthodox attitude. Jews were seen somewhat the way Jews are seen in the United States, not by everybody, but by a good part of society. My father's family was more religious. They were quite observant and kept a kosher household, but my father walked away from that; he broke with religion. So, my parents were completely secular. I know that my father never went to synagogue and didn't keep any holiday. Yet, the designation of a religion was required by Hungarian law. Everybody in school had to go to religion classes. You were registered from birth as this or that, and the record was kept officially. But other than that, the religion was not seen as something important.

After World War I, the fascist regime with [Miklós] Horthy came. Hungary was still a kingdom at that time, even though Austro-Hungary had been dissolved and Hungary became a smaller country, more centered on the ethnic Hungarian part of the larger country. At that point, Horthy came in and his right-wing faction did have a somewhat anti-Semitic overtone. It took the form of quotas. We have educational quotas, in a different sense, here. But for instance, first in the universities, there was a quota on how many Jews could be accepted to the university. It was supposed to be in proportion to the fraction of the population that was Jewish, about 6%. Yet, more than half of all physicians in Hungary were Jewish. My younger uncle, for instance, immigrated to the U.S. right after, in 1919, because they judged that he had no chance of getting into university (there was only one medical, science, and humanities university and one engineering university in Budapest).

Q: Were there a lot of Hungarian Jews at that point coming to the U.S.?
A: Not then. The big exodus was in the decades before World War I, and for professionals somewhat later. Several later-famous physicists such as [Eugene Paul] Wigner[62] and [John von] Neumann,[63] left Hungary for the more liberal west in the 1920s. They went first to Austria and then to Germany, because Germany was seen as more enlightened at that time. Wigner, in fact, became a professor in Berlin and did much of his early work in Germany. But when Hitler came to power in the 1930s, Wigner and many others went to the U.S.

Q: The Regent of Hungary was a patient of your father?
A: Yes. My father was probably one of the leading radiologists in Hungary. He was Jewish, so he didn't get to be a professor in the university. There were two major private hospitals in Budapest. There were also public hospitals, but the private hospitals were thought to have better care, and they probably did. He

[62] Eugene Paul "E. P." Wigner (1902–1995) was a Hungarian American physicist and mathematician. He received a share of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1963.
[63] John von Neumann (1903–1957) was a Hungarian-American mathematician who made major contributions to a vast range of fields.

was a radiologist in both of them. Many of the top layers of the Hungarian society and government—the regent, ministers, and ambassadors—came to that hospital, and if they came, he was likely to have them as his patients.

Q: How do you personally feel about religion?
A: Religion to me is not important. Whoever it was who said that more evil was done in name of religion than good, I am fully in sympathy. I do feel that religion as such is outside of my frame of reference. Basically, I'm agnostic. I don't know whether there is such a thing as a divine being or not, and I don't see that it should make any difference, as far as ethical decisions are concerned. We find ourselves in this world, aware of our surroundings, and having the ability to think. We have to use our intelligence and make our own decisions. I'm proud of the fact that I am a descendant of a group of people who managed to maintain high intellectual standard of analytic thinking and ability to understand. I think that's good. I do not feel any particular allegiance to the formal tradition of holy days or such. I don't feel any attachment to the ceremonial aspects of it. Judaism as such doesn't mean very much to me as a philosophy of life.

Having gone through a period between the ages of 10 and 14 of Nazified Hungary, it made a strong impression on me that I was a Jew. I can show you a picture of me with a Yellow Star. At the age of 13 or 14 that makes an impression on you, having been brought up in a rather secular way, to be suddenly stamped as something that is obviously regarded by the prevailing culture as not a good thing, not a nice thing. This label is one that you get at birth, not because of anything you did or your parents did—that's just who you are. That certainly made an impression.

Q: Did you think, "I look Jewish," growing up?
A: You learned it from the Nazis. There were cartoons about Jews with big noses. There were Hungarian articles in Nazi papers about Jews with curly black hair, hairy legs, and other comments. That sort of thing sticks with you.

Q: How did it feel to be labeled in such an aggressive way?
A: That was interesting. I went to a school that was actually run by the Lutheran church. It happened that this school had a very good academic reputation, particularly in math and sciences. In fact, I later learned that Wigner, 20 or 30 years earlier, had gone to the same school. Most of my classmates knew that I was a Jew because I went to Jewish religion classes, but other than that, there were some jokes but nothing serious until after the German occupation.

There was one boy in our class who had spent time in Germany and apparently he belonged to the Hitler-Jugend. In the few weeks between the occupation of Hungary by German troops on March 19, 1944, and the closing of all schools, this classmate organized the beating up of the Jews in the class. For some reason, I wasn't there that day and only heard about it the next day, when our teacher asked for those who had participated in this incident to stand (this was most of the class). He asked what the Jewish students had done to provoke this, and the Hitler-Jugend classmate answered that this was to repay the Jews for all that they had done. He did not elaborate. Our teacher then told them off in rather strong terms. Given that we were already under German occupation, it was a brave thing for the teacher to speak up in this way. I think most of the class was pretty ashamed of themselves, though some were not. I would guess that of my closer friends, there were probably more Jews than non-Jews. But that was a sort of social stratification.

To show what I mean, I had a cousin in Mohács, who now lives in Cleveland, and is somewhat older than me. She recently wrote her recollections. She pointed out that there were two middle classes in Mohács—the Jewish one and the Gentile one. Each had its own social functions; each had its own tennis club, its own ways of getting together. There was some of this separation in Budapest also, but perhaps not as strong. You tended to associate more with Jews than non-Jews, but by no means exclusively. For my birthday party when I was perhaps 10, about half the boys I wanted to invite were Jewish, half were not.

Having gone through that period made me feel, on some level, that perhaps Jews had been keeping themselves too much apart from the rest of the society, and some of the problems came from that. It had its good side, but also had its negative side. Intellectually, it is not clear to me whether complete amalgamation is a good thing, or whether maintaining some separate identity is good. It's something one can discuss. I guess I have not come to terms with that myself.

Q: How did things change in 1944?
A: Until March 19, 1944, Hungary was fighting part of the war on the side of Germany, fighting on the Russian Front. Our sympathies were, of course, with the allied side. My father listened to either the BBC or the Voice of America every evening. We all listened to the Hungarian language broadcast as well as the German one. His English wasn't good enough to listen to the English broadcast. There were a few air raids, but by and large, life was going on as before. Some slightly more restrictive laws were passed about Jews holding property, but most of it had no affect on us. We had a rather good middle-class existence. My father encouraged me to learn English earlier on, and I had subscriptions to children's magazines from England and from the U.S. as long as it was possible, until about 1943.

On March 19, the Russian front was getting closer and the Germans occupied Hungary. This was a cataclysmic change for us and all Jews in Hungary. This incident of beating up Jews in school, which I mentioned, happened maybe a week later. Schools closed about two or three weeks after that. The Russian front was getting closer, getting to the eastern border of Hungary. The moving of Jews to designated houses started. We had to leave our apartment to a designated Jewish House. This was something like a month or six weeks after March 19. From then on, we lived in a Jewish house.

Then, these Schutz-Passes became available, and other Embassies started issuing protective passes also. At that point, it wasn't clear yet how you could get one, so my father applied for one based on his studies in Sweden in the 1920s. That dragged on for a while. In the summer of 1944, the Russian front was coming closer and the rate of deportations from towns outside of Budapest intensified. My mother's family from the southern town of Mohács disappeared. Later, we found out that they were taken to Auschwitz. The Germans and [Adolf] Eichmann were more and more insistent on the deportation in Budapest. With quite a large Jewish population, things were getting tighter. In the middle of the summer of 1944, Horthy's government tried to negotiate a separate peace treaty with the Allies. As a result of this, he was put under house arrest by the Germans, and they empowered the Hungarian Arrow Cross party—the Hungarian Nazi party—to take over.

Q: The Arrow Cross was a minority party. How much of a minority?
A: Of about 400 seats in Parliament, they had perhaps 40. It was really an extremist minority. They were put into power only because the Germans did not trust anybody else in the very last months of the war. Then atrocities in Budapest escalated. The residents from some of the Jewish houses were taken to the Danube and then just machine-gunned, with the bodies carried away by the river.

Q: As a 14-year-old child, how did you process that?
A: Until the time that we heard of Auschwitz after the war, we knew nothing about gas chambers. We knew there were deportations; my parents told us how, in case of need, we should go and try to get to some Gentile friends. The Horthy incident happened in the latter part of August 1944, and at that point, there were some houses designated to be under the protection of the Swedish embassy. Our Schutz-Pass came through sometime in late August or early September of 1944.

Q: Were you in a panic?
A: No. It was obviously sort of a race between the Russians getting there and the Germans. We didn't know that we were supposed to be deported to Auschwitz under Eichmann's initiative, but we knew that the situation was bad and that the laws were becoming more restrictive. One day, my father was not allowed to practice medicine on anyone but a Jew. At that point, he couldn't go to the hospital where he had practiced to use the X-ray equipment, or anything. But then, they started to round up people between certain ages, men, women, to help dig trenches in the surroundings of Budapest. In Hungary, a large

fraction of physicians were Jews, something like 50% or 60%, although Jews were only about 6% of the population.

Starting back in 1942 or 1943, they had taken younger Jewish men, between 18 and 40, to be auxiliary workers, in parallel with the military draft for Gentile men in the same age group. This separation was a concession to the Germans; so these men didn't fight, but they dug trenches and did manual work. But not people my father's age. In the summer of 1944, everybody up to age 50 or 55 was rounded up; men and then later, women, were taken away to dig defenses for the coming Russian front. My father was among them. He was in a brigade of 500 Jewish physicians. He was gone for about six weeks. After they had done the digging that they were supposed to do, they were moved westward. It became clear to my father that their destination was not to dig more trenches, but that they were marching westward to Germany.

Q: Do you remember the day your father was taken away? Did he have time to pack clothes?
A: Yes. It was known the day before that the next morning, at 6 o'clock, all men in a certain age group had to line up in front of the house to be taken away for work on fortifications. They were told to take suitable clothing and food with them.

Q: You moved to a safe house after that. Do you remember the interior of these houses?
A: Vaguely. I remember on this second apartment, that it was very crowded. Our original house came to be designated as a Swedish House, but this one was maybe five blocks away. It was an apartment of maybe four rooms, and there must have been about 50 people in it. I remember one day there was some noise, and when I looked out the window, there was a man being taken away by Arrow Cross people. He was screaming and shouting, though I'm not clear what. He was thrown on a horse cart and taken away. I remember things like this. I also remember that in our first Jewish house, we had quite a bit of canned food that my parents had saved for emergencies. My father had already been taken away when we had to move, so I had to organize it. My mother was completely out of it, both physically and mentally, and in no condition to do things. I had to try to organize getting some of our clothing and food and move it to the new place.

[My mother] was extremely upset because it was clear that my father's postcards were coming from further and further west. Moving 500 middle-aged men, you don't get that far day to day, maybe 10 miles or so. But the mail service still worked, so we kept getting postcards. There were several attempts to get him out that were not successful. By that time, we had our Swedish Schutz-Passes. We sent him a photocopy of one. The officer in charge just tore it up, saying that you could buy these on the black market.

Q: You mentioned that you had a letter from the Regent [Horthy] for your father.
A: We had a letter from the Regent, but it was not worth much by that time.

Q: Did you have a particular task to perform in the Swedish protected house?
A: When we returned to the previous house, there was a sort of organization established there. There was someone called the commander of the house, which is a literal translation; it was more the chief administrator for the house. He was one of the people, a Schutz-Pass holder, who was in charge of administration and dealt with the people from the Swedish Embassy, the Germans, or the Hungarian authorities. Forms needed to be filled out, information had to be gathered. Some food came in from the Swedes. I don't think I ever saw Wallenberg, at least not that I knew. I remember that the first DDT[64] I had ever seen was supplied by the Swedish Embassy. So, I became the assistant to this man.

The building that we were in was a six-story apartment house, three apartments on each floor. A total of maybe 300 or 400 people were in there. We had to go through the pretense of keeping records of who was there, what Schutz-Pass they had, the number of the Schutz-Pass, etc. Only the people with

[64] DDT, the best-known of several chlorine-containing pesticides, was extensively used during the World War II to control malaria and typhus among civilians and troops.

Swedish Schutz-Passes were supposed to be living there, but this wasn't quite true. But, all the information had to be collected and presented. Also, there was some food and powdered milk supplied by the Swedes for young children, so we had to know how many children we had under the age of 12 or 10, and a great deal of other information. I was the one given the task of collecting this.

Q: Why do you think you were selected for the job?
A: There were some other young people. Everyone 16 and older had been taken away. There were some people in their 60s. I was among the older kids who had not been taken away. It was interesting. To me, at that time, it had the elements of adventure. Not that I enjoyed it or was excited, but basically, once my father got back, I felt optimistic.

Q: You seem hesitant.
A: Well, once you learned how many people were killed or taken off to Auschwitz, it doesn't seem quite so much like an adventure. You had gone through a period of extreme danger, but without quite understanding what things were about.

Q: Marianne, I understand you were in a safe house as well. Do you want to share your experience?
Marianne**:** My family was in a house across the street from John's. It was also a Swedish-controlled house. My parents saw the people John mentioned who were taken away, and it didn't look good. So, they said they were not waiting for that, and they were not going to sit there. This was the end of December. We walked across town. Where my mother grew up, there was a house where supposedly her mother and sister and children were hiding. We walked across the city, by the artillery and tanks. We arrived, and they were there, all except a Gentile friend of my aunt's. By that time, they were living in the basement. This was now a three-family house in the different part of the city. The Russians came in much later. That was one of the few houses left standing in that part of the city. The Russians were rather suspicious about us, and the Swedish passport. They made us move out eventually. Before that, as John mentioned, my father was in a work brigade, and my mother was taken away. This friend of my aunt's put me in a cloister. There were kids hiding there, maybe 20 girls. When my mother and father got back to the Swedish house, my mother collected me in mid-December. My mother had lighter hair than yours, blue eyes and white skin. She wandered around without the Yellow Star happily. My mother got this Swedish Schutz-Pass for my father when he came back from work camp to Budapest, and she handed him the passport. That was how my father got his Swedish Schutz-Pass. My father had a friend in the Swedish Embassy.

Q: Did your mother know that she didn't look Jewish?
Marianne: Oh, she did.

Q: Did your father look Jewish?
Marianne: Yes. Looking Jewish was a very relevant thing depending on where you were. My father had darker hair, darker eyes.

Q: John, you were a young boy, but you had to behave as an adult.
A: Yes, I was doing what I could because there was nobody else to do it. There was not only my mother and sister, but also my aunt, her daughter, and my grandmother who were with us at that stage, but I do not think they had Swedish Schutz-Passes. There were people from other families who had lived in the same apartment we did, and others we did not know. The apartment was very full. We stayed in this new apartment about 10 days, and then we found out that the previous house we had lived in, where we'd left many things—including some food hidden away—was also declared a Swedish protected house, so we moved back. That was the day my father came back.

Q: Do you remember that day?
A: It's hard to know what I remember directly and what I remembered from having read his diary. It was 60-some years ago. My father just showed up early in the morning, and he was very tired and very

bedraggled looking. He got back by walking away from the group. It turned out that my wife's uncle, who was a physician and a friend of my father's, was in the same group. He was marching with my father and refused to walk away with him; he never returned. Most of the people who did not escape in some form, died—not in a gas chamber, they just died of malnutrition, dysentery, or whatever. My father walked back to Budapest, stopping in small villages, looking for the houses of the local doctors, and asking for their help. None of them turned him away. Some were less comfortable with his visit than others, but most of them helped him along the way. When he got back, he was physically in very bad shape. He spent the next month, which was the time when the Russian liberation occurred, essentially recuperating and writing his diary relying on the postcards—he had written postcards home as often as he could. My mother, of course, had saved them to remind him of what went on which day.

Q: Why do you think he needed to document all that?
A: I think that the experience was such a shock to his worldview, to his beliefs about people, that he felt he just had to have some way of recording what his experiences were. Also, since he had known many of the people who were with him from earlier days and had become perhaps closer friends with some of them, he felt that he had to record what had happened to them, as far as he could tell, for their families.

Q: Considering your father's diary as a reference, how did the war affected him?
A: He was very much a humanist in his outlook on the world. Actually, I have a whole bunch of his letters that he sent to my uncle in New York. An interesting group of letters is from a period of a few weeks while he was in Switzerland in 1939, just as the war was threatening. He was explaining his worldview and why he felt that what had happened in Germany could not happen in Hungary, and why he felt that he should not take the step to immigrate to the United States. I've translated some of those letters for my children. It gives an interesting window of the times and on my father's worldview.

Q: How were the social aspects of your life?
A: There was a group of us. We played endless games of Monopoly or cards. Since there was no school, we read books or played games all the time. I remember a brother and sister, who were maybe 17 or 18. Their parents had been taken away. They were sort of admired as virtually adults. They would tell us stories and we had discussions with them, but I've no idea what happened to them later.

Q: Were the games always played inside? Did you go outside?
A: No. We were allowed to go outside until the fall in 1944. But there was a curfew for Jews. I remember that a boy of same age and I walked along the shore of Danube with our Yellow Stars showing, during the summer. Nobody made any comments and nobody called us any names. Maybe I am imagining it, but many people seemed almost embarrassed by the fact that we had to wear the Stars; some people undoubtedly took satisfaction in it.

Q: What percentage of the population do you think was anti-Semitic?
A: Some survivors say that all Hungarians were against Jews; they were all anti-Semitic. Some have more nuanced recollections. I tend to go with the latter, but there were no Gallup polls conducted at that time on how people felt about Jews. It's very hard to say. I didn't have enough direct contact to have evidence, just my impression that it was not as universal; it was more something forced by the Germans that undoubtedly had echoed in some Hungarians, but that it did not have the same general support as it had in Germany.

Q: What was it like inside of that house?
A: We were all stuck there; some people were hysterical over what we should do about those who, for example, didn't have a Swedish but only a Swiss protective pass. Should they be forced to leave, or should they stay? These were the sorts of things my father would help smooth over. People were huddling in their own little rooms within the apartments. It was a question of who had how much food put away, and what they would eat. You clearly didn't have enough food to feed everybody in the house, not even all those in the apartment; you didn't have enough food to feed your own family, but if somebody was in very bad shape, who helped out whom and to what extent? All these nuances happened on a microscopic local level from room to room almost, not house-wide. There were no meetings of the house

as such. I got some glimpse of it by being this messenger, and my father did by being the physician in the house. There were all sorts of ugly tensions coming up at that time. Some people got hysterical. I remember, but that must be after the Russians came in.

My father was called up to a lady that we didn't think very much of. She had dyed red hair and looked like she was in her 50s, though she probably was in her 30s. Her husband was with her; he had not been taken away. They were having a fight and my father had to be called to help make peace. When he came back, he was beside himself with laughter. She was complaining about how her husband had used a candle to burn a bed bug on the wall and it set flame to her mother's picture—not quite, but almost. Bed bugs were a problem in the crowded apartments, and Wallenberg's mission managed to get DDT for us to control it.

Q: Was there some hierarchy established in the house?
A: Within our apartment, yes. My father was a respected member, and he was sort of the house physician for anybody that was ill. Other than that, it was a very crowded apartment building.

Q: What kind of family dynamic was there in your family? How did your parents get along?
A: They got along very well and had a warm, loving relationship, as far as I could see.

Q: What were your feelings as the Russians were closing in?
A: Complete relief. The period just before that was sort of exciting. The Hungarian Nazis came to the house next to us and its inhabitants were actually taken off and killed. A few days later, that house took a direct hit and was completely destroyed by a bomb in an air raid. Then the Russian Army surrounded Budapest and their artillery started shelling the city. This was somewhere around early December.

Q: How much did you know about the Russians?
A: Only what had been written in the Hungarian pro-German papers. But we knew how the regime was treating us; we had listened to the BBC and we did not believe the papers, and were eagerly awaiting the Russians.

Q: Could you hear the artillery?
A: Yes. The artillery noise was getting closer and closer, and the Russians surrounded the city. They sent an officer with a white flag to negotiate the surrender, and the Germans shot him. Then the Russians moved in the heavy artillery; we didn't know that until later. I remember that my father felt that the basement level of the apartment house was too crowded and that we might as well stay in our apartment, which would be a second floor in the U.S., with four floors above it, so it was reasonably well-protected from above.

One day, the Russian artillery hit a German ammunition dump about half a mile away from where we were. There was a tremendous explosion. The room where I was sleeping had a little balcony with a French door in front of it. The pressure from the explosion was so strong that it pushed the whole door into the room, and as I woke, I saw it suspended over the bed I was sleeping in. A brick hit some pillow next to my head. I remember waking up to this enormous noise and finding that there was dust settling, and the bricks sitting on the bed close to my pillow. I had to climb out from under this structure. We managed to get that frame into place, but all the window panes were broken, of course.

Q: What was your emotional state?
A: I took it very matter-of-factly. It wasn't something particularly scary. Air raids were funny things. I remember air raids before the Germans came. Occasionally, there were U.S. air raids from Italy flying over. Some of them were bombing Budapest, although not very heavily. We went to the basement shelter in 1943 and early 1944, before we moved to the designated Jewish house. I remember some of the neighbors being quite scared. Somehow, maybe because of my father, we just took it as a matter-of-fact thing and were hoping that the alert would last until after 1:00 a.m., because that would mean no school the next day.

In the time we are talking about, in the Swedish house, I must have been scared on some level, but I don't have a recollection of being scared. The noise was tremendous. The artillery was rumbling. Its continuous rumbling is difficult to describe. It's not an individual explosion, but sort of like a distant thunderstorm in the mountains, punctuated by loud thunderclaps nearby. The rumbling goes on and on and on, day and night. That's a peculiar noise of that time; you have to experience it to know what I mean. Another special noise that remains with me is that of many airplanes flying overhead. That beating of the propellers against each other is, again, something very unique to itself—having 50 or 100 airplanes flying overhead. Those are just the recollections of noises, but not particularly frightening ones.

Q: You seem to have paid special attention to airplanes.
A: I remember fantasizing about how I would run away, steal an airplane, fly over to Italy, find an American airfield, and land; things of this sort. Perhaps I had read too many of the children's adventure magazines.

Q: What was the transition like when the Russians finally came in?
A: I remember that very well. I was sleeping and I heard my father talk in what sounded like a Slavic language. Since he was born in Slovakia, and he could speak Czech and Slovakian. In fact, he was talking with a Russian soldier who was there because the Russians occupied our part of the city with no fighting. They set up a machine gun placement in the window for a few hours and with no Germans around, they just moved on. Fighting still went on for another month or so. That was the end of it. That was just a tremendous feeling of relief. It was the thing I (and all of us) had been fantasizing about, and suddenly it happened.

Q: The feeling was sudden, but did you leave the house immediately?
A: No. The fight was still on. There were artillery bombardments, unexploded shells all over the place. There were dead bodies. It was a gradual process. After it was clear and the fighting was over, my father made his way to the hospital. The hospital where he had practiced was a Russian military hospital now, but it had been a German military hospital. He knew how all the equipment worked since he had overseen its installation, and they were glad to have him. There was no electricity and I remember that he took a little lead battery—half the size of a car battery—charged it in the hospital, and brought it home every day. We gradually started going out, and my job was to collect firewood because there was no gas or heating in winter, and it was January. I remember we went back to our old apartment before the ghetto. In the maid's room, there was a little iron stove. We took a child's sled and brought the stove back to have some form of heating, but we needed fuel for it. So it was my job to collect wood from ruined houses. The houses were mostly brick except for window frames, doorframes, flooring and a few bits of structural wood. I collected anything that could be chopped up and used as fuel. Scavenging was sort of fun for a while, as a challenge. Many other people were doing the same thing, because that was the only source of fuel to be had. Our apartments had gas stoves, so we had to improvise with one-gallon [four-liter] cans, cutting off the tops and lighting a fire in them with a pot balanced on top. The smoke had to go out the window, and the kitchen ceiling quickly turned black. Windows were all broken, so the window openings had to be covered as best we could to protect against the cold.

By March, my former school reopened. It also had been some sort of a military hospital. Students were put to work, cleaning up the classrooms and moving the benches back into the rooms. Whichever teachers were around started to teach us in their subjects; that was in March, early April.

Q: How were your parents emotionally at that time?
A: The liberation had been a tremendous relief for them. They were doing alright. My mother was relieved that her husband was back, but the news about her sisters was ominous. Some people started coming back from Germany. She was very upset that her sisters and their husbands perished in Auschwitz, but she was devastated to hear that her 16-year old niece who had been taken had also disappeared.

Q: How do you feel about Budapest now? Do you still feel that it is your home?
A: No, not really. We've been back, but I don't have any relations. [My wife] Marianne has some cousins who remained there.

Q: Marianne, I know you don't you want to go back to Budapest. Why is that?
Marianne: Well, I was so happy to get out of there. You know, some Jews are not comfortable going to Germany. I had no trouble living in Germany for a year because I did not know the people. But in Hungary, I knew the people, and if you scratch them a little bit about what they did in the war or in the Communist era, you see the same people, or some of the same people, who were Nazis and became Communist. I left in 1956. John does not have this feeling about Hungary. I think that is due to his being there during the next phase of his life. I was younger. I was 9 in 1944. I remember the Communist era. Interestingly, John's cousin has the same feeling as I do. It is not illogical.

Q: When did you decide to come to America?
John: After the war, about 1946. I had two uncles who had immigrated to the U.S., one before and one after World War I. The son of one of them was 10 years older than me. He finished college before the start of World War II. He was a reporter for the *New York Times* and couldn't serve in the Army. After the war, he left the *Times* for the Joint Distribution Committee, the group that coordinated Jewish relief agencies' work in Europe. He was stationed in Paris as their public relations person. He came to Hungary and he was one of the first Americans we saw. This was before mail services had been established, before we knew much of anything that was going on. I wanted to come, but the decision was my parents'. It was partly because of his influence, and probably the fact that my father saw the communist cloud getting darker and darker in Hungary. My uncle in New York invited me, and they wrote an Affidavit of Support to enable my studies. I came on a student visa in 1947. I was enthusiastic about America. America was the ultimate in my imagination, and in my fantasy. I was all for it. For my parents, it was not so easy to let their 16-year-old son to go.

Marianne: [My parents and I] were brought to New York through the HIAS[65] agency. They were sponsoring us. I left in 1956. This was after the Hungarian Revolution. The borders were opened, meaning there were not any landmines. We walked as proper refugees from Hungary to Austria, and then stayed in Vienna for a while. My father had business acquaintances and distant relatives there. They arranged some hotel accommodations. We were there for about two or three weeks. Many of my friends and schoolmates were also in Vienna.

Q: Was that essentially an exodus of a whole generation?
Marianne: Yes, especially for Jewish kids. Very few people I knew stayed in Hungary. Essentially my generation, at that stage, left or tried to leave. What made it special was that my parents came with me.

Q: You just completely divorced yourself?
Marianne: I heard that you could get into university. Gymnasium was alright. I went to a technical high school that had a harder entrance exam. But, my family was forced to leave Budapest and I had to quit school. For two years, we sat in this little village. To get into university, depending on what your background was, a certain number of points were required. So I didn't make it.

Q: Having gone through that period, what is your impression of humanity?
John: People are capable of doing awful things to other humans. Certainly Germany carries a large burden for that. There are many examples of major cruelties to people in other countries, not on the same scale. In Hungary, the Arrow Cross Party was from the dregs of society and became suddenly empowered by the Germans in the last months before the Liberation, after Horthy was arrested. They were really murderers, but that is ordinary evil. The calculated extermination organized by Eichmann and the regime that enabled it are in a very different category in my mind. It is scary what evil an organized society is capable of, while fully believing in the moral righteousness of its cause.

People can develop certain levels of emotional insensitivity and then they are capable of enormous of atrocities against others. I read about it, but fortunately I don't have any direct experiences. I should

[65] The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was founded in 1881 with the aim of aiding Jewish people whose lives and freedom are at risk, through rescue, relocation, family reunification, and resettlement.

mention that there is a Hungarian writer by the name of [Imre] Kertész,[66] who won the Literature Nobel Prize, and I have read his books. He is roughly my age, and he wrote about his experience in Auschwitz and about the period before, in Hungary. Much of the tone of what he writes struck me as very close to what I felt. Unfortunately, the English translations of his books, for instance *Fateless*,[67] are very, very poor. I was very disappointed when I read these. Then I got a hold of his books in Hungarian and the difference was enormous! The Hungarian version is overwhelming and feels very valid.

Q: Has this changed the person you are today?
A: It has certainly changed my worldview.

Q: Did the name Wallenberg mean anything to you during that time?
A: Oh, yes! Wallenberg's name was well known. That he was the principal person who was responsible for this protection; that I certainly knew. But what he looked like, I had no idea.

Q: How did you recall him as a figure, as an individual?
A: I see him as an exceptional, brave man who did a lot at that time that very few people could accomplish.

Q: Why do you think Wallenberg became a phenomenon?
A: First of all, because of what he did as an individual and what he accomplished in a terrible period of history. That's the most important. Second, is of course the fact that he disappeared without a trace, immediately after the war. The combination, I think, made a mystery that kept people guessing. Had he survived, I think he still would be a tremendously important person, one of the few people who really behaved humanely. [Oskar] Schindler has been immortalized by movies and books, but Wallenberg accomplished much more than Schindler did. The objective reason why this happens, the fact that he disappeared added an aura of mystery that captured people's imagination, is difficult to quantify.

Q: Do you distinguish those who do large acts and those who do small acts?
A: I distinguish that he did something far beyond what could have been expected from somebody in his position. He was an official in the Swedish Embassy, yet he took it upon himself a much broader goal and did that successfully.

Q: Have you ever visited any memorials or read about Wallenberg on your own?
A: Yes, of course. I followed, for a long time, bits and pieces of information about the probability of his having survived. Time is going on. After the Perestroika, there was a hope that he might still be alive. In fact, there was a gentleman at the University of Chicago who had looked into this. He borrowed my Schutz-Pass and photocopied it for educational purposes.

Q: Do you feel like you owe your life to Raoul Wallenberg?
A: My chances of survival in Budapest with a Schutz-Pass, given how things developed, were maybe 80%–90%. Most Jews in Budapest survived; those who were not in Budapest did not survive. Wallenberg made a difference in that. Without Wallenberg, it would be difficult to say. The probability of survival may have been 50%, or it may have been 20%. He made a big difference. I owe that chunk of probability to him. In some considerable measure, I do owe my life to him

[66] Imre Kertész (1929–) is a Hungarian Jewish author, Holocaust concentration camp survivor, and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002.
[67] Kertész, Imre. *Fateless*. Evanston, Il: Northwestern, 1992.

Interview with George Schwarz

Q: What is your name?
A: My name is Thomas George Schwarz.

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary.

Q: When were you born?
A: I was born on July 26, 1932.

Q: How did you grow up?
A: We lived with very close family members: my grandmother, a couple of aunts who were living with us in Budapest, my father, my mother, and my sister, who is one year older. I grew up basically in a, I would say, lower middle-class surrounding. I went to school, to the kindergarten. We went to Jewish religious school. I remember I was a young boy and we went to the playground a lot. We lived very close to the city park, which is a famous place in Budapest, so we used to walk four blocks and go [to the park] to play after school. I liked to play soccer, and there was a little lake over there; I remember a little boat. We used to go on the boat sometimes with my father, sometimes with my friends. That is what I recall, more or less.

Q: You mentioned that you went to a Jewish school. Was your family religious?
A: Yes and no. My grandmother was very religious; she was Orthodox, but then my mother married my father, who was not religious at all. So, my father was not that happy about practicing very strict religious customs. He was kind of not so cooperative, but my grandmother, who was really religious, always told me, “You have to study Hebrew, Torah. You have to study Jewish studies.” So she sent me to this religious school after school. I went to the regular school when I was about 6, 7, 8 years old. But after hours, starting in the afternoon, I had to go to the religious school to study Torah and prayers.

Q: Was there any sign of anti-Semitism towards Jewish people?
A: We lived in a mixed neighborhood; there were some Jewish people and some non-Jewish people. In our building, there must have been maybe five or six Jewish families and maybe about 15, 16 non-Jewish families. From a very early age, we noticed the hostility of non-Jewish families who would come down the street and point out, “Look, these are the Jews.” Things like that. So I had already noticed [anti-Semitism] at a very young age. It was very apparent.

Q: Did you tend to befriend Jewish children more than non-Jewish ones?
A: It was not that strict. I had some very good friends I used to play with in the building who were not Jewish. There were three Jewish brothers, I remember very well, who lived on the floor above. We lived on the second floor, so they lived on the third floor, and we became very good friends with them. So we played with non-Jewish kids and Jewish kids. It did not matter if they were Jewish or not, it was just how you felt about them, and we did not pick them because of religion.

Q: In addition to the animosity you mentioned earlier, when did you first notice alarming signs of anti-Semitism?
A: The first time I really noticed it was, I believe, in 1941. What happened is that suddenly my two uncles and my father were drafted to the Hungarian army for forced labor. So suddenly, three people in my family had to go to the military, but it was not regular military. Everybody knew that they were not really regular soldiers. They were given hard labor and they had to go with the Hungarian military; they had to dig trenches and they had to wear yellow bands on their arms because they were Jewish. It was a very difficult thing for them. I suddenly realized that three men in the family disappeared; they were just gone

to the service. I kept asking mother where they were. Mother was very upset about it so I already felt the tension when it happened.

Q: Did they come back?
A: One uncle survived. He was in a camp in some place in Germany, and he came back. I believe one uncle died in Auschwitz, and my father [returned briefly] in 1944. He was still in the camp, but they gave him the right to leave for a day. He came home, but had to go back to the camp. At one point, they would not let him out, so my mother said, "You have to go there. It's behind the old synagogue, on the other side of the river." You know, Budapest consisted of two sides, Buda and Pest. Buda is on the western side of the Danube, and Pest is on the east side. We lived on the east side, in Pest. I used to go in the afternoon and bring food, but I was not allowed to enter the camp. I had to give it to the guard, who would say, "Oh, this is for your father (his name was Bella). Okay, don't worry. I will give it to him," and he gave him the food. Except in November, I forgot the exact day I came, and the guard was still there. He already knew me, and he said to me, "Your father was taken, they are gone; they took them to Germany last night." I didn't know what happened; I ran home with the food and I told my mother. She had already heard from other women that they marched them to Germany. We didn't know exactly what had happened to him until after the war.

There was one Jewish agency that took care of Jewish affairs in a certain location. They had a big list of all the people they knew who had died in the camp. Somebody came back and said, "I know these persons died." So we looked and we found [my father's] name. Later, I found out that he was in Dachau, he died there. I know exactly what happened because now there is a website where you can actually go—the Dachau website—and it tells you all the information about my father. I have it printed out: his name, where he was born, when he was born, when he arrived in Dachau, when he died, and where he lived in Budapest. So I know exactly—he died in early 1945. And most people in Dachau—I heard, and because I read a lot of documents—died of diseases; there were a lot of diseases, hunger, diphtheria, and all these diseases. Thousands of them died. Just the other day, I saw a film from the American army who took pictures of Dachau—from when they liberated Dachau—and they were showing all these people who survived, and showing fields of dead people lying there, dying; people who died a few days ago, people who were dying the day Americans came in and after that, because they were so sick. So, we found out that my father died and one of my uncles survived. He came to Germany and he got married there, and had a child.

Most Hungarian Jews, when the Russians came into Hungary in 1945, had the opportunity to leave, so thousands of them, including us, left. We first went to Germany, where the American government set up these DP camps (dispersed person camps). So, people stayed in the camp until they decided where to go. Some came to the United States; some went to Israel, some to other places.

My uncle, his name is Simon, married this woman who came to the United States later because she had a sister, and I knew her for quite a while. They had a child, but the child died in Germany at a very young age, maybe two months old. My uncle Simon got very sick and he died of a heart attack; he was a young man, so the wife, Bertha, said that he was so sad about the child's death that it probably caused his own. But, he survived the war. The other brother, my uncle and another uncle, whose name was Sigmund, they both died in a camp, though we do not know exactly where; we assume it was Auschwitz.

Q: Going back to Budapest, what happened after your father was taken away to the camps?
A: We still lived a fairly normal life, except economically, it was already becoming difficult. Anti-Semitism was pretty apparent during that time, 1941 and 1942. Suddenly, in 1943, the Hungarian government put this poster on the wall and said that everybody who was not Hungarian-born had to go to the police station to register. As a matter of fact, my grandmother was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—not in Budapest, but in a region in the northeast of Hungary—but she came very young, maybe she was 14. My grandfather from my mother's side was also from there, and they got married very early and had like eight children. So my grandmother had to go [to the police station], but her friends and the family said, "Do not go, it could be dangerous!" But, she did not listen because she was scared. So, she went to register and right on the spot they kept her, and we know that she was taken to Auschwitz. We found out later.

Q: How old was she?
A: She was in her early 60s; 61, maybe 62. She died there, so we had quite a few members of the family who died in the war.

Q: Do you remember the Jewish laws?
A: Yes, I remember. I am not sure what year they came out, but there were all kinds of laws erected against the Jews, like: "Jews are not allowed to own a business; [Jews] are not allowed to practice some professions like law, medicine…." All kinds of restrictions. I remember that. How they manifested? I do not know, because nobody in the family had a business or practiced law. So I do not know, but I know there were such laws against the Jews.

In March 1944 when the German army rode in, they overtook the country and of course, at that point they started the deportation of the Jews. It did not start in Budapest. In Budapest, they took all the military-aged men, and if I had been 14 by then—which I was not—I would have been taken also. We had some friends and the parents told their children, "Don't tell them that you are 14, say that you are 12," to not be caught in that situation. [The Germans] started to deport people from other towns in Hungary, almost every town including Transylvania, Slovakia—which is not a part of Hungary—but not Budapest, yet. As far as I know, the governor of Hungary, [Miklós] Horthy, insisted with the Germans not to take Jews from Budapest. For some reason, we had this situation. The Germans apparently listened to him and they did not take people from Budapest.

Until October of 1944, we were still living in our own home. In October, that is when the Wallenberg situation comes in. My father came home at that time; he was in the synagogue, but he used to come home. He found out that we could purchase[68] a Schutz-Pass. So, he arranged for the family to have one from Sweden. I remember seeing this Schutz-Pass and we knew that we were under the Swedish government protection. And at one point, we actually moved into a house that was under the Swedish protection; I forgot the address but it was not that far from where we lived, near the Danube.

Q: Do you remember how your father heard about Wallenberg?
A: I am not sure how he found out, but you know, you talked to some people in the same situation, and they said, "Oh, by the way, I heard that there is a possibility of getting Swedish protection," and of course everybody wanted to get some kind of protection because it was a life-or-death situation. I remember that there were four governments who provided protection: the Vatican was one of them, the Portuguese government, the Spanish government, the Swedish of course, and the Swiss. The Spanish, I am not sure. The Swedish [Schutz-Pass] was apparently the best, so people knew about it.[69]

Q: You mentioned moving into a safe house, how did that happen?
A: They said that there were some special houses where the people with the Swedish Schutz-Pass could live. So, my mother found out where these houses were and one day she told us, "Come on, we are going to live there." I did not want to go. I remember I said, "But I like living here, I have my friends." We had a big courtyard. In Hungary, apartments were built around courtyards, so there was a big, open space where the children played. And I liked it, but my mother said, "No, no, no." So, we took out suitcases and everything, and we went to this house.

Q: What do you remember about the house?
A: I remember it was a really nice house, a very well-kept house. It was a four-story building, and it even had an elevator. Our building did not have an elevator, so I used to go up and down, because it was something new. We lived in a small apartment with maybe two families. We did not spend a lot of time

[68] Although George Schwartz mentions the "purchase" of a Schutz-Pass, Wallenberg did not charge for the document. However, it is known that other people issuing false documents did benefit financially from their trade. It is probable that Mr. Schwartz's confusion comes from that fact.
[69] In most cases, it was not the government providing protection to the Jews; help was instead provided by individuals against their governments' orders.

there, maybe a month, a month and a half, and then things happened and we had to leave. But I remember it very vividly.

Q: Do you know how Wallenberg managed to maintain those houses?
A: I remember there were people taking care of the building who were kind of "in charge," like superintendents—somebody who made sure that children did not run around, that they were clean. We were well disciplined there because they said that we had to be very clean; we had to take care of ourselves. It was not like when we were at home, more free. There, it was more restricted.

Q: Did your father mention Wallenberg when he came home with the Schutz-Passes?
A: My father didn't know about Wallenberg. The reason I know Wallenberg's name so well, even when I was in Hungary, was because one day my mother did not come home at night. We already lived in the ghetto. After we went to the Swedish house, the Nazi regime (the Arrow Cross) overthrew the government. It was 1944. There was a leader like Hitler, his name was [Ferenc] Szálasi, who was later hanged, and who told everybody in the protected houses to leave. They just said, "Out." Actually, they took some of them right to the Danube and shot them. I remember that I was walking with about 30, 40 children, and my sister next to me, and we did not know where we were going. It was a rainy morning and we were walking in the streets, and suddenly my sister said to me, "You know, nobody is watching us, maybe we should run away." I was a little boy, so I said, "No, I am afraid." But she said, "No, no. Come on," and she pulled me to a side street. We went under the gate of some house and we sat there, waiting. They did not notice us; there were a lot of children. We ran to the next street and we knew where we were, so we went to the house where our aunt lived, which was in the ghetto area. Later, we found out that those children were taken to the Danube and were actually shot. That is what we heard. Maybe God helped us.

Anyway, my mother did not show up one night. She used to go out every day to try to get us food. That was the main issue, because food was so scarce. She always found some places, I do not know exactly how she managed, but she did. We were waiting and waiting. At the time, we were living in the ghetto, which is a special section in Budapest where they put barriers, with wooden gates and guards, and people were living inside. It was very crowded; there were thousands of people. I remember we lived in an apartment, maybe four or five families in one room. Some people slept on the floor. There was a small sofa, and four people were sleeping on it; it was terrible. We did not know what happened, and we were all worried about mother; she did not come home. It had to be midnight when she finally came in, crying. "What happened?" She said, "I was walking down the street and they captured us. They told us to get on this truck, and they took us to a brick factory (which was a gathering place somewhere in Budapest), and they said that we were going to go to someplace." There were hundreds of people waiting. And suddenly, two cars came by and Wallenberg (she remembered the name even) came and said, "Anybody with a Swedish Schutz-Pass, please step forward." My mother jumped, because she had one, and he sad, "Get into the car," and he gathered other people. I do not know how many exactly, maybe 15, 20 people. He brought back my mother, back right to the door where we lived. So mother came up and said, "I just came with some Swedish diplomat, he took me from the brick factory," and she was all excited and crying, because she could have been finished. So, I remember very vividly that section of her life.

Q: Did she say anything specific about Wallenberg?
A: No. She said there was a man there named Wallenberg, who was a diplomat helping the Jewish people with the Swedish passports, and that was all she remembered. She was so happy that it happened, but very upset that she almost did not make it. We were talking about it for years, so it was a well-known incident.

Q: So you had to move into the ghetto after spending a month at the safe house.
A: We had an aunt who already lived there in that region, and she had a very large apartment. So, when we had to go to the ghetto, she took us in. In her apartment, where there was originally only one family, there were now maybe four or five families living there. We lived in that building and then, I remember, maybe two months before the war, for some reason, we had to move to another apartment, which was next to the great synagogue of Budapest. That is where the Adler family lived, so I remember them from

that building. When I met [David Adler] in Israel, I said, “You look familiar,” and he looked at me and said, “You look familiar too.” I told him, “Don’t you remember, we lived in the same building!” So we found out that we lived in the same building.[70]

Then on January 18, 1945, Soviet tanks came to the front of our building. We did not even know—there was a lot of commotion, shooting, noise, and we were in the shelter. We were not allowed to go upstairs because there were bomb shootings all the time. Suddenly, somebody said, “The Russians are here, the Russians are here!” So everybody in the shelter ran out to the street. It was cold, January, and we saw these tanks. First, we thought they were German because we were used to seeing German tanks; we did not see the difference. Then someone said, “*Ruski, Ruski*,” in Russian. In Hungarian, you say, “*Orosz*,” but because the Russians came, we already used the word “*Ruski*.” I remember they set up big kettle for soup, and everybody was given soup. We were all so hungry, we hadn’t eaten real food for months; they gave us hot soup and this black bread they used make. It is like pumpernickel bread today; we should call it “healthy” bread, but at that time, for us it was very bad-looking bread. The same day, everybody was running along the streets and breaking all the shop windows and taking everything they could from the stores. Suddenly, it was like nobody said no. I remember that incident too because people were running around and taking things from the stores. There was no food, but they took whatever was available. And the war ended.

Q: At the time, did you or your mother hear of Wallenberg’s disappearance?
A: We did not hear personally, but of course, we had already read things, newspapers, and heard rumors; they said that Wallenberg was taken by the Russians, but we did not know. Many years later, I do not know if it is true or not, somebody said that Wallenberg had a very good car. I do not know what he used to drive, but one of the Russian officers saw it and said, “I want that car,” because the Russians took everything; they had no laws. Somebody told me that. I do not know if it is true or not. So they went to him, pulled him out of the car and took it, and somebody said that there must have been a reason for them to want his car. It could have been the smallest thing, since the Russians were so cruel. They used to rip off watches from people’s hands and things like that. They were totally free to do whatever they wanted as the occupying army against an enemy. So whatever they wanted, they took. I heard that rumor, that they wanted his car.

Q: That is interesting; I have never heard that before.
A: I heard it from somebody in Israel who said he heard it, that he had a very good car. For the Russians, a car is a very important thing for the army and for the officer. So the officer said, “I want this car,” and they took it.

Q: I think Wallenberg had a Buick.
A: That was a special car at the time. I do not know if it is true or not. You have never heard about it?

Q: It is the first time, but it could be possible.
A: It is such a mandating thing—“I want your car, I do not care who you are.”

Q: What happened once the Russians came in?
A: Once the Russians came in, we had already planned to leave because all the Jewish people used to go to the Jewish agencies to find out what we could do. The situation was very bad after the war; there was no food, and everything was scarce and chaotic. So, my mother decided that we were going to leave Hungary; everybody was going to Germany, and then we would see what happens. We just wanted to leave. So, we went to this Jewish agency and they told us how to go about it. We had to go to the railroad station, take whatever belongings we had, and go to Vienna. I do not know exactly who paid for the tickets and how it happened, maybe the Jewish agency. In Vienna, they had a Jewish hospital called the

[70] For an interview with David Adler and his wife, Agnes, please refer to page….

Rothschild Hospital,[71] and it was the gathering place—everybody went to the Rothschild Hospital. We were refugees basically from Hungary, and we stayed there maybe a month, just staying there, and we were fed by somebody. Then after a month, five weeks maybe, we took another train. We were still under the Russian occupation in Austria this time, and we went to the western side of Germany, which was American-occupied. Somebody told us that when we crossed the Elbe River, which is where the Russians and the Americans divided the country, somebody took a suitcase of money and gave it to the Russian guard to let us pass. This was kind of a brave situation. And then we went to this camp in Bavaria, which is near Munich.

I forgot to tell you. We left in 1946. At that time, we were already introduced to the youth Zionist organization in Budapest, and my sister and I attended meetings. We were all studying Hebrew, we sang songs; it was like camp. So, we sort of became Zionist at that time. They even sent us to another city for a month, like a training camp to become more involved in the idea. Then, when we went to Germany in 1946; we had already joined this group, so we went to this first DP camp in Bavaria. We already went to this special place where the Zionist organizations waited for us to get organized. My sister was also with me. My mother went to another place where there were mostly older people, but it was not connected with a designer's organization, it was just another Jewish organization.

We were there in Germany for more than a year. My sister was in a different camp because she was a little older, so she was in another group, until they said we could go to Palestine, which wasn't Israel yet. So, we went to France, to a port city near Marseilles, and we boarded the ship; but, we did not know it was the "Exodus," because it was one of many. There were many ships that took Jewish people to Palestine against the British, because they did not want us to go there. On our way to Israel, to Palestine, the British stopped us, took us off the ship and onto a British ship, which took us back to Germany. All the others landed in Cyprus; we were the only ship taken back to Germany. That is why it is so famous. My sister did not come with me; she came a little later, maybe six months after me, with another ship, which landed in Palestine because the mandate was already finished and the British didn't stop them. There was no more control.

Q: How did you eventually get to Palestine?
A: We came back to Germany and they put us in a DP camp; we stayed there until November 1949, when the United Nations declared Palestine divided into an Arabic state, Egypt, and Israel. So, the British opened the gates because they no longer had control of Palestine, and whoever wanted could go. Then the Zionist organization came, they put us in a truck and took us back to Marseille, and put us in a regular passenger ship headed for Haifa.

Q: How was life in Israel?
A: I went to this youth camp, youth organization school, which was near a *Kibbutz*. You worked half a day in the *Kibbutz,* and you studied half a day. I was there for about three years. I finished high school there, and then I decided, with another group of people, to find a new *Kibbutz*, maybe in the desert. So, we went there and found this empty space with two little houses, and we built a *Kibbutz*. We got cows, we started farming, and this and that. Most of us were from Hungary in our group, maybe 200 people, and for about a year we were doing pretty well. But after a year, the economy was so bad in the *Kibbutz* that people said that we had to do something because we could not survive. They decided not to keep it as a *Kibbutz*, and converted it into a *Moshav*. The difference between a *Kibbutz* and a *Moshav* is that in the *Moshav*, you basically own your own house and you live on your own, but you work together with the people in the field, agriculturally. In the *Kibbutz*, everything is owned by everybody; you do not even have your own house. Since I was single, it did not make sense for me to stay there, so I joined another *Kibbutz*. I stayed there for a few years. Then I went to school, I went to college; after I served in the army, I stayed 13 years in Israel. After I finished everything, I decided to come to the United States because my mother had come here from Germany. She found somebody in Germany whom she married and I came to the United States.

[71] Founded in 1869 by Baron Anselm von Rothschild, the Rothschild Hospital served as a hospital for sick and infirm displaced persons after World War II. The hospital was administered and supported by the Israeli Community of Vienna and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee respectively.

Q: How did your sister join you?
A: My sister was in Israel for about 10 years, and then she found somebody in Israel whom she married. He was a German, actually, born in Berlin. He was an engineer. They still live in the United States. Her husband Henry moved around the world. They lived in India, in Sweden, in Denmark, because he always got a job somewhere, until 1968 when I told my sister, "Maybe you want to come to the United States." I arranged from them to come, and they have been living here since.

Q: Do you still have some documents?
A: All my documents, the photos, fell in the water before I got into the ship. I do not think I kept the Schutz-Pass, it was probably my mother who kept it. So, I have no documents from Hungary. I really do not have any physical documents for Hungary at all, unfortunately. I wish I did.

Q: Do you have children?
A: I have a daughter.

Q: Do you talk with her about the war, about Wallenberg?
A: Yes, I do. My daughter is adopted; she was born in Colombia, She now works for the United Nations, and she is 31. We occasionally talk about it. She used to ask me, "What happened to you, father?" I talk a lot with my sister, and somehow, we have selective memories. Sometimes I remember something and my sister says, "You really remember that? I cannot remember it!" Sometimes she tells me something and I say, "I cannot remember that." Sometimes I remember and sometimes she remembers.

Q: Do you remember things differently sometimes?
A: Yes, not that much differently, but little variations. We interpreted things a little bit differently, I think.

Q: What do you think happened to Wallenberg?
A: There are certain things I am not sure [about], but what I read is that Wallenberg was actually financed by the American Jewish Agency,[72] that he was actually supported by them. I have never heard that before; I only heard that recently.

Q: Have you met other people saved by Wallenberg?
A: I think in Israel, when I lived there, in a *Kibbutz*, with my friends there, I knew a few people who knew Wallenberg and who had talked with him. A few years ago I was in Hungary, five years ago, maybe. I have a very good friend who was in the Jewish orphanage in Budapest, which is a very well-known orphanage, and they had a big reunion. When it was organized, my friend told me I should come, even though I hadn't stayed in the orphanage. He said, "But didn't you tell me that when your father was taken away, your mother was considering putting you in the orphanage because she had trouble taking care of the children?" I said, "Yes, that is true, but she never did it." "So potentially you would have gone to the orphanage." So, I had to go, but I wanted to anyway. It was organized by a person in the United States who became very wealthy, I forgot his name. He chartered the bus with his own money and he invited maybe 500 people who were in the orphanage. We went to the orphanage, which is now a governmental building. And when we were at this meeting and we had some discussions, some people mentioned Wallenberg. A lot of people knew about Wallenberg.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?
A: I would say that I am really happy than I met this group here, because I think it is a very important issue that somebody like Wallenberg, who saved so many people, should be honored and should be known to everybody, and should point to other people how to behave under dire circumstances. You do not have to follow the bad things; you can actually be your own person and do good for whomever you feel like. So I think it is very important.

[72] Raoul Wallenberg had financial support from the War Refugee Board (WRB), an American organization tasked with saving Jews from Nazi persecution.

Interview with Robert Tabory
with the participation of Mrs. Tabory

Q: What is your name?
A: Robert Tabory.

Q: What country and city were you born in?
A: In Hungary, the city of Budapest.

Q: What year were you born in?
A: I was born in 1925.

Q: How was the place where you grew up?
A: I grew up in Budapest, my parents were from Budapest, I went to school in Budapest, and I survived the Holocaust in Budapest.

Q: How was your family comprised? Did you live with your parents or siblings?
A: Yes, I was with my parents, I was an only child. I escaped from the Hungarian military, which wanted to deport us to Germany. There was a so-called death march going west, towards Germany, which I escaped. It was in early December, 1944. We were at home in our apartment and from there, we went into hiding with Christian acquaintances.

Q: How did you know the Christian people who hid you?
A: He was a famous person; have you ever heard of Kossuth? Kossuth was a Hungarian freedom hero in the mid 18th-century, and this man was his great grandnephew; he had the same name, Layos Kossuth, and we knew him. My father was a journalist and his father was also a journalist, so they knew each other. He gave us a room to live in and we hid there up to a certain date.

Q: How old were you at that time?
A: I was 20 years old, approximately. Budapest was already encircled by the Soviet armies and inside the siege, there was the Arrow Cross terror.

Q: Building up to that point in your life, do you remember the first signs of anti-Semitism in Budapest?
A: We grew up with anti-Semitism from my early childhood, way before [Adolf] Hitler. I had some tough times as a little boy in school. These other little boys made hell of my life and I was always asking myself, “How do these 6-year-old kids know that they have to hit Jews?” They learned it at home obviously. We lived in a neighborhood like that. So I grew up with anti-Semitism since my earliest childhood. Hell broke loose with the Holocaust in 1944.

Q: Do you remember the first anti-Jewish laws in Budapest?
A: Yes, in 1938 the first Jewish laws came, and in 1939 came others that were more severe. We lived in our apartment until 1944 when the Germans came, on March 19. Until then, we had our business and lived more or less normally. There was very intense anti-Semitism, which I would say was not yet the Holocaust anti-Semitism. The Hungarian anti-Semitism had been introduced in 1920 already. It developed on its own and was later encouraged by Germany, of course. That's where we lived and we were hoping that the Russians or the British or whoever would reach Budapest before [the Germans].

The deportation started in Hungary when the Germans came in 1944. My wife's parents were deported and died in Auschwitz, because they did not live in Budapest; the Budapest Jews were saved from the first waves of deportations, before the Arrow Cross came to power. The intervention of the King of Sweden [Gustaf V] stopped the deportation of Budapest.

I witnessed personally the preparation of the deportation of the Budapest Jews. I was working as a slave laborer with a Hungarian peasant on the outskirts of Budapest and I got permission to go home and visit, so I did. It was a long ride on a tramway—the tramway was forbidden for Jews, but I got on anyway. Somebody wanted to throw me out, but there was a Hungarian lady there who said, "Leave him alone," so she protected me.

While I was on the tramway looking out the window, I saw the Hungarian gendarmerie marching into Budapest, the whole battalion. This was strange, since none of the gendarmerie were stationed in Budapest; they were outside Budapest, and Budapest had its own police. But, I saw this gendarmerie unit marching into Budapest and I immediately knew what this was about. The gendarmerie executed the deportation for the Germans. And the gendarmerie marching into Budapest, a strong unit, hundreds of soldiers, meant only one thing—deportation. I got home and told my parents the bad news, but two days later [Miklós] Horthy ordered the gendarmerie out, upon receiving that letter from the King of Sweden. He was threatened to be put on the list of war criminals. The miracle was that he could throw out the gendarmerie, despite all the Hungarian Nazis and Germans around. Somehow, he was obeyed, and he ordered the gendarmerie out of Budapest. The deportation did not take place.

Q: Do you remember the date?
A: No, not the exact date, but I guess it must have been in July 1944. It was summertime and I was working with that peasant. I remember there was a huge cherry tree and we had to get the cherries off for the peasant, and we ate as many cherries as we wanted. Since then, I don't eat cherries. So it was July, and the Germans came in March; the deportation outside Budapest took place in May–June.

Q: You mentioned earlier that you were hiding with Christian people.
Mr. Tabory: In October, the Arrow Cross took power, hell broke loose and the men were collected. There were designated Jewish houses in Budapest with a Yellow Star. [The house] where we lived at the time became a Jewish house, so we were in our own apartment. The Arrow Cross came and took us to build fortifications against the Russian army at the outskirts of Budapest. My father was saved by a Hungarian Christian neighbor who argued with the Arrow Cross and told them that my father was a soldier from World War I—a good man. Somehow, he was left behind. He had a cardiac condition and I'm sure he would have died if he had been taken. I was taken, and I went to this fortification-building in a village outside Budapest. That must have been in November or the end of October 1944. From there, a death march was formed to go to Mauthausen, Austria. Many people died in that death march, but I escaped into the outskirts of Budapest, before being put into the march. All you had to do was to escape; there weren't Arrow Cross soldiers everywhere, so you could do it. [My wife] escaped from the same death march.

Mrs. Tabory: Two hundred women were taken into a coal depository, and we slept on top of the coal. If I hadn't escaped from there, I would have been on my way to I don't know where. I went to one soldier who supervised the 200 women and said, "Listen, I lost my luggage," which wasn't true. I threw my luggage in the Danube; it was raining and I had bread, and it got heavier and heavier, so I threw the whole thing in the river. I said, "I've lost my luggage. Would you let me go out and look for it?" He said, "No," but I thought sooner or later he had to go somewhere; he was all alone. And that's what happened; he went to the toilet and I went home.

Mr. Tabory: So we were in the death march from which I escaped with a friend of mine. He had a Hungarian military cap and some kind of armband, national army armband. We played "soldier and prisoner." I was the prisoner and he was the soldier, and we walked through Budapest. Nobody stopped us until we got home to where we lived. We lived on Izabella Street in Budapest, No. 83; that's where I grew up and that's where we went.

Q: Were your parents at home?
A: My parents were at home but by that time, the Arrow Cross arrests had become so intense that it was impossible to stay in our apartment. They would have taken us. We went to our Christian friends, the Kossuths. We were there, but we couldn't stay. I guess that was on Christmas Day or right after. In 1944, the Arrow Cross came and searched, building by building. They took all the men down, ordered them to pull down their pants, and examined everybody. If they found a Jew, they shot him and they shot the Christian who was hiding him too. So, Kossuth told us he couldn't keep us there anymore. He had children and didn't want to be shot. Then, I don't know how, my father acquired Swedish citizenship.[73] I don't know how he got it. So, we went to a Swedish house at Pannonia Street No. 30.

Q: You said your father got a Schutz-Pass, do you remember the document itself?
A: I don't precisely remember, I don't remember if it had a photograph. It was just a paper with your name that said you were a Swedish citizen. I don't remember if the three of us in my family had one paper together or if we each had one, but I don't remember me having one separate, so it must have been one for the family.

We somehow got from our home to the Swedish house. It was not very far, but it was not next door either. I don't remember how we got there, I guess on foot. We were at Pannonia Street No. 30, and what I remember [is that] we were terribly hungry. There was nothing to eat, and we were sitting in our room fantasizing about meals. That's a symptom of hunger—fantasizing about cakes and whatever, pork chops and things that we used to eat.

Q: How was your first impression of the safe house?
A: The safe house was quite good. We were in a ground-floor apartment in one room for the three of us. There were lots of other people, all around the house. I didn’t know of anybody, any close acquaintance or family who was in that house. Most people were unknown to us; they probably came from all parts of Budapest, and Budapest had many Jews, hundreds of thousands. We were there until the early days of January and it was very cold.

Q: Did you meet Wallenberg in person?
A: The Arrow Cross came and wanted to take us to the Danube. We were lined up on the street, facing the Danube, and I didn’t know at that time that we were going there to be killed. My parents must have known, because I remember they looked at me and they were crying. I didn't know that we were going to the Danube, but my parents did. Then, a big black car came with a Swedish flag, and out stepped Wallenberg. I had no idea who he was at that time. After the war, I saw pictures of him in the newspapers and recognized him; this was the man who saved us. He started to argue with the Arrow Cross, and that argument lasted at least half an hour. I guess he bribed them, because I saw him touching his own pockets. I don't know the details. In any case, at one point the Arrow Cross commander said, "Turn around." My father, who was standing next to me, had a sigh of relief. We were going to the ghetto, which was somewhere in Budapest, not where the Swedish house was, but we were saved. Wallenberg somehow arranged this. We went to the ghetto, and later we were liberated.

Q: Do you remember how many people were saved with you at the Danube?
A: We didn't get down to the Danube because we were turned around before. We were standing in the street in front of the Swedish house, in the direction of the Danube. Then, we were turned around in another direction, which was the way to the ghetto. That's when my father said, "We're going to the ghetto; our lives are saved." That was after this half-hour argument with the Arrow Cross. I guess there were 30 or 40 people there, at least. In the ghetto, we stayed maybe a week or a few days more, under pretty bad circumstances, until we were liberated by the Soviets.

Q: What was your impression of Wallenberg?
A: He was a tall man, I remember. I wasn't too close to him, but to us he looked like an angel; we knew

[73] Mr. Tabory is referring to the Schutz-Pass, a protection document issued by Raoul Wallenberg that identified its bearers as Swedish subjects. The document was not official and did not provide citizenship status.

that something was going on. We were in the Swedish house, but nobody took that seriously at all; the Swedish papers were fake, of course. It was a Swedish house with a Swedish flag on it, but we did not expect that car. It was a big, black Mercedes, if I remember it right, with a Swedish flag on it.[74] The Ambassador or the Embassy's car was going to argue for us. We thought it was a Swedish diplomat who wanted to argue that we were Swedish citizens. It was a Swedish diplomat; it was Wallenberg and that's the way we were saved.

Q: Did you ever hear about Wallenberg again?

Mr. Tabory: I had no idea that his name was Wallenberg, I had no idea what happened until maybe years later. I was sitting in Paris reading the French papers, and I read the whole story that he had disappeared, taken by the Soviets. His picture was there, and I recognized this man. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm 99% sure that it was him. Who else could have been? There was nobody else, he had no help. I don't know about it.

There was one more reference to Sweden when the Russians liberated us. My father was standing next to me and we were in the basement of a building in the ghetto. On the top floor, German soldiers who didn't care about us were fighting the Russians; then, these Germans withdrew and suddenly the door of this basement opened, and there was a tall guy in a strange uniform who said, *"Aleksei, Ruski soldat"* (Aleksei, Russian soldier). He was looking for Germans hiding. My father was standing next to me and said, "God bless Sweden," because the Arrow Cross were killing to the left and right, and it was just a matter of time before they were going to get us. But, they didn't have enough time because the Russians, in the meantime, occupied the ghetto. It was the 1st Ukrainian Front under [Rodion Yakovlevich] Malinovsky, the Russian commander.

I learned later in Paris that Wallenberg was arrested, probably not by these soldiers, but I guess by the Police. I guess nobody knows what happened. I have my own theory; it was not a deliberate move by the Soviet secret police. He was arrested just like any other and they realized he was a Swedish diplomat. They called somebody in Moscow saying, "What do we do with this guy?" and that somebody was another idiot who said, "Put him in the prison." And that's how he ended up in Russia. And when they realized who he was, the Russians covered it up. They didn't want to say that they arrested this man by accident, so they denied the whole thing. And there is the "American spy" theory that is not very believable. Spies are not sent to concentrations camps in Siberia; spies are used to become double agents, or maybe that's what happened, who knows; the Russian counter-espionage was sophisticated enough to know this guy.

Mrs. Tabory: They killed him because he helped Jews, and the Russians are no better than the Germans. That's my opinion.

Mr. Tabory: The regime wasn't overly anti-Semitic.

Q: What was your experience after the war? How did you come to the U.S.?

A: I left Hungary in early 1946. I ended up in Germany for two years, where we got married in Munich. In Budapest, we happened to live quite close to one another, but we didn't know each other. We met in Munich after the war and got married there. From Munich we went to Paris. We lived 16 years in France; I did university studies in Paris at the Sorbonne and was hired by an American company, IBM, in Paris. Later, in 1962, we came to America, first on a temporary basis, and then we stayed on. Since then, we have been living in America. I retired from IBM 19 years ago. I worked for IBM all my life, except some very early insignificant jobs. I was hired by IBM in 1957 in Paris, and in 1962 we were in New York, and I retired in 1981.

Q: Do you have children and grandchildren?

A: I have one daughter, yes, Catherine. She lives in Chicago—she is an economist there.

[74] Although Mr. Tabory seems to remember a black Mercedes, Raoul Wallenberg was known to be driven in a Buick.

Q: Have you talked with her about the war?
A: Yes, she said I should write my memoirs, specifically the Wallenberg story, and I told her it's going to be for posterity.

Q: Do you know any other people who were also saved by Wallenberg? Or who had an experience similar to yours?
A: No, the people I knew were in Auschwitz, not in Budapest.

Q: What would you say to Wallenberg if you had the opportunity?
A: I don't know, but I'm very, very thankful; that's for sure. He literally saved us; he saved my parents' lives. It's not like he wrote a letter or protested, he was there on the spot when we were being taken to the Danube. He was there and saved us; it's quite an excellent thing. I followed the newspaper articles on his fate in Russia. I am very, very sorry that nobody knows what happened to him. That he had to end his life like that in the Soviet Union.

Interview with Thomas Weisshaus

Q: First, please tell me your full name.
A: My full name is Thomas Weisshaus.

Q: Where were you born? What was your life like in your country?
A: I was born in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary, in 1928. I lived my first 16 years there and went to school there. I followed the Hungarian football players and football teams. I was a very big fan. My father was, too. He took me to all the matches against the Italians, especially, but also against the Austrians, Czechoslovakians, and Yugoslavians. They all came to Budapest to play and we went to see them. Going to these games with my father was one of the big experiences when I was younger.

The name of the school I attended was the Hebrew Gymnasium of Budapest. Very interestingly, my first day in that school was September 1, 1939, exactly the same day that the Germans invaded Poland. I went to school in the morning and it was peacetime. I sat in school for one morning, and by the time I went home, the world was at war. It was a very strange combination of events. I never finished school there because the war interrupted everything. My father was taken away from us in 1942 when I was in my 13th or 14th year of school. I still had four years left to complete (it was an eight-year school), but when my father was taken away from us, I had to help my mother bring in some needed income. I went to work at a local little factory located in the basement of an apartment house. I finished high school in America so that I could go to college.

I have to say that I was never—and my family was never—observant. We were secular. I was more of a European than I was a Hungarian, and I was more of a European than I was a Jew. Although, I went to a Hebrew school in the sense that it had one class in Hebrew and I had to read the Torah—the Jewish Bible—in Hebrew. In every other way, it was a classical school. It was a classical school like they have in France where you learn Latin or Greek, French and English and German (the modern languages), algebra, calculus, and anything you want to hear, in the hardest way possible. You had to work from morning until night to keep up with the work that had to be done. It was a very hard school, as good schools everywhere are.

The anti-Jewish laws began in Hungary in 1938. Traditionally, Hungary was a very anti-Semitic country where, even today, you can find signs that they have not changed like Germany has. In Germany today, there is such a thing as a hate crime, and you go to jail for it. In Hungary, this does not exist. That definition still does not exist there. So, Germany is ahead of Hungary in terms of acknowledging what the Holocaust did.

Now, my father was a wonderful and very, very, very nice-looking guy. He was just wonderful. He lived through a period in Hungarian history when it was very difficult for a Jewish male to make a life for himself. He was 19 years old when the First World War ended, and a period of all sorts of political upheavals began. Just like in Germany, there were the Communists versus the Right Wings, and it was very difficult for him to establish a profession. While his brother, for some reason, was able to become a banker and work as a banker all his life, my father didn't quite have it that easy. He worked in different kinds of jobs to earn what he could, but he was never established in a real profession. In the 1930s, he finally became the manager of a delicatessen type of store where they sold all kinds of foodstuffs. That was it.

Yet, my father was very talented in art. He was very good at drawing pictures and things of that kind, like what you're doing, except he worked with pencils and things like that. He was talented in many other

ways too, and he was very much liked by people. He became the father of two sons, and my family—my parents, my brother and I—lived with my mother's parents and shared their large apartment with them. So, we always had our grandparents with us.

In 1942, the German armies were deep into Russia and they called on the Hungarians to provide them with Jewish men to work behind the lines in that, if you can imagine, Russian winter climate. So the Hungarians collected every Jewish man between the ages of 24 and 42, and that just happened to include my father. In 1942, he was 42 years old. They took these Jewish men to Russia without equipping them with the right kind of clothing or materials. They just took them.

The last time I saw my father, it was five in the morning and I was still sleeping because I did not have to be at school until eight. He came to my bed, took me by the shoulders, and he pulled me up to him for a last hug. I didn't know that's what it was. I guess I just didn't know enough to realize that that would be the last time. I may not have opened my eyes fully. That's how it was. That was the last time that I saw him.

Three months later, a Hungarian soldier in uniform showed up at our door. I was with my mother when he handed her a ring that I knew my father had worn. It was a ring with a big green stone. He said that this was the last thing that he could do. My father had given him that ring because he wanted a loaf of bread, and that's all he had. And after that, he died in Russia. We never found out where—or even if—he was buried. That was the end of my father. His death in 1942 was the beginning of our tragedies in the family. I was 14.

The whole picture of Hungary during the war is kind of unbelievable because all around us there was destruction and bombing. The Germans had taken over, but they thought that the Hungarians were their natural allies and that they didn't have to conquer and occupy Hungary. They had to use their soldiers in places like France and Russia, so they left us alone. Unlike those in the outlying districts, the Jews in Budapest lived as if we were living on an island, an island of unbelievable privileges. Life went on, except for the fact that my father was taken away.

In fact, in the summer of 1943, I had some time off from the neighborhood factory where I worked, and an adventurous friend of mine and I decided to make some real money by going out to one of the film studios outside of Budapest. We applied for jobs as extras in the Hungarian movie industry and we got them. Hungary was always very much interested in the movies and consequently, a lot of great Hungarian filmmakers came to Hollywood. In fact, if you look at a movie like *Casablanca*,[75] you'll see that it was directed by a Hungarian. Look at Alexander Korda[76] in England: he established the whole English film industry at the time. It was one Hungarian after another. And they were Jewish, not just Hungarian; they were Hungarian Jews.

Q: What is the name of the movie that you were in?
A: The name of the movie is *Szováthy Éva*.[77] As a matter of fact, I got a hold of a VHS copy and I have it right here.

Q: What does the title mean?
A: It's the name of a woman. Szováthy is her last name. In Hungarian, the last name comes first—as in everything else in Hungary. And her first name, Éva, comes separately.

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[75] Originally from Hungary, where he worked as an actor, Michael Curtiz started a directorial career after World War I finding work in Austria, Germany, and other European countries. He finally moved to Hollywood in 1926, where he would go on to direct such classics as *Casablanca* (1942) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945) for Warner Bros.
[76] One of a large group of Hungarian refugees who found refuge in England in the 1930s, Sir Alexander Korda was a major figure and acted as a guiding force behind the British film industry of the 1930s. He started his production company, London Films, in 1933. Helped by his brothers Zoltan and Vincent, and by other expatriate Hungarians, London Films produced some of Britain's finest films of the period.
[77] *Szováthy Éva* (1944) was directed by Ágoston Pacséry and starred Katalin Karády in the title role, together with Pál Jávor and Ági Mednyánszky.

Anyway, I play this drummer boy and I have to stand on a hill with a drum hanging in front of me, and I play the drum. Then I get shot and fall down. I get exactly three seconds onscreen. But, I had the privilege of using the same dressing room as the star of the movie, who was—at that time—the greatest star in Hungary. She had to get dressed in the same dressing room as I did and she had no problem at all getting, you know, changed while I was still in there. That was one of the high points of my summer 1943.

So, because we were in that movie, my friend and I had a great summer. We had enough money that we never walked; we took taxicabs everywhere we went. And my poor mother didn't know anything about it. I told her that I was working at the movies, but I didn't tell her how much money I was earning. You know, there I was, 15 years old and a selfish little character.

But that came to an end a year later, in 1944, when the Germans decided that they needed to occupy Hungary. The Germans learned that the Hungarian government was secretly talking with the Russians and the Americans about how to get out of the war. (By that time, Romania and all of the small countries that had joined the Germans were getting out of the war, so Hungary was pretty much the only country left.) The Russians were coming into Hungary from the east with tanks and huge armies of millions of men, and the Germans were worried that if the Russians had a free passage through Hungary, they would attack Germany from the south by going through Austria. So, the Germans wanted to make sure that the Hungarians would stand up to the Russians and start fighting the war. They hoped for this even though the Hungarians had earlier sent an army of 150,000 men into Russia to help the Germans. That army of 150,000 was put into place on the Don River and the Russians started a huge attack and destroyed that whole army. This left the Hungarians without an army and so, when the Russians came to occupy Hungary on March 19, 1944, they walked right in.

During the period that I will be telling you about, in the summer—May, June, and part of July—of 1944, they shipped off 400,000—again, I will repeat 400,000—Jews from the small towns and villages in the outlying districts of the eastern part of Hungary. These were villages that were made up of around 4, 5, 6,000 people who could very easily be packed into cattle cars. They were shipped off to Auschwitz where they were immediately gassed. Four-hundred thousand in something like two months.

I was very lucky that we were living in Budapest. Because there were 120,000 or so Jews in one place, it was not as easy for the Germans to pack us up and ship us off. In addition to that, they knew that they had lost the war in 1944. This was long after Stalingrad and the Germans were retreating through Hungary; there were also some feelings among the German officers in charge that perhaps they should take it a little easy because there were going to be trials after the war, and they didn't want to be caught up in that. The local Hungarian Nazi thugs, however, had no such feelings. They kept on killing people in the streets, in the buildings, wherever they went. They weren't worried because they had probably made up their minds that they were going to have to escape anyway. And they did, most of them.

In my case, there was a very beautiful woman in my family, though she was not my blood relative—she was married to an uncle of mine. My uncle died and she then had to live as a widow for the rest of her life. She gave shelter to a Jewish Hungarian university student in a room of her apartment. This was discovered by someone, who reported her. The Hungarian Nazis came to her apartment; she lived on the third floor, and they threw her out the window into the street. That was her punishment for allowing a university student to occupy one of the rooms in her house. That kind of thing happened time after time after time.

I was at a jazz concert on March 19, 1944. It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning and my friends and I went to the concert at nine in downtown Budapest. When we came out at noon, the streets were full of marching German soldiers and motorcycles and trucks. Entering Hungary on the Danube River were some small German boats. That was the German navy. And suddenly, the war was with us. Hungary was in the war and, within two weeks, we had to wear Yellow Stars on our chests. That was two weeks after the Germans got there.

Q: Were you aware of what was happening in other countries?
A: Yes, but we didn't know about details. I happened to hear a little bit because when I was working at the factory, there were three or four boys who had escaped from Poland and come to Hungary. They tried to tell me in Yiddish, which I didn't understand. I understood a little bit of what they were saying was happening in Poland. But it was the first time I had ever heard, and that was in 1943, 1944, if you can imagine. That was three or four years after the war began that we started to hear about what was really happening. We didn't know anything about Auschwitz; we didn't know anything about the concentration camps. The Germans were very clever in keeping it secret, even from us.

Q: Did you have a radio?
A: You couldn't get radio stations. You couldn't listen to the BBC; that was against the law. If someone heard that you were listening to an English station, you were done. But there were people who managed somehow and they would pass the news on. But, we didn't know anything about the concentration camps, nothing. Only after the war did we find out about Auschwitz.

Q: Did you know about the ghettos?
A: If you traveled into Poland, you could see the ghettos. Otherwise, you only knew that there were lots of poor Jewish people living in cities. For instance, we didn't know anything about the famous battle that took place in Warsaw in 1944. I learned about that after the war, and the same thing happened with the other cities in Poland. We knew that there were a lot of poor Jewish people out in the countryside, the kind of thing that you would see in the play *Fiddler on the Roof*,[78] but we had no contact with them at all in Budapest—nothing. Once in a while, you would see an Orthodox Jew dressed up in a long black coat with a big black hat—almost like a cowboy hat, but straight—and that looked, to me, like a very strange vision. And you couldn't talk to him because he didn't speak Hungarian.

On that day, March 19, 1944, everything started to happen. After the Yellow Stars that people had to wear were passed out, they selected 2,600 of the one million apartment buildings in Budapest that all Jews had to move into. If you were lucky, like we were, the building you were already living in was selected. They put a large Yellow Star on the front door that led to the street to show that it was a Jewish building. Then, as many people as could live together in one apartment had to move in. I had an aunt and an uncle move into our apartment. One of my other aunts and her daughter had already moved in, so we were kind of crowded. We had an extra room that used to be the maid's, and it was given to a young Jewish couple. They didn't have any relatives in our building but we had an extra room, so they put them in that room. The whole house, at that point, consisted of all Jewish individuals. And this happened to 2,600 apartment buildings.

Eventually, we were imprisoned. The doors were locked. You could go out for two hours in the afternoon to shop, and most of the people just ran out to get food at a market not far from there. Basically, that's all you could do. You couldn't go anywhere. You couldn't go to the movies. You couldn't go to any public places. With a Yellow Star, you were not supposed to do anything that was not legal.

To the teenagers like me—I was 15 going on 16—it was like living in prison. There were no movies. There was, obviously, no television. There was nothing entertaining except records. We had a lot of good American jazz records and we knew as much about American jazz as anybody in America, I'll bet you that. And we could dance, so we started to have parties. There were a lot more girls than boys, so if you were a boy, you had all the girls you could possibly want, and it was a great summer. That's how it was for me. It was, perhaps, one of the most enjoyable summers of my life.

[78] Based on *Tevye and his Daughters* and other tales by Sholem Aleichem, *Fiddler on the Roof* is a musical—and later a film—with music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, and book by Joseph Stein. Set in Tsarist Russia in 1905, the story centers on Tevye's attempts to maintain his family and religious traditions while outside influences encroach upon their lives. He must cope with both the strong-willed actions of his three older daughters—each one's choice of husband moves further away from the customs of her faith—and with the edict of the Tsar that evicts the Jews from their village.

Q: When you were imprisoned in the apartment building, did you have access to books?
A: Yes, I was a reader. I read all the time before and after the war, and I read during the period that we were locked in that building, too; but since I had so many other things on my mind, I can't remember if it was one of the great periods of my reading. But, let me tell you what I did read as a 14-, 15-, 16-year-old. I read Thomas Mann's, the great German writer, stories about Joseph and his brothers. They were based on the Bible and they were very, very well-liked books at the time, and I loved them. I read those stories all the time. I read many other things as well. We couldn't have parties all the time.

Q: What else did you do to occupy your time?
A: Well, the Russians in the east were getting closer and closer and were beginning to bomb the city. When the Americans bombed Budapest, they seemed to know where the Germans were because they would only bomb the district where the Germans were located; they didn't bomb the rest of the city. The topic of the bombings is a story in itself. Either way, the streets were becoming covered with rubble due to the bombings and machine-gunnings.

There were times when they would come with a truck and ask if there was anybody who wanted to go out and pick up rubble. I volunteered a couple of times, and one day I was taken out to the city park. It was like a central park on the outskirts of Budapest. They took us out there because the bombers had been firebombing (dropping some of the bombs that cause fires) and a lot of the trees were burning.

We found a car parked on one of the streets inside the park, and it was so hot that we couldn't go near it. It had been hit by one of the firebombs and it became an oven. When we got close enough, we noticed that the glass windows were so milky from the heat that we couldn't see what was inside. We threw wet sand all over the car to cool it off so we could open it up. When it started to cool off and the glass started to clear up, I got to see through it and I beheld something I'll never forget. What I saw in the front seat, on the passenger side, was a turkey, a large turkey like I see at Thanksgiving, all brown and dripping. And I don't have to tell you that it was a human being who had been reduced by the heat, baked. That's all I can compare it to. It looked like a huge turkey, all brown. We had to clean out the car and help them take it away so that the street would be clear of it.

At other times, I remember they would take us to buildings that had been hit by bombs. We had to go up to the sixth or seventh floors and all the walls were gone, but you could walk around on the floors of the apartments. They asked us to make sure that there were no bricks that were about to fall down onto the street, and if there were, to move them so that they would not fall. We found dead bodies that we had to pick up and all of that business. That was the kind of thing that we had to do. That was the only thing that we could get out of the building for, so that's what I helped out with.

Aside from that, the war began to come to us when the Americans started to fly from Italy. Their planes would come through Hungary on their way to Vienna, or maybe to Germany, up north. But, they did not really bomb us very heavily.

In our apartment building, the superintendent made a schedule designating times for each young man, or other person he could use, to go up to the roof of the building and keep watch for fires; everyone had to take his turn. It was a building with windows in a mansard roof like they have in France. In the attic, there was a ladder that went up to a window that opened onto the roof. You had to stand at the end of the ladder, stick your head out, and keep your eye on the neighborhood to watch for fires. If you spotted any, you had to run downstairs and tell everyone so they could escape before the building caught on fire. They were all in the basement in the air-raid cellar to keep safe from the bombing. One day while on the roof, I counted 1,250 American planes. Twelve hundred and fifty. I'll never forget it.

The Hungarian government continued to work behind the Germans' backs, trying to make this separate peace with the Russians because the Russians were all this time pushing, pushing, pushing into Hungary. Pretty soon, the Russians were only about 50 miles from Budapest. They continued bombing

and machine-gunning and coming closer and closer, and we knew that something was going to happen very soon.

What happened was that the Germans put a group of Hungarian fascists in power. These were the individuals I was telling you about earlier. They were the ones who had no inhibitions at all about murdering as many people as possible, especially Jews in Budapest, because they knew the Jews of Budapest were at their mercy. They began to have all kinds of pogroms and massacres on the Danube, and when my mother found out about that….

My brother was five years older than I was and by that time, those who were older than 20 years of age had already been called for. He had been shipped down to Yugoslavia, to a workforce where they did things that were not important, just so they would be out of the way. I think the Germans, the Nazis, wanted to get all the men out of the way so that the women would be easy to kill.

This new government of Hungarian fascists that was put in place by the Germans began at five in the morning on October 15. (They liked that time of five in the morning.) They came to our building and ordered every Jewish male from the ages of 16 to 55 to come downstairs into the courtyard.

When I was ready to walk downstairs, my poor mother came out to the stairs with me, went down on her knees, and started crying. She was hysterical, and she said, “They’ve taken your father, and they’ve taken your brother, and now you’re the last one. Now you will be gone, too.” She thought that her family was done, finished.

Q: Could you have lied about your age and not gone downstairs into the courtyard?
A: The superintendent had records of all the people living in the building. You couldn’t hide.

In the courtyard, they formed us into a line, and that was it—march. We started marching through the streets and out of the city. Jewish men from other buildings joined us and finally, we became a long, big line of men and boys marching out of the city. They had us going to the eastern part of Budapest to dig ditches to stop tanks because tanks, you know, get caught in ditches.

They had no food for us. They had no place [for us] to sleep. They had nothing prepared. All they did was give us some Hungarian soldiers to march us from place to place. Every day we went to another place to dig. Dig, dig, dig, without good food. We got something called “soup.” It was a black soup, some kind of black water; I don’t know what was in it. That’s all we had to eat, and we were out there for something like four weeks.

After the four weeks, something happened that I always tell the kids about in my school visits. It has to do with one of my aunts, and I’ll show you her picture again because she is really worth looking at. We ended up on one of the islands in the Danube River. The Danube has several islands and the one we were on was a large, industrial island on the southern end of Budapest. There were 20,000 men, all of them like us, having been made to march around and dig ditches. It had been raining for days and days and days, and by the time we got to the island, it was all mud and puddles. They told us to sit down, so we sat down in the middle of all the puddles and the mud, and waited. I looked at all the men around me and they were all doing the same thing, sitting in the mud, looking down at the water, just sleeping or doing whatever. What can you do? You sit there and wait. They didn’t allow us to do anything. They didn’t give us any food. Everybody was hungry and weak and tired.

Then we realized that on both sides of the Danube there was movement. On the western side, there were trains being filled with people and heading west, which was bad because that was in the direction of Germany. On the east side of the Danube, there were streetcars like the kind that you would use to go to work or somewhere if you lived in the city. They were going in the opposite direction; they were going back into the city, into Budapest.

I sat there with my uncle, who was 55 years old. He was at the upper end of the age scale, which ranged from ages 16 to 55. I was 16. He was 55. We had gone through the four weeks digging ditches together and we ended up sitting together on the island. Everybody had given up. We knew that the end was coming. We knew that the trains were going somewhere in the west. So what can you do? You sit there. Until the third or fourth day, it began to happen.

We heard a soldier or someone calling out a name. It was far away at first and we couldn't tell what the name was, but it was coming closer and closer. Finally, when he got close enough, we heard it was the last name of my uncle: Hiosh. As the soldier came closer, we got up and waved to him, saying, "Here, here he is. Hiosh is here." He came over to us and he said, "Come on, follow me." My uncle took me by the hand, he didn't want to leave me behind, and we followed the soldier.

He took us a few steps away, and we saw a hut that we hadn't seen before. We went through the hut door, and right inside there was a large desk. Behind the desk there was a very highly placed officer of the Hungarian army, all dressed up with his stars and everything, and he looked us up and down, and he kept staring at my uncle. Finally, he called out in Hungarian, "Where did you find her? Where did you find that woman?" My uncle said, "What? Who? What woman? What are you talking?" He said, "That woman who came out here. Your wife! Where did you find her? Where did you find such a woman?" And my uncle said, "I married her," and he gave the date that they were married, back around the First World War. The officer never said anything else. That's all he wanted to know, "Where did you find her?"

Then, after a few minutes, he said to the soldier, "Alright, take them over there," and he pointed to the streetcars—not the trains, the streetcars. The soldier walked us across a bridge over to them. He put us on a streetcar going back to the city, and my uncle and I were back with our families within an hour or two. We had to hide a little bit when we got off the streetcar because we didn't want to get caught, but we got back and we found our families, and my mother went down on her knees again.

My aunt Marishca looks like a queen, she was. She survived and ended up in Australia after the war. She and her husband, my uncle who was with me in the work service, went to Australia, and I talked to her through letters, asking her, "What did you do? How did you do it? What did you do to get us out of there?" The only thing I ever found out from her was that they threw her into a dark dungeon when she first went out there and somehow, she worked with them and convinced them to let us go. She had some kind of influence from someone that she knew back in the city that she could use on this officer to get us out of there. That's all I ever found out.

One of the reasons my aunt may have had some influence was that she and my uncle were butchers. They owned a butcher store, and they knew influential people who were wholesalers in the business. In Hungary, it's very big business, and they probably got to know some pretty important people that way. That's the only thing that I can think of as to how she knew someone who had some influence.

I'm going to see her daughter, who is now 90 years old and lives in an apartment in Sydney. She told me the same thing. She said she never found out anything else from her mother about how she got her father and me out of that horrible area.

That was the first big escape that I can point to before my "Schwarzenegger" period. When I talk to the students in the schools, I tell them of my "Schwarzenegger experiences"—the times I had to jump through windows and make turns and choices on a moment's notice that could have been either right or wrong. (They happened to turn out right, because I'm still here.) At that time, though, I didn't have to do anything, I was just following along. But, after we got away and we got back to Budapest, several things happened, little events where I had to make choices to help me escape. I got confident that I knew how to navigate in difficult, dangerous situations.

My mother put me into a Red Cross villa to hide me for a couple of weeks, but somewhere, she heard that the villa was going to be raided by the S.S. She and my cousin, who was 16 years old—a girl, poor

thing, she was killed along with the rest of them—came and got me the night before the raid. They said, "You have to get out of here right now because tomorrow morning, there is going to be a raid." I went with them and we walked through just about all of Budapest, at night, with the Nazi sentries standing on the corners and in the squares. Imagine, two Jewish women with a 16-year-old Jewish boy walking between them. They held me by the arms and they just about carried me; they wanted to keep me safe because, for some reason, they thought that I was the one in more danger. For women, they were not so worried.

We would hide and wait along the sides of buildings and in doorways when it looked dangerous, and then continue on. Because of the bombings, all the lights were out, which helped us get through the whole city of Budapest. The Nazis who were standing on the corners couldn't really see everybody, and they imagined that we were just normal people. They didn't ask us any questions, they didn't stop us, and we got by.

Eventually, my mother got me to the apartment where she lived with her mother (my grandmother), my Aunt Olga, and Olga's daughter, 16-year-old Judy, who was with us. My mother kept me in her apartment for one night; I told her I didn't like the feeling (it was too dangerous), and she got me out of there and into the safe house.

There was a safe house available because there was a Swedish diplomat by the name of Raoul Wallenberg, who had come to Budapest and was giving Swedish passports[79] to people who could get to him. My mother knew how to get to him, and I got a passport. She put me into a safe house right on the shores of the Danube. As I told you, I was on the seventh floor of the house and I could look down and see people getting shot into the snow on the river.

Q: Let me ask you about Raoul Wallenberg.
A: Raoul Wallenberg. I met him in person.

Q: How was that?
A: My mother took me to him. He was sitting at a bridge table, one of those small tables that have four legs you can open up and play cards on, out in the street, on the sidewalk, not far from the safe houses. He had his table set up, he was sitting in a chair, and people were standing in line; one by one, he was signing passports and handing them out. That's how I got mine. He wrote my name in it, and then he pointed to the safe house. From that point on, I stayed there.[80]

Q: How did your mother know about Raoul Wallenberg?
A: She heard about what Wallenberg was doing. She had some kind of contact. Just like she knew when the Germans would raid the Red Cross building and she got me out of there. It wasn't that she had any special contact with Wallenberg. She knew that people were getting passports, Swedish passports. That was getting around and she wanted me to have one.

Q: We know now how Wallenberg got individuals off the trains at the train stations, for instance, but did you know about these things at the time? Was Wallenberg someone people talked about?
A: At that point, I didn't know who he was. If somebody would have told me, "This is Raoul Wallenberg," I would have said, "Okay, so what?" There was not a lot of talk during that time as far as I knew, but then, I was not in contact with a lot of people. I was in contact with the family who lived in the same apartment as I did in the safe house, but we were not very close, we were not friendly in any special way. I was on my own. I was just a boy who was put in there.

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[79] Although Mr. Weisshaus refers to the obtained document as a Swedish Passport, what he acquired was a Schutz-Pass—a protective document stating that the bearer was under the Swedish protection. The document did not grant citizenship, nor did it allow the bearer entrance into Sweden.

[80] According to Hungarian historian Jenö Levai, Raoul Wallenberg only signed Schutz-Passses during a short period of time. It was decided that, as head of the Swedish Legation to Hungary, Ambassador Carl Ivan Danielsson's signature would give the document more credibility.

I found out about Wallenberg later on. After the Russians arrested him and thought he was an American spy, you read about him everywhere. You can read about Wallenberg nowadays; there are books about him all over the place. But, the only time that I was in his presence was when he was sitting behind that bridge table on the street, signing the passports and handing them out. That's the only personal contact that I had with him.

Handing out passports was not the only thing he was doing. He was doing a lot more than that. He would get on the trains leaving for the concentration camps and tell the Germans that those people were all Swedish citizens, and he would take them off the trains.

Q: What was life like in the safe house?
A: The problem with the house was that there was no food. They didn't provide food. They just provided a bunk bed. But my mother, grandmother, aunt and cousin had gone out and bought false papers to show that they were Christians, and they were living in the apartment under false pretenses because my mother had a plan. She bought the false papers because she wanted to stay in the city, as dangerous as it was, so she would be able to bring me food in the safe house. She was worried that if she left the city she wouldn't be able to feed me, that I would not be able to eat, and that I would not survive. What I don't understand is why she and the rest of them didn't come with me; but as I explained, they wanted to be able to get food, and the only way that you could do so was to be out in the city. In the safe house, you were locked in so it would have been a problem to get food.

My mother came to the safe house with something that she knew would last [a long time], like a pot of Hungarian goulash, and I would have food for several days. She started bringing me food in late November and she continued through December, day after day, week after week. There was bombing going on, there was machine-gunning. This woman, my mother, who was 42, 44 years old at that time, was a little lady. She was not big, but she was very powerful and she did all of that to save me.

But one day, my mother stopped coming. She didn't come for three or four days, and I was hungry and I had no idea what to do. But I got a break. The family that I lived with in the apartment had a sack of flour. Now, why did I not have a sack of flour? Because I was by myself and they were a whole family who had taken everything with them when they left their own apartment. They had cans of food and they had this sack of flour. They kept making dishes of pasta, baking bread, and so forth. Once in a while, they would give me something, but not enough to really feed me.

One day, the family made a big, huge dish filled with bread dough and was going to bake it, but their oven went on the blink. They couldn't bake it. They had to think about where to take the bread to have it baked, and I told them I knew of a bakery two blocks away. I told them that it was illegal for me to go out there and it was dangerous, but that I would take their bread out there if they gave me part of it. And they said, "We'll give you half of the bread if you take it out to have it baked." And, you know, I was going to take chances; I didn't like being hungry.

So I took the bread dough in my arms, took off my Yellow star, and started to go. I had to walk two blocks south and then half a block over to get to the bakery. I walked the two blocks south without any event, no problem. I got to the corner and made my turn, and I saw the bakery window, which was a huge, long, plate glass window. In front of it was a mob of people with dishes in their arms, all waiting to bake bread. And I knew that most of them were Jewish; I could tell, looking at them from a distance. As I turned the corner, almost immediately, on the other corner at the end of the block, I saw a huge truck pull up and I saw German soldiers, in their green gray uniforms, jump off the truck and lock down the block at that end. Then I looked around and I heard the truck pulling up behind me, and the German soldiers jumping off and locking down my side of the block. I tried as hard as I could, as quickly as I could, to lose myself, sort of disappear in the crowd that was standing in front of the bakery. I got into the crowd, stood behind everybody, and waited for the German soldiers. They were coming slowly, coming with machine guns from both ends, and they knew that they had us trapped. There was no way to get out of there. A couple of people I saw, older people, went down on their knees on the street and started to pray. I just stood there. I was hoping for a miracle, which happened; one came along.

The entire time that I was on the street, I was aware of the bombing that was going on. The Russians were attacking the city and they were fighting their way through the streets, beginning on the outskirts and bombing everything ahead of them. There were bombs falling all over the place. You could also hear machine-gunning; this was war. But just as I had given up on it—I mean, I could see that the Germans were getting closer and that they were going to arrest everyone, put us on the trucks and take us wherever they wanted to—imagine, a bomb hit a big apartment building across the street from the bakery, exactly across from the bakery.

The building came down as nothing but rubble. It covered the street and part of the crowd standing there with the bread dough in their hands, hitting people left and right. They were bleeding everywhere. The bakery's huge plate glass window exploded because of the air pressure from the bomb. It cut people in the face and other places. I was standing there and everybody around me got hurt, but I just happened to be in the middle of a crowd of people and I didn't get hurt. I could see the window still had part of its base left, which was not very high from the ground, and gosh, it took me two steps to get over there. I jumped over it, and I was inside the bakery. There was somebody behind the counter, and I slammed the dish with the bread dough down on the counter and I told them, "I want this baked," and I kept running through the bakery.

There was a narrow corridor that led to the back of the bakery. I figured that was a way out. I just wanted to get away from the street. I didn't want the German soldiers to catch up with me. I didn't realize that they had turned around and run back to the trucks and taken off. They didn't want to have anything to do with the bombing. I got out into the courtyard of the building, and it had gangways like European apartment buildings have that go around each floor and lead to the entrances of the apartments. It had gangways that went up six or seven floors, and I was down on the main floor of the courtyard looking for a door, but I couldn't see one because these were all apartments.

There must have been some door that was not easy to see or something—I was in a hurry. But then I spotted something that looked like a door. I went up to it and tried to pull it open, and I pushed my nails in between the door frame, and then I realized what it was. It looked like a door that would have a handle on the other side, but not on my side because they didn't want people getting in from [that direction]. It came to my mind that it must be a movie house because those are the kinds of doors that they have, where you have an exit but not an entrance. I made up my mind that I had to open it. Somehow, I got my nails into it and I kept pulling and pulling and pulling and I opened it up, and guess what. I opened up the door and it was all dark inside, and it actually turned out to be a movie house.

The door I opened suddenly let some light in and I could see all the seats were empty except for one. There was a girl sitting in one seat. I closed the door behind me. I ran in, and I sat down next to her. She was crying. She told me that she was a servant girl who had escaped from the family that she was working for. They lived in that apartment building and they were not treating her well. (Middle-class people had servants all the time in Hungary. We had maids. We had at least one maid all the time that I can remember. It was very easy to hire a maid because in the small villages of Hungary, people lived in such conditions that the goal of every young girl, every young person, was to get away and go to the city and find a life. That's what this girl had done.)

So I sat next to her and she was crying. I put my arm around her and she put her head on my shoulder; she cried and told me what they had done to her, and I told her something about my story. The two of us had somebody to tell our stories to. I sat there with her for at least an hour and a half, and then I decided that the bread may be done. I went back to the bakery, and by God, there was the dish on the counter with my bread in it. There was nobody there to collect money. I picked up the dish and I saw no Nazis on the street, so I went through the window and I walked through the crowd that was still lying on the ground outside. I just walked away, went back to the safe house and got my half of the bread. That was one adventure that falls under the combination heading of luck, a miracle, and a little bit of presence of mind on my part to run away from there. But who wouldn't? If you were in good shape, why would you stay there?

After that, I still didn't hear from my mother too much, but she did come again a few more times. Then she stopped coming altogether toward the end of December. At that point, I didn't hear from her for so long that I decided I had to go into the town no matter how dangerous it was. I had to go to her apartment to find out what was going on.

The safe houses were in the northern end of the city, right on the Danube, in the most modern and most expensive part of Budapest. The area where my mother and the three others lived was in a good area, but more in the center of the city, so you had to negotiate the distance to get there. There was still bombing going on and the street fighting was getting closer and closer. It was not safe, but I was lucky because along came a truck. They were collecting young people from the safe houses who were willing to take a chance on going into the city to help clean up the streets. The rubble was getting so bad that traffic was completely stopped, so they were trying to collect people to do this work, even Jews. I volunteered because I said to myself, "I'm going to get into the city and then escape and go over to the house and find out what happened with my family." I couldn't go on without knowing, not to mention the fact that I was without food. I had some bread I had gotten somewhere, and I put a little piece of bread into a briefcase that I took with me.

In Budapest, there are underground passages that connect buildings. You can go from one building through several others and go to a whole different part of the city solely underground. It's almost like a subway, but you have to walk. I knew about these places in Budapest, so when we got into the city, I got away from the group that was cleaning up the rubble and escaped at a place that was close to one of these subway entrances. I was very happy that I could get off the street and not be too visible. I snuck down there and I walked all the way to the avenue that I knew my mother's building was on.

I got back onto the street and I had several blocks to go. I tried to stay out of sight. This was in late December and there was about a foot of snow, I would say, on the streets. So aside from the fact that it was in the afternoon and it was starting to get dark, it was also snowing and the visibility was not too good, which helped me. I didn't want anyone to see me, so I stayed as close to the buildings as possible and I kept going through the snow, which was coming down pretty thickly. It was not easy to see me.

The snow, however, also prevented me from seeing what was ahead, and I didn't see this huge figure standing in the middle of the avenue, about a block away. I had my head down, trying to make myself as little as possible, you know, and I wasn't watching, but there he was. It was a gendarme and gendarmes were the scariest people who you could run into, because they were known to be the greatest anti-Semites. They were the ones that you really had to watch out for. The local police were something else. The gendarmes were national police. And this guy was something like, I'm probably exaggerating, but to me, he looked like a giant. He looked seven feet tall and he was wearing one of those gendarme caps, the kind that has the big black feathers on the top, which made him look like he was eight feet tall. And then he was wearing a long coat, down to his ankles, black boots, and he had a black mustache. And his eyes were black as the devil. He saw me and was motioning for me to come over to him before I ever saw him. I finally saw him and I realized he was calling me over there, and I don't have to tell you how I felt.

Across the street from him, there was a huge doorway, the kind of doorway that you can drive a huge carriage through. It was opening and closing, opening and closing, and while it was opening and closing, I'd catch glimpses of a whole bunch of people. It looked like a beehive of people. It was just full of people behind the door, and I had just a guess in my mind. I said to myself, "These are people who were caught and are prisoners, and they are being prepared to be taken somewhere. That's where he's going to send me." I was sure that he would send me across the street to join that group.

As I was getting closer and closer to him, something formulated itself in my mind. I cannot tell you that it was a conscious plan, but I think it is a normal thing that happens to a 16-year-old when he is completely lost and he's given up, and he's desperate to find his family. That's what I was. As I got closer, I began to say to him, "My mother is not well. She is not well and she has no food and this is what I have for her," and I opened up my briefcase and I showed him the corner of bread. It was just a piece of bread and it was kind of dry. I said to him, "This is all I have to take to her," and I pointed out the building that my

mother's apartment was in, because it was just one block away, and you could see it. I pointed and said, "That's the one I'm going to. Just let me go there." And you know what? This monster looked me up and down, and I think he was trying to be very careful because he probably had some superior officer or someone over in that group behind the door. He didn't want to do it very openly, but he made a movement and he went like this, *Run, just run*, with his hand, without letting them see it, and he said, "Run." And he just believed me. He believed the story.

I started running. Because the snow was coming down pretty thickly, I was probably not too visible and I probably got away with it because of that. I was afraid that he might change his mind and shoot me from behind or something, but that didn't happen. I got away with it, and I made it to the building.

Now, years and years later, I wrote a story about the irony of that situation and how funny things can be. Here he was, probably thinking that he was taking pity on me and doing me a favor. Later on, I decided that that's the kind of thing that happens. People don't know what they're doing. They think they're taking pity on someone, maybe they are doing something good for a change, and what he did was let me go to the building where I found out what I didn't want to find out.

A truck had pulled up the night before and taken my mother, my grandmother, my aunt and my cousin Judy away, never to be heard from again. I never found out what happened. I never found out what was done to them. I never found out who was actually responsible.

This was one of the very bad periods that I overcame only because I had to keep going on a daily basis. I just had to keep my body and soul going with food, and so forth. I didn't have time to do much more than just try and figure out who had done something like that, and I couldn't follow up on anything because the war was still going on.

The only thing I heard was from the superintendent of the building, who said that the person who had gotten them the false identity papers which allowed them to live in the city was the person who gave them away, who ratted on them. And he was gone; I couldn't find him. I found his parents and I went to their house, a little hut that they were living in. They were two very old, very broken-down, poor, poor, working-class people outside of Budapest. I confronted them and they told me the same sad story that I already knew. Their son was a loser and they didn't know what happened to him or what he was doing. They knew that he was involved in bad things; that's what they said, but they didn't know anything about him. He had gone away. Who knows whether he survived the war or not? In Budapest, when the Germans were completely beaten by the Russians, a lot of the Hungarian Nazis joined up with the Germans who were running west, and they all escaped to Germany. Knowing this, my brother looked for some sort of evidence of the man's whereabouts, but he couldn't find anything after the war either.

When the superintendent told me about my family, I backed out of the building. I began to feel a little strange, being there asking about four Jewish women when I was not supposed to be out in the streets. I didn't know what the superintendent might do, so I backed out of the building as soon as I could and went as fast as I could back to the safe house. I was lucky because it was snowing and it covered everything.

I got back to the safe house and I found out that there was an old man there selling food. I probably would have starved if I hadn't done something; I must have been full of the will to live. I went to him and asked him where he got the food, and he said, "From the Russians." I said, "From the Russians? Where are they?" He said, "A couple of blocks away."

By that time, the Russian front had moved closer and closer to the Danube and was fighting its way through buildings, and there we were, only a couple of blocks away. I asked if I could go with him the next time he went, and he agreed. So I could go from the Germans to the Russians by walking a couple of blocks!

I followed the elderly man. I didn't know that there was shooting, machine-gunning going on in the streets. On one side were the Germans, and on the other side were the Russians, and they were shooting at each other and we were in the middle. How I got through that, I don't know. All I know is that, suddenly, I noticed holes being made in the wall of the building that I was running by, and the wall was coming down on me. The stucco was falling down because bullets were hitting it. So I ran faster, and the faster I ran, the better it was because I got to the other end of the block where there was a big door. I went through the door, and inside, a Cossack was standing there. He looked just like the gendarme except he was a Russian, and he was handing out cigarettes—not food—he was handing out cigarettes. They were either Hungarian cigarettes or Russian cigarettes. They were not good. I was not a smoker yet, but even I could tell that they smelled bad and they tasted bad. But I couldn't help it. I took a cigarette, lit it, and tried to smoke because I was hungry. Later on, I found out what American cigarettes tasted like and, at that point, I decided that I wanted to go to America.

Behind the Cossack, there were people getting food and eating. It turned out that there was a field kitchen set up behind this Russian soldier and they were handing out big metallic plates, or canteens, that would be filled up with pasta, fresh pasta, and I could see the woman slapping these huge spoonfuls of pasta onto this dish until there was a big heap of it. That's what I wanted. And I got it.

Then, they told me to go over to a guy who put a big spoonful of raspberry preserves, like jam, on top of the pasta. And then they told me to go to the next guy, too, who had a sack of powdered sugar, and he took out a big spoonful and poured it on top of the jam. That's the way the Russians eat—pasta and then raspberries and then sugar! I sat down and I did nothing but eat for the rest of the afternoon.

Q: What image do you have of the Russians? What was your position toward them?
A: What was my attitude toward them? Oh, I was very much in favor of the Russians coming.

Q: So you had knowledge of their position in the war?
A: Oh, certainly. As it turned out, the Russians were no great friends of the Jews or anything. Later on, you found out more about that. But, as far as comparing them with the Germans, with the Nazis, we preferred the Russians.

Q: Anything was better than the Nazis, right?
A: Well, of course. That was liberation, you know? It was called liberation. I tell you, I waited for the Russians like they were the greatest heroes in the world. My attitude toward the American bombers was the same. We would joke about how nice it would be to have a bomb fall on us; we joked about that because we knew that would hurt the Germans. So, when the Russians were only two blocks away and this old man knew how to get to them, I thought it was a miracle. I couldn't believe it. I was hungry. I was just looking for any food that I could get.

Q: Because you are Hungarian and Jewish, and humor is very important in both cultures, did you manage to keep your sense of humor during the war?
A: The humor didn't happen then, not at the time. The humor takes place now, looking back. I find that when I talk about my experiences to students, they listen better and really understand things better if I let them see some of the humor. They really pay much more attention to what I'm saying. The more humor I can get into it, the better they like it. That's what I want; I want them to really hear everything.

During the period itself, in 1944, I don't remember having a lot of laughs. There was not a lot to laugh about in the situation, let me tell you. I can tell you one thing that kind of comes close. Remember I told you I was in a Red Cross villa for about 10 days? It was in a very, very nice district of the city and it had a garden with a fence around it. One day, I went out into the yard and up to the fence and I suddenly realized that there was an SS officer standing outside the fence. He was not watching me; he was not looking in my direction. He was looking away. Then, he turned around and it was a friend of mine, a boy who had been in the same school with me—the Hebrew school that I told you about. He was one year older than me because one year, he had flunked every class that he had so he had to repeat a whole

year. He was the friend I went into the movie business with, one of the extras in that movie with me. He was the son of a dentist and he had all kinds of money because his father had gold for dental fillings and such, and he would steal gold from his father. He was a bad boy.

When I saw him standing there in an SS uniform I said, “What are you doing!?” He said, “I got a uniform.” You can imagine what you would feel like if you knew a kid, a boy from school, and during the war, when the SS is killing everybody, he suddenly shows up in the uniform of an SS officer. I’m not saying that it was funny, that it was a joke, but it was very strange, very weird.

I’ll tell you something, the war was very serious. It was so serious that we listened to the announcements and tried to follow everything that happened, the fighting and where the front was on maps. When the Americans landed in Normandy in June 1944, believe me, we looked on the map, trying to follow exactly where the fighting was taking place. My grandfather was a very sick man by that time. He was dying, but he was interested and I showed him the map and where the Americans had landed. He died the day after June 6.

I think I really very much identified with my mother, who worried about whether she would be able to feed the family and how she would keep everything going. That was a big enough problem in itself.

Q: What happened after the liberation?
A: Well, as you know, I got to the Russian side, and remember I told you I ate pasta the whole day? There was still fighting going on because the war was not over yet, so I got as far away from the front line as possible and found my way back to our old apartment where my family had lived. It was pretty far from the Danube, so I got back safely. And I couldn’t believe it, it had hardly been touched. Everything was there. Nobody had taken anything away.

On the way back to the apartment, I had a lucky break and I ended up with a huge solid block of chocolate that was about a foot across. Can you imagine a block of chocolate a foot across both ways and weighing a ton? I knew that I could eat it if I didn’t have anything else, and that was one thing. But the main thing was that I was back in my apartment, in my family’s apartment, and I felt at home.

Then, I found out that some of my aunts and uncles were living in a place not far from there, and I went to see them. They had no food and I had my chocolate. I gave them a lot of the chocolate because there was a newborn baby and he was hungry, and they had to have food for him. That ended up being important because, later on, when I was living in New York, I suddenly received a letter from one of the relatives who was in the apartment where I had left the chocolate. She was the mother of the baby and when I got the letter, she was living in Washington, D.C. with her second husband. She said, “You can live with us for the rest of your life because of what you did. You gave us the chocolate and saved my baby’s life.” I didn’t stay with them forever because I wanted to get to California where my girl was, so I eventually left them.

But that’s how life in war is. Strange things can happen. People who you don’t think you’ll ever see again suddenly turn up in Washington, D.C. and invite you to live with them. That’s what happened.

In 1945, after the war in Hungary, it was a very mixed-up mess. My brother was not back yet; I didn’t know where he was. I didn’t know whether he was coming back or not. As I told you, he was five years older than I am and he had been marched all over Hungary and made to dig ditches.

I was still in Budapest in the old apartment. An aunt and uncle of mine, the uncle who I had dug ditches with and his wife, who saved us, came back to the apartment and I lived with them. They tried to set up the butcher business that they had before the war.

Then, one day, I heard my name being called from the street. I went to the window and somebody called up to me and said, “Your brother is coming. Your brother is here.” I ran downstairs, and walking down the

street in my direction, I saw this person who looked like all bones and skin. It was my brother. He had just come back from the Vienna area where he had been hiding in a brick oven, a brick kiln, at a factory where they made bricks. He had found a place to stay inside one of the ovens. He had no food, but somebody brought him water and that kept him going until he could get on a train. They helped him get on a train and get back to Budapest. Then, when he got back to Budapest, he found me in that apartment, and I saw that he had typhus that covered his skin. He had skin problems—big rashes that typhus causes—all over his body. I had to put oil on his whole body for weeks until they got better.

I lived in the apartment with my brother and I went to work with him, and we tried to sort of start a new life together; but, I told him right away that I was not going to stay in Europe, that I wanted to leave the continent. That was the first thing that I said to my brother: "This continent, I'm finished. And it's not just Hungary that I want to leave. I want to leave the continent. I must go." The only place that I could imagine going, at that point, was Israel. There were *kibbutznikim* that were being collected in Hungary. You know, a *kibbutz* is a community that works on the land, and I said to myself, if that's what I have to do, fine. So I joined the *kibbutz,* which got me out of Hungary. They got me through the line between Hungary and Austria where the Russians were standing. By that time, the Russians were the authority there, and you know what? We gave them American cigarettes and Hungarian wine, and with those two items they let us go through. They liked the American cigarettes.

Q: How did you end up in the United States?
A: I got to Germany and there were places called Displaced Persons Camps. Displaced persons were refugees who had come from the East—all over Poland and Germany and Russia and elsewhere—to escape from the Russians. They all wanted to live in the American zone, and that's where our *kibbutz* ended up, in the American zone. Do you remember there was a zone in Germany that was American? There was the English zone to the north, and the Russians were in the East.

I lived in a Displaced Persons Camp and worked for the American Army as a switchboard operator because I spoke a little English, I spoke some German and I could translate. I helped them out and they gave me a carton of cigarettes every week; that was my salary, a carton of Lucky Strikes. And you know what? I smoked my salary every week! I didn't need money for food because the camp gave us food and shelter, and I didn't need anything but cigarettes. So I smoked them, but not all the time. Finally, I got the idea that I was throwing money away because the Germans loved American cigarettes, and they paid big money for them. So, I started to sell the cigarettes and not smoke them.

Being a switchboard operator, I could connect to every town, so I got to know all the girls at the switchboards all over Germany. One day, I went on a date with a girl that I had gotten to know on the line. I was with her at a hotel in her town, about 20 miles away from my Displaced Persons Camp, when a friend of mine called me and said, "If you don't get back here tonight before five o'clock, you will miss out on going to America. I said, "What?" He told me, "The American Congress passed a law that if you are under the age of 18 and you're an orphan of the Holocaust, you can apply for an American passport."

I had to fill out the application and send it to the American consul that day. I went to the train, got back to the camp that afternoon, and signed the passport application. I got the passport in Munich a couple of months later, and I was in Bremerhaven, Germany by the fall—November or December—of that year, 1946.

I was on a ship sometime in December. The ship's name was "The Ernie Pyle" and it was named after the great American newspaperman who was killed in the war. The ship traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and reached New York Harbor on January 7, 1947. We sailed past the Statue of Liberty and up the Hudson River, and this is where some of the comedy begins.

There are piers along the Hudson River where the ships have to pull in, and on Manhattan's West Side, there is the West Side Highway, which is up on stilts, built up high, so it's like an elevated highway. You cannot see the highway all the time because there are buildings in front of it on the side near the river.

But, between the buildings, there are streets that create gaps between the buildings, allowing you to see the highway again, like a bridge between buildings. Cars disappear behind the buildings and then you see them again on the "bridge," in the space created by the next street.

As we were sailing up the Hudson River, we saw one West Side Highway "bridge" after another. On the bridges, there were yellow cars rushing by. Standing around me were all these kids from central Europe and Germany and everywhere, and they didn't speak English very well. I spoke English better than they did and I got an idea of what I wanted to tell them. I told them, "Those yellow cars are ambulances and the ambulances are going around New York so much because, well, you've seen all those movies from America where the gangster shooting goes on all the time; people all over New York are getting hurt and they're being taken to hospitals by those ambulances." And they said, "Oh, my God." You know, they were really impressed and worried. After we got off the ship, I never saw them again; thank God, because I don't know what they would have said to me. But that was the beginning of my having fun in America.

Q: Why did you decide to come to America instead of waiting to go to Israel?
A: While the *kibbutz* was in Germany, we waited to get to Marseille, the place where the ships leave for Israel. But, perhaps you remember from history, the British were having a problem with terrorism in Israel—not only with Arabs, but with Israeli terrorists. There was the Irgun and there was the Haganah; there were these terrorist organizations that were trying to chase the British out of Israel, so the British shut down the landing spots. Nobody could get into Israel anymore, and they wouldn't let the ships leave from Marseille. We waited in the *kibbutz* in Germany for months and months in 1946, and finally, along came this opportunity to get the American passport. I got it because I gave up on Israel.

When we got off the ship in New York, they divided us up and sent us to different motels all over Manhattan to spend the first night. They told me to go to a hotel up on 103rd Street and Broadway. They showed me how to get to the subway and take it to 96th Street. Then, they said if I walked just a few blocks from 96th Street to 103rd Street, I'd be at my hotel. So that's what I did. I got to 103rd Street, turned left, and looked up. There was a big marquee with the name of the hotel. Can you guess what the name of the hotel was? The Marseille. And even then, I was someone who looked for a laugh; I looked up there and I put my hands up and I said, "I made it to Marseille!" That's how I was.

The next night, three men were waiting for me in the lobby of the hotel. They turned out to be cousins of my father. They had come to America in 1926 (this was 1947), but they had known my father and my mother when they were young and had first met; they knew about their Romeo–and–Juliet kind of story, and they cried, right there in front of me, because I had to tell them what happened.

So, there were three men who wanted to help me. One of them was a doctor, one was a pharmacist, and the third one was the head waiter at a great, famous restaurant in New York, Luchow's. All three said they wanted to do everything they possibly could for me, but they wanted me to do what they wanted me to do, and I was already too much of my own person. I was 17 years old and I wanted to become a director—not an actor, a director—in the movies.

After I arrived in New York on January 7, 1947, I was given a chance to get acclimated to American life in New York for a year, and almost immediately, I found a place near Times Square in Manhattan. In fact, it looked down on Times Square, where people were playing chess on the second floor of a building. It was a huge, big floor on which tables were set up and rented for 25 cents an hour. Since I had played chess since I was 4 years old, I became interested in watching the people playing there. Then, when I found out they were playing for money and that they looked at me and saw a baby-faced young boy—17 years old, who they thought they could easily beat and take money from—I started to play them. Little by little, I became one of the players there and for something like a year and a half or two years, I did hardly anything but play chess day and night.

Later on, upon reflection, I came to understand why chess was so important to me at that time. It was because chess, of course, is a world of its own. It does not involve what happened in history or what's

happening on the outside in the streets. There's only one thing. There's the board with the pieces on it that are yours and your opponent's, and your only concentration is on how to play the game. For some very easily understood reason, that came at a time when I needed something that would take my mind off of everything else. Just as I had found something before, I found something else in chess. And I have to admit that the players eventually found out who I really was, because I began to make enough money playing chess to eat.

Downstairs from the chess place, there was a place called Nedick's, which was very famous in New York at the time because they had the best hotdogs and the best French fries and the best orange juice. I lived on that for a year and a half. And I went to the movies on 42nd Street, caught up on all the movies that I had missed during the war. I went to the public library to read and learn as much English as I could, as fast as I could. So, I kept busy. I would say that during that period I was disconnected from everything that had to do with the past. I found that there were other people my own age who had come from Europe who were taking about it all the time and I just, for some reason, stuck to chess and the library and movies. And little by little, I found myself becoming interested in going to night school to get my American high school diploma so that later on, maybe I could go to college. I got a job in a department store in the Bronx and I worked in the daytime, and then took a train to 14th Street, way downtown, to go to night school. In a year and a half, I had myself an American high school diploma. Now, this was a boy who had not spoken English until a couple of years before that.

So, I got started on building a life. Not that I was thinking about that, necessarily, but because I was in love with a girl, a very nice Irish girl from Queens. The trouble was that she had to leave for California because she had relatives there. She expected me to follow her, so I started to go by bus in the direction of California.

I stopped in Chicago to earn some more money for bus trips out to California, and while I was there, I went to a dance at a YMCA. I danced with a girl who was also very nice and very friendly, and she was very appreciative of my history. We talked a lot, we walked a lot along the lakefront; it was beautiful, the glass buildings of Chicago's lakefront. That went on for several weeks and by the end of it, she was convinced that I should go to college right away. She felt that I was wasting my life, not doing what I should be doing. I was getting to be 22, 23 years old, and she felt that I should go to college. So, we talked and talked and we got to know each other very well and we even became people who loved each other. We got married on June 25, 1952, and I started college that fall. I finished two years later at the University of Illinois, which was a two-year school in Chicago at that time.

From there, in 1955, I got a scholarship to go to Northwestern, which is in Evanston, Illinois, and I got a bachelor's degree in German. In 1957, I received a fellowship to go to Yale University without tuition. I was supposed to get my master's degree in German, but when I got to Yale, they gave us a chance to change our majors and I changed mine to English because, by that time, I had fallen in love with Shakespeare and with English literature. I was also really interested in comparative literature because I knew three languages. I was very happy to be at Yale.

My wife and I moved to New Haven and that was the start of my second life, or third, or fourth—I'm not sure. By the time I had my master's degree from Yale, I was a different person than the one who had sailed into New York Harbor on January 7, 1947. That was exactly 10 years later that I was at Yale—from 1957 to 1958.

As I was writing one of my last papers for my master's degree, down in the basement of a building in New Haven, I looked out the window and a huge black Cadillac, driven by a chauffeur, pulled up. The chauffeur got out and came to my door, rang the bell, and told me that the headmaster of the Tabor Academy was sitting in the backseat of the Cadillac and wanted to talk to me. He wanted to have an interview with me.

I got dressed quickly, because I had been writing on a typewriter downstairs completely relaxed, and went out. I sat there in the backseat with Dr. Wickenden and he explained to me that the head of my department, Mr. Noise, had told him about me and that's all he needed; he didn't need any papers from me, he didn't need any proof of my degrees. He already knew he wanted to hire me to teach at Tabor Academy, which is in Marion, Massachusetts—between New Bedford and Cape Cod, along the coast, not far from Buzzards Bay—because of what the head of my department had told him.

I accepted his offer and we moved to Marion. I was a preparatory school teacher at this old boys' maritime school on the water (they had lots of boats and schooners) for seven years. They immediately made me a junior varsity golf coach and I played a lot of golf; I learned what it was like to go out every afternoon on a beautiful course and play golf. I found that to be very easy. At the same time, because the classes were small and they gave you the chance to get started, I learned how to teach English. So, here I was, a Hungarian boy teaching native-born American boys English and particularly, about literature and things of that kind. (By the way, I had gotten out of German because I didn't want to teach grammar for 10 years, which is what you do if you're a German teacher in college.)

I stayed at Tabor for seven years, at which point I had an offer to teach English at the University of Illinois, a new four-year school that was just opening up in Chicago. I accepted because I wanted to get my Ph.D. at the University of Chicago while I was teaching at the University of Illinois. So, I started teaching there and thus began another very different life. I would say I was possibly on life number four or five at that point.

By that time, I had been a father for a few years. I had a son who was born in 1961, and then I had a daughter who was born in 1966. My daughter is now a psychologist working at Children's Hospital Boston, and she is convinced that I was in denial about the Holocaust all my life. Of course, being a psychologist, she has to find some explanation for things. I am not sure that I was in denial. I did what I've been telling you—I found ways to keep busy and to keep alive and if that's denial, then I was in denial. But, anyway, my daughter is a sweet, loving person. I see her once a month; we have dinner together either in Boston or here in Exeter.

I think my son, on the other hand, was very much impressed by the stories that I told him when he was little. For the first five or six years of his life, we made up stories together, particularly about a little cat that liked to go into the jungle and save other animals who were being hurt. In the jungle, animals would get hurt and this little cat was convinced that he could help them. Actually, the cat was a stand-in for my son. At the time, he liked to think that he was the little cat. So, we told story after story after story about the cat going into the jungle on his tricycle and handing out peanut butter sandwiches to animals that were hungry, and helping those who were hurt, and so forth. Now, my son, who is 47 years old, lives in San Francisco. He cooks and hands out food to the homeless at the Civic Center and saves animals he picks up in the street by taking them to the hospitals.

Q: When did your daughter and son learn about your experience in the Holocaust?
A: I told them things about what happened, but not details that I thought would upset them or leave an unhappy mark on their memory. I tried to keep things of that sort from them. I told you about my aunt who was thrown out of her window by the Hungarian Nazis; I did not tell my children all those details of my history. I didn't want them to know about that kind of thing. I didn't want them to know that that sort of thing happened in this world. But, I did tell them who I was, where I was from, what happened, what destruction took place, and so forth. But I didn't dwell on it day after day after day in detail.

For 50-some years, I'd never dealt with any of these things in public; I never talked about it anywhere. One night, we were looking at the newspaper for something to do—maybe a movie or something, but instead of that, there was an announcement about a middle school in Nottingham, a few miles away from Dover, that was putting on a play called *Under a Yellow Star*. That's all that it said. And I said to myself, *Under a Yellow Star*? That sounds familiar. It must be something about the Holocaust. So we decided to go to Nottingham, and it turned out that 25 middle-school children were in a play based on a script that was taken from the diaries and the journals of children who had lived through the Holocaust. A teacher at

that school, A.M. Sheehan, had been able to collect passages from those diaries and journals and make them into a script for these children to read to an audience.

We sat through the first half of the play and I talked to the director during the intermission, and when I told her that I was a survivor, she almost fainted. She asked me if I would get up on stage when the play was over and tell the audience who I was and some of the things that had happened to me, and then answer questions. I told her of course I would, and I did. But nobody would ask a question. They were mostly parents of the children who were in the play and they were scared, I think. Then I saw a hand go up way in the back of the audience, and guess what. It was my wife. She asked me a question and she got things started for everybody else; they had no trouble asking questions after that.

Then, the director, A.M. Sheehan, told me they were going to take this play to other schools in the area, all over the sea coast, to Portsmouth and Rye and so forth, and she asked me if I would be interested in going with them.

Well, I was retired; I had nothing to do, so I was very happy to say, "Sure, I will." That's how it got started. The play finished after two years, and A.M. Sheehan moved to England where she teaches drama. At that point, Keene State College heard about the play and about me, and they got in touch with me and asked if I would go to a summer institute and give a keynote speech. So I did. And now they have invited me to do it again this year. After my first keynote speech, Tom White, from the Cohen Center at Keene State College, got a hold of me. Tom White knew about all the schools that wanted to have this story told. Since then, we have gone to many schools to perform. He gives the historical background of the Holocaust, and then I get up and tell my story.

Q: And what is the reaction of the public? How do they respond to your story?
A: The more I make them laugh, the better they like it. But, at the same time, I don't make a joke out of it. For instance, one of the topics I read about was dinner table conversations that Hitler had. In one conversation, he told a group of Roman Catholic clergyman, "I want to punish the Jews because they did a terrible thing. They invented the conscience." The Jews invented the conscience. So, I tell my audiences, "Can you imagine doing something worse than that? Something worse than coming up with the conscience?" With eighth-grade students, I sometimes have to ask, "Can anybody here tell me what the conscience is?" And there is always one student who knows what it is and then I tell them, "For that, Hitler said the Jews had to be punished." That is the kind of comedy I use.

Another thing that I tell individuals about Hitler is that he wanted to have his body burned after he shot himself and Eva Braun,[81] at the end of the war in the bunker under the *Reichstargen*[82] in Berlin. So, he gave the order that he should be burned and then he shot himself. They took him out into the backyard of the bunker and they tried to burn him, but the Third Reich, which was supposed to last for a thousand years, didn't have enough gasoline to burn him completely. They didn't have enough gasoline in the Third Reich. I think that's a good joke!

Q: You told me that you became interested in reading books about what happened in other countries during the Holocaust. Why?
A: I have to tell you very frankly, very truly, that I came out of my own experiences without really thinking about these larger questions. Only in the past few years, since I have been giving speeches, have I learned about the kinds of things that occurred during the Holocaust. I have gone to the library at the University of New Hampshire—it's not far from here—and read as many books as possible about the Holocaust. Lots of things have been written about it, and I have tried to find out all that I can because when you live through it, you know your immediate circumstances, but you don't necessarily hear about

[81] Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun decided to commit suicide by biting into thin glass vials of cyanide on April, 30 1945. As he did so, Hitler also shot himself in the head with a 7.65 mm Walther pistol. Braun did not make use of the revolver. In his last testament, Hitler wrote, "At her own desire she [Eva Braun] goes as my wife with me into death. It will compensate us for what we both lost through my work in the service of my people."
[82] Opened in 1894, the Reichstag is a historical Berlin building constructed to house the *Reichstag*, the parliament of the German Empire. The building served its function until 1933, when it was severely damaged in a fire.

what happened in France or in Denmark, Germany, Spain or Italy. All of those things went on and on and on, but I was limited to my immediate surroundings. What occurred in my surroundings was all I knew, until I got to Germany after the war. There, I began to meet boys and girls from Poland and they would tell me what had happened there. The same thing happened everywhere I went.

Q: You have probably read books about and by survivors. I don't know if you know Primo Levi or his texts. What is your reaction to these interpretations and recollections of the Holocaust? What have you been most impressed with?
A: I'm very much impressed by people who knew how to put into words something that many people said could not be described verbally. There are people who said things like, "If you meet a witness today, then tomorrow, you will be a witness." I like that. And that's what I tell the kids. And, at first, I was very surprised at how much they wanted to come up to me, to touch me, just to shake hands or to hug, especially to hug me. I didn't know why they did that and then one of their teachers explained to me, "You know, we read books about the Holocaust and we tell them about it, we show them pictures, we show them films, but they don't meet someone who was really there. You are the first one, and so they really want to know that you are real and that you can be hugged, that you can be touched." And so that's what they do. It's a very good feeling. Now, since my wife passed away, I take my hugs anywhere I can get them.

Interview with Peter Zwack

Q: What is your birth name?
A: My birth name is Peter [Zwack].

Q: What city and country were you born in?
A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary.

Q: What is your birth date?
A: May 21, 1927.

Q: Where did you grow up?
A: I grew up in Budapest until 1948.

Q: Tell us about your family.
A: My mother was Vera von Wahl. She was related to the Weiss-Manfred family, who had Hungary's largest steel mills and a country estate in Derekegyhaza. My father, Janos Zwack, and his brother Bela were heirs to the Zwack distillery, founded in 1840 by my great-grandfather, and at that time one of the most important in Central and Eastern Europe. I had no brothers or sisters.

Q: Did you grow up in a Jewish community?
A: All my family was converted to Catholicism in 1917. I myself was born a Catholic. I had no idea that I was Jewish until 1944, when [Adolf] Eichmann came to Hungary. I had very little contact with the Jewish community. Even our extended family, though of Jewish origin, was entirely integrated into Hungarian society. My relatives played bridge with Admiral [Miklós] Horthy, were patrons of the arts, philanthropists, and leading members of society.

Q: What kind of schools did you attend?
A: I attended a Catholic school run by Cistercian monks. It was one of the leading schools in Hungary.

Q: Was your family religious before the war?
A: Our family was all devoutly Catholic.

Q: How was your daily life before the war?
A: Daily life before the war was very pleasant for people of our social class and income. We had town houses, country mansions, and an elegant lifestyle. To give you an idea, my father had 120 made-to-measure silk shirts which were laundered for him in Switzerland.

Q: When did you first notice signs of anti-Semitism?
A: I never felt any anti-Semitism in Hungary until the war, when we had to hide in a cellar from the Arrow Cross, and I had to wear Yellow Star if I went out.

Of course, my parents must have been much more aware of the Nazi menace, as we later found a letter from the Jewish Council addressed to our company in 1944. It listed things Jews were allowed to take with them when they were deported, and it invited them to present themselves at the railway station at a certain time. My father had anticipated that we would need to go into hiding and had planned earlier where we would go and had filled the cellar with provisions. He just didn't share his fears with me; I was going to school, playing ice hockey, and dating girls.

Q: What changes did you experience?
A: My father sent each of us separately to other families to hide. Once I escaped from my refuge to go to see a Ferencváros[83] football [soccer] match, and my father was furious with me.

Q: You met Raoul Wallenberg at your aunt's house. What was he like?
A: My father used to play bridge with Raoul Wallenberg between 1944 and 1945. I sometimes went too and would watch them play. He was an unassuming and modest man, not someone I would have imagined as a hero.

Q: Could you tell us what happened between the Arrow Cross, Consul Lars Berg and your cousin Lajos's shoes?
A: We were hiding in a cellar when the Arrow Cross came and marched us up the stairs. They started taunting my uncle and wanted us to walk down to the Danube River, where we knew we would be shot. They would tie people together and then shoot one of them so that his weight would drag the others into the river. My cousin Lajos asked if he could go and get his shoes. While he was away, someone had managed to sneak next door to the Swedish Embassy, and Lars Berg came rushing into the house brandishing a machine pistol. He said that our house was under Swedish protection, and frightened the Arrow Cross. While this was happening, I ate the entire chocolate bar they had given me to last the whole time that I would be hiding in the cellar. I was only a boy and I thought that I was going to die, so I ate the chocolate bar then and there. The episode (without the chocolate) is described in Lars Berg's memoirs.

Q: Did your family remain in contact with Consul Berg after the war?
A: I am still in contact with Lars Berg's widow, Barbara, who lives in Brazil. I was shocked when I found out that the Swedish government had made no provisions for her welfare. Although less known than Raoul Wallenberg, Lars Berg made heroic efforts to save the Hungarian Jews, not just our family.

Q: What do you think about the "Shoes on the Danube" monument?
A: I think the "Shoes on the Danube" monument[84] is very moving, as is the Holocaust Museum.

Q: What happened to your family after the war?
A: After the siege of Budapest, life went back to normal for us. We were busy rebuilding the factory, which had been completely bombed.[85] Most of the people we knew survived the Nazi occupation, although quite a number of our workers in the factory did not.

In 1948, my father put me on a train to Yugoslavia. I crossed the border on foot, then walked and hitched lifts as far as Trieste, where my father had a banker friend who took me in. Later, I went to the United States with my father. We were on Ellis Island[86] for one month until a special bill of Congress to facilitate our entering the country was introduced by Congressman Emanuel Celler.[87] We were then joined by my mother, and I was very happy to be in the United States. After the war and the Soviet occupation, it seemed to me to be a brave new

[83] The most popular soccer team in Hungary, the Ferencváros is part of the Ferencvárosi Torna Club (FTC), founded in 1899 by Ferenc Springer and a group of local residents of Budapest's ninth district.
[84] To learn more about the Monument, read Tibor Gonda's Interview on page….
[85] After the war, the factory was rebuilt using the most modern technology available at the time. However, in 1948, the newly instated Communist government confiscated everything the Zwack family possessed with no compensation.
[86] Ellis Island operated as a federal immigration station from 1892 to 1954, processing around 12 million immigrants. After the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed, which greatly restricted immigration and allowed processing at overseas embassies, the only immigrants to pass through the station were displaced persons or war refugees.
[87] Emanuel Celler (1888–1981) served in the United States House of Representatives for almost 50 years, from March 1923 to January 1973.

world. My mother missed Europe and her life there, but my father was totally engrossed in winning back the rights to his trademarks. Eventually, he was successful and the Communist owners of his old factory were prevented by law from exporting products bearing our family name.

Q: How did the war change you?
A: The United States offered me a brand new life, and I wholeheartedly embraced the American ideals of freedom and democracy. While my childhood made me culturally and emotionally a European, America gave me a liberal viewpoint and a positive outlook, which I have maintained in both my business and political life.

Q: How did your experiences during the war affect your relationship with religion?
A: I am still a Catholic; at this point I believe that the important thing is to believe in God and try to be a good person. I think that is the core of all the monotheistic religions. I do, however, sponsor many Jewish events and I am very supportive of Jewish causes. I give my voluntary tax contribution as provided for by Hungarian tax laws to the Jewish religion.

Q: Do you talk with your children or grandchildren about the war, Lars Berg, and Raoul Wallenberg?
A: All my family has been brought up on the story of how we were rescued by Lars Berg and the heroism of Raoul Wallenberg. My eldest son is a colonel in the U.S. Army and he has devoted time and research to this period in history. My two youngest children live in Hungary and work in the factory. They are very proud of their Jewish origins.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?
A: I am very glad that you are keeping the name of this truly great man alive. We need heroes to inspire us in today's world.

Glossary

Aliyah: A Hebrew term referring to the immigration of Jews to Israel.

Anschluss: A German term meaning connection or annexation that is used to refer to the takeover of Austria by Germany in March 1938.

Arrow Cross (in Hungarian, *Nyilas*): A Hungarian fascist party established and headed by Ferenc Szálasi in 1937. The party's ideology included nationalism and militant anti-Semitism. Its foreign policy was pro-Nazi. German authorities relied on the support of the Arrow Cross when, in October 1944, Miklós Horthy declared that Hungary would no longer partner with Germany. The Germans dismissed the traitor and put Szálasi in charge. The Arrow Cross party led Hungary from October 15, 1944 until Soviet Army liberation. Ten to fifteen thousand Jews were murdered outright during the party's tenure. Tens of thousands of Jews were deported from Hungary to death camps. Szálasi and other Arrow Cross leaders were tried as war criminals and executed by Soviet courts after the war.

Baruch Hashem: A Hebrew term meaning "Blessed be the name" or "Blessed be God."

Berg, Lars: Embassy Attaché of Sweden to Hungary in 1944–1945. Along with his diplomatic colleagues, Berg was responsible for saving Jews from Nazi and Arrow Cross deportations and murder.

Bergen-Belsen: A camp established in 1940 by the German military authority. Located 11 miles north of Celle, Germany, the camp functioned as a prisoner-of-war prison until 1943, when it was taken over by the SS and transformed into a concentration camp. Five sub-camps were set up at Bergen-Belsen, one of which was known as the "Hungarian camp." It housed 1,684 Jews from Hungary who had been allowed to leave their country on the "Kasztner train," and would eventually reach safety in Switzerland.

Bernadotte, Folke (1895–1948): The Count of Wisborg, Bernadotte was a Swedish diplomat and nobleman who served as the representative of the Swedish Red Cross. He is known for negotiating the release of about 31,000 prisoners from German concentration camps during World War II, including 423 Danish Jews from Theresienstadt released on April 14, 1945.

Brick Factory: An open-air facility outside of Budapest that became a holding place for those about to be marched to concentration camps.

Buda: Located on the west bank of the Danube, Buda is the western part of Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

Chutzpah: Coming from the Yiddish word *khutspe* and the Hebrew word *ḥuṣpāh*, *chutzpah* means audacity, nerve.

Danielsson, Carl Ivan (1880–1963): As the Swedish Ambassador to Hungary from 1944–1945, Danielsson refused to leave his post when Miklós Horthy was overruled. Instead, he supported and participated in the rescue operation lead by Raoul Wallenberg. He signed Schutz-Passes, personally raising their protection value, and looked the other way when the permitted quota was exceeded or his signature was forged. He was responsible for the rescue and protection of tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews.

Dachau: Located on the grounds of an abandoned munitions factory 10 miles northwest of Munich, Dachau was the first Nazi concentration camp opened in Germany in March 1933, soon after Adolf Hitler's rise to power. It was officially described as "the first concentration camp for political prisoners," and was aimed at scaring the German people into obeying and supporting the Nazi Regime. Commanded

by Theodor Eicke, with the support of the SS's Death's Head Unit, the camp was a training ground for the operation of future camps. Dachau was liberated on April 29, 1945.

Designated Jewish Houses: Buildings where Jews were forced to reside. Also known as Yellow Star Houses, these apartments were located in a specific part of the city that would later be enclosed and transformed into a ghetto. Families were usually limited to one room, having to share the rest of the apartment with other people.

Displaced Persons Camps: Also known as DP camps, these were temporary facilities for people coerced into forced migration. Immediately after World War II, many such camps existed for years in West Germany and in Austria, as well as in the United Kingdom, primarily housing survivors of concentration camps, death marches, and extermination camps. There were still 250,000 Jewish displaced persons in 1946. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the need for DP camps diminished.

Eichmann, Adolf (1906–1962): The SS official charged with the task of facilitating and managing the logistics of mass deportation of Jews to ghettos and extermination camps in German-occupied Eastern Europe. After the war, Eichmann fled to Argentina, where he lived under a false identity until he was captured by Israeli Mossad agents. He was taken to Israel to face charges for both crimes against humanity and war crimes. Eichmann was found guilty and executed by hanging in 1962.

Evian Conference: Following the initiative of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a conference was held in Evian, France, in July of 1938 to discuss the increasing numbers of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. Although delegates from more than 30 countries expressed their sympathy for the refugees, no immediate joint resolution or commitment was reached.

Gendarmerie: A body of the military or a group organized along military lines charged with police duties among civilian populations on a national level. Individual members are known as Gendarmes.

Gentile: A term coming from the Latin *gentiles,* meaning of or belonging to a clan or tribe. It is used in English translations of the Bible to refer to non-Israelite peoples or nations. From the 17th century onward, Gentile was most commonly used to refer to non-Jews.

Gestapo: The official secret police of Nazi Germany that also served as Hitler's main instrument of torture and terror. Its name comes from the abbreviation of *Geheime Staatspolizei*, which means Secret State Police in German. Established before Hitler's rise to power, the Gestapo gained new control during Nazi Germany. In 1934, a "Jewish section" was established within the operation. After the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938, the Gestapo became Germany's main executor of its anti-Jewish policies and, when World War II broke, it supervised the liquidation of the ghettos and deportation to extermination camps. Most of Gestapo officials eluded capture after the war.

Ghetto: A section of a city where Jews were forced to reside. Enclosed by fences, wire, or walls, the ghettos were sealed to prevent people from leaving or entering. Ghettos were self-governed by the Jews—they had to run and provide their own services, such as postal, security, food distribution, hospitals, and schools. Ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation, and forced labor. As Jews were transported to concentration or extermination camps, ghettos were liquidated.

Glasnost: A policy introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of 1980 promoting freedom of information, openness, and transparency in the activities of all governmental institutions.

Glass House: Formerly a glass factory, the Glass House was the headquarters of the Jewish youth underground in Budapest, Hungary, during the Holocaust. The building was also used by Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz to shelter persecuted Jews.

Great Synagogue in Dohány Street: Still active today, the synagogue is the largest temple in Europe and has served as a model for all the other synagogues built in Hungary. The synagogue was built by the

German architect Ludwig Förster between 1854 and 1859. During the siege of Budapest, at the end of World War II, the synagogue suffered 27 hits. In the Cemetery of Martyrs, located in its garden, rest 7,000 victims from the Pest ghetto.

Gulag: An acronym for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies, it is a government agency that administered the main Soviet penal labor camp systems, which housed a wide range of convicts—from petty criminals to political prisoners. The Gulag is recognized as a major instrument of political repression in the Soviet Union.

Gymnasium: European schools that prepare pupils to enter a university for advanced academic study. They are comparable to English grammar schools and U.S. college preparatory high schools.

Hasidic Judaism or Hasidism: A branch of Judaism that promotes spirituality and joy through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspects of the Jewish faith. The movement differentiates from other Orthodox Jews by their devotion to a dynastic leader (referred to as "Rebbe"), their wearing of distinctive clothing, and a greater–than–average study of the inner aspects of Torah.

Hilberg, Raul (1926–2007): An Austrian-born American political scientist and historian. He was widely considered to be the world's preeminent Holocaust scholar, and his three-volume book, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, is regarded as a seminal study of the Nazi Final Solution.

Hitler Youth (In German, *Hitler-Jugend*): A Nazi Youth movement for children aged 10–18. The group was established in 1922 with the aim to shape the young generation and ensure the continuity of Nazi ideology. Activities focused on physical development. Upon turning 19, male members were drafted into the Reich Labor Service and the army. The female branch of the movement, the League of German Girls (in German, *Bund Deutscher Maedel*), taught girls to become obedient wives and to raise superior Aryan children.

Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945): Dictator of the Third German Reich. After finishing his secondary studies and failing the entrance exam into the Vienna's Art Academy, the Austrian-born Hitler settled in the city. Governed by Karl Lueger, anti-Semitism was rampant in Vienna at the time, and Hitler was greatly influenced by the mayor's ideologies. Hitler moved to Munich, Germany in 1913, and enlisted in the Bavarian Army when World War I broke. He returned with honors, but also harbored bitterness over the war's outcome, as he blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat. He joined the newly formed anti-Semitic German Workers' Party, which was soon reorganized under his leadership as the National Socialist German Workers' Party—or Nazi Party, for short. After a failed coup known as Beer-Hall Putsch, he was sentenced to prison, where he wrote *My Struggle* (In German *Mein Kampf).* Upon his release, Hitler reestablished the Nazi Party and grew its membership. In the national election of 1932, he was appointed Chancellor of Germany and immediately transformed the democratic country into the Third Reich—a single-party dictatorship based on the totalitarian and autocratic ideology of Nazism. Hitler rapidly organized anti-Jewish boycotts and, in 1935, he established the Nuremberg Laws, reducing Jews' civil rights. He also followed his dream of a Greater Germany by annexing Austria and Czechoslovakia. His invasion of Poland in September of 1939 led to the outbreak of World War II. Nazi forces engaged in numerous violent acts during the war, including the systematic murder of as many as 17 million civilians, including an estimated six million Jews targeted in the Holocaust and between 500,000 and 1.5 million Roma, in addition to Poles, Soviet civilians, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, people with disabilities, and other political and religious opponents. Hitler married his long-time mistress Eva Braun in the final days of the war and, to avoid capture by Soviet forces, committed suicide two days later, on April 30, 1945.

Holy Alliance Treaty: Following the fall of Napoleon, the Emperor of Russia Alexander I, the Emperor of Austria Francis I, and the King of Prussia Frederick William III signed a treaty on September 26, 1815 in Paris, by which they united in a "Holy Alliance." Although a political act, the treaty in its wording is a statement purely religious in character. It was subsequently signed by other European monarchs except for the King of Great Britain, who declined to sign on constitutional grounds; Pope Pius VII, who refused

to treat with Protestant monarchs, and the Sultan of Turkey. The treaty had little influence on the policies of the signatories.

Homonnay, Tivadar (1888–1964): The mayor of Budapest during World War II. He resigned following the German occupation in March 1944, and offered refuge in his house to persecuted Jews.

Horthy, Miklós (1868–1957): The Regent of Hungary from March 1, 1920 to October 15, 1944. His government was anti-Semitic and abided by the *Numerus Clasusu Act*, a system that restricted the number of Jews who could attend university. Horthy led Hungary into an alliance with Nazi Germany—Hungary would join the Axis in exchange for the restoration of some of the Hungarian territories lost by the Treaty of Trianon. Horthy's anti-Jewish legislations worsened, but he refused some of Hitler's demands. Believing that the Axis powers would lose the war, Horthy negotiated a separate peace treaty with the Allies. However, when the Germans occupied Hungary in 1944, Horthy installed a collaborating pro-German government, only to change his mind again and stop deportations to extermination camps. Instead, he offered Hitler to send the Jews to Palestine. As a result, Germans kidnapped the Regent and appointed Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi in his place. At the end of the war, Horthy was captured by the United States Army in Bavaria and was held in protective custody until the end of 1945, when he was released. After appearing as a witness at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials in 1948, Horthy spent the rest of his life in Portugal.

Hungarian Anti-Jewish Laws: Starting in 1938, the regent of Hungary, Miklós Horthy, passed a series of anti-Jewish measures in emulation of Germany's Nuremberg Laws. The first anti-Jewish law—issued on May 29, 1938—restricted the number of Jews in each commercial enterprise in the press, among physicians, engineers, and lawyers to 20%. The second law—issued on May 5, 1939—defined people with two, three, or four Jewish-born grandparents as Jewish. Their employment in government at any level was forbidden, they could not be editors at newspapers, and their numbers were restricted to 6% among theater and movie actors, physicians, lawyers, and engineers. Private companies were forbidden to employ more than 12% Jews. The third law—issued on August 8, 1941—prohibited intermarriage and penalized sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews.

Hungarian Revolution: A spontaneous nationwide revolt against the government of the People's Republic of Hungary and its Soviet-imposed policies. The revolt began as a student demonstration, attracting thousands as it marched through central Budapest to the Parliament building. Lasting from October 23 to November 10, 1956, the revolt spread quickly across Hungary, and the government fell. Thousands organized into militias, battling the State Security Police and the Soviet troops. Pro-Soviet Communists and AVH [*Államvédelmi Hatóság*, or Hungarian Secret Police] members were executed or imprisoned, as former prisoners were released and armed. Impromptu councils wrested municipal control from the ruling Hungarian Working People's Party and demanded political changes. The new government formally disbanded the AVH, declared its intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, and pledged to re-establish free elections. After announcing a willingness to negotiate a withdrawal of Soviet forces, the Politburo changed its mind and moved to crush the revolution. On November 4, a large Soviet force invaded Budapest and other regions of the country. Hungarian resistance continued until November 10. Over 2,500 Hungarians and 700 Soviet troops were killed in the conflict, and 200,000 Hungarians fled as refugees. Mass arrests and denunciations continued for months thereafter. By January 1957, the new Soviet-installed government had suppressed all public opposition.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): An international humanitarian movement founded to protect human life and health, to ensure respect for all human beings, as well as to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without any discrimination based on nationality, race, sex, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions. During World War II, the ICRC visited and monitored prisoners of war (POW) camps, organized relief assistance for civilian populations, and administered the exchange of messages regarding prisoners and missing persons. However, the committee was unable to obtain an agreement with Nazi Germany about the treatment of detainees in concentration camps and a response to reliable information about the extermination camps and the mass killing of European Jews, Roma, etc. After November 1943, the ICRC obtained permission to send parcels to concentration camp detainees with known names and locations. The committee delivered about 1.1 million parcels, primarily to the Dachau,

Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, and Sachsenhausen camps. Swiss army officer Maurice Rossel was sent to Berlin as a delegate of the International Red Cross and, as such, he visited Auschwitz in 1943 and Theresienstadt in 1944. In 1945, the SS accepted ICRC's demands to allow delegates to visit the concentration camps. This agreement was bound by the condition that these delegates would have to stay in the camps until the end of the war. Ten delegates, among them Louis Haefliger (Mauthausen), Paul Dunant (Theresienstadt) and Victor Maurer (Dachau), accepted the assignment and visited the camps. Louis Haefliger prevented the forceful eviction or blasting of Mauthausen by alerting American troops, thereby saving the lives of about 60,000 inmates. Another example of great humanitarian spirit was Friedrich Born (1903–1963), an ICRC delegate in Budapest who saved the lives of about 11,000 to 15,000 Jewish people in Hungary. By the end of the war, 179 delegates had conducted 12,750 visits to POW camps in 41 countries. The Central Information Agency on Prisoners of War had a staff of 3,000, the card index tracking prisoners contained 45 million cards, and 120 million messages were exchanged by the Agency. One major obstacle was that the Nazi-controlled German Red Cross refused to cooperate with the Geneva statutes, including blatant violations such as the deportation of Jews from Germany and the mass murders conducted in the Nazi concentration camps. In 1944, the ICRC received its second Nobel Peace Prize, the only Peace Prize awarded during the main period of war, from 1939 to 1945. At the end of the war, the ICRC worked with national Red Cross societies to organize relief assistance to those countries most severely affected. In 1948, the Committee published a report reviewing its war-era activities from September 1, 1939 to June 30, 1947.

Jewish Gemeinde: The German term for Jewish Community.

Jewish Star: See Yellow Star.

Kasza-Kasser, Sandor Alexander: The Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross in Budapest from 1944–1945. Together with Professor Valdemar Langlet, he designed the Swedish Red Cross protective papers, provided Jewish refugees with jobs and safe houses, and worked extensively with Raoul Wallenberg on numerous rescue missions to save Jews from Arrow Cross roundups and death marches. His wife, Elisabeth Kasser, worked as an interpreter with Raoul Wallenberg.

Katyusha: A type of rocket launcher named after a Soviet wartime song about a girl longing for her beloved. The launcher was first built and fielded by the Soviet Union in World War II.

Kibbutz: Israeli communal settlement.

Kiddush: A ritual of Jewish Sabbath and other holy days, usually accompanied by a glass of wine, proclaiming the holiness of the day.

Kindertransport: Name given to the trains that transported children from various occupied countries into safety, mainly through England. The first *Kindertransport* departed from Berlin to Great Britain in November of 1938, after *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass), an anti-Jewish pogrom in Nazi Germany.

Kistarcsa: A detention and concentration camp since the mid-1930s, where Miklós Horthy's opponents were sent. After the German occupation, Jews were shipped to the now SS-run Kistarcsa camp administered by the Hungarian police. The camp became more particularly known after Adolf Eichmann's many attempts to transport its inmates to Auschwitz. About 1,000 Jews remained in the camp until it was dismantled on September 27, 1944, when they were then sent to other labor camps.

Kőszeg: A town located in western Hungary. During World War II, the Jews of Kőszeg were among the last to be deported to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944. Later that year, Nazis established a slave labor camp in Kőszeg. With the impending arrival of the Red Army in 1945, the camp was liquidated with 2,000 survivors enduring a "death march" of several weeks over the Alps.

Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass): A pogrom against German Jews launched by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Chief of Propaganda. Officially claimed as instantaneous outbursts, the attacks

targeted synagogues, schools, cemeteries, Jewish stores and businesses, as well as Jewish people in the street. Jews were blamed for the events, which led to stricter anti-Jewish measures and financial compensation. Jews were to pay a fine to the state for the damage.

Malinovsky, Rodion Yakovlevich (1898–1967): A Soviet military commander in World War II and Defense Minister of the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and 1960s. He contributed to the major defeat of Nazi Germany at the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Budapest. After liberation, he was stationed in the Soviet headquarters in Debrecen.

Mauthausen: An Austrian village around which the Mauthausen Concentration Camp was built in 1938, just a few months after Austria's annexation to Germany. Initially a single camp, it expanded over time and by the summer of 1940, it became one of the largest camp complexes in German-controlled Europe. The camp was liberated by American troops on May 3, 1945.

Mitzvah: A ritual or ethical duty or act of obedience to God's will. It is also applied to a boy (*Bar Mitzvah*) or a girl (*Bat Mitzvah*) who has reached the age of religious duty and responsibility.

Munich Conference: Held on September 28–29, 1938, the Munich Conference was the result of a series of long negotiations between Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany in which it was agreed that Germany could annex certain areas of Czechoslovakia to its territory. This decision was reached following the belief that once this demand was approved, Hitler would not make any additional ones. Five months later, Hitler broke the agreement and took control of the entire country.

Munka Tabor: A slave labor battalion named after the Hungarian words *munka* (work) and *tabor* (battalion or group).

Neolog Judaism: A mild reform movement within Judaism, mainly in Hungarian-speaking regions of Europe, which began in the late 19th century.

Numerus Clausus Act: A method used to limit the number of students who may study at a university. The act was first introduced in Hungary in 1920 with the aim of restricting the number of Jews who could attend university to 6%, the proportion of Jews in Hungary at that time. Until that time, the rate of Jewish students in Hungarian universities was 25–40%.

Nuremberg Laws: Racial Laws introduced in Nazi Germany on September 15, 1935 that stripped Jews of their German citizenship. The laws included the first official definition of who was to be considered a Jew. Until that time, there were no clear policies on how to deal with the "Jewish Question," and the Nuremberg laws provided legitimacy to and rationalization for the anti-Semitic acts carried out.

Pengő: Hungary's currency between January 1, 1927 and July 31, 1946. After World War II the *pengő* lost value, suffering the highest rate of hyperinflation ever recorded.

Perestroika: A political movement within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union widely associated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The movement is argued to be one reason for the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and for the end of the Cold War. Its literal meaning is "restructuring," referring to the restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system.

Pest: Located on the east bank of the Danube, Pest is the eastern part of Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

Rapprochement: A term from the French word *rapprocher* (to bring together). It is used in international relations as a re-establishment of cordial relations between two countries.

Ravensbrück: Opened in May 1939, Ravensbrück was the only major women's concentration camp established by the Nazis. The camp also served as a training facility for SS women. By 1944, it had more

than 30 satellite camps. Inmates were requested to do forced labor, and among their many tasks, they manufactured Nazi uniforms.

Razzia: From the Arabic word *gazya*, a term meaning raid or military attack.

Reform Judaism: A branch of the religion which maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and should be compatible with participation in the surrounding culture. The movement has challenged many traditionalist Jewish doctrines, adapted or eliminated practices, and introduced its own theological and communal innovations.

Roncalli, Angelo Giuseppe (1881–1963): The Apostolic Nuncio in Turkey and Greece when World War II broke. Roncalli assisted many Jews in escaping by issuing "transit visas" from the Apostolic Delegation. In December 1944, Pius XII appointed him Nuncio in France and, during the last months of the war and the beginning of peace, Roncalli aided prisoners of war and helped to normalize the ecclesiastical organization of France. He was elected Pope on October 28, 1958, taking the name John XXIII.

Rotta, Monsignor Angelo (1872–1965): Apostolic Nuncio in Budapest at the end of World War II. Rotta issued at least 15,000 protection letters to Hungarian Jews, providing them with baptismal certificates. He also protested vehemently to the Hungarian government against the deportation of the Jews.

Safe House (In German, *Schutz-Haus*): Also commonly referred to as Swedish or protected houses, these were buildings acquired by Raoul Wallenberg to shelter Jews who were under the protection of Sweden, thanks to the possession of a Schutz-Pass.

Schmidthuber, August: The SS General in charge of executing Adolph Eichmann's orders of exterminating the Budapest ghetto.

Schutz-Pass: A document created by Raoul Wallenberg that provided protection by stating that the bearer was under the protectorate of the Swedish government. The document did not provide citizenship, nor did it work as a passport or visa allowing the bearer to enter and reside in Sweden.

Seder: A Hebrew term meaning order or sequence that is also used to refer to the traditional Jewish evening service and opening of the celebration of Passover, which includes special food symbols and narratives.

Shabbat: The seventh day of the week, recalling the completion of the creation and the Exodus from Egypt. It is a day symbolic of new beginnings and one dedicated to God, a most holy day of rest.

Shtreimel: A fur hat generally worn by many married Orthodox Jewish men on Shabbat, Jewish holidays and other festive occasions.

Shul: A Yiddish term for synagogue, mostly used by the Jews of Ashkenazi descent.

SS (in German, *Schutzstaffel*): A major paramilitary organization formed in 1925 as a personal protection guard unit for Adolf Hitler. Built upon the Nazi ideology and under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, the SS grew from a small paramilitary formation to one of the largest and most powerful organizations in the Third Reich. The group was responsible for the "Final Solution" and the management of extermination camps where Jews were killed in gas chambers. After 1945 the SS was declared, along with the Nazi Party, a criminal organization by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Swedish House: See safe house.

Szálasi, Ferenc (1897–1946): The leader of the National Socialist Arrow Cross Party, which he established in 1940. Hitler installed him as the head of the Hungarian Government after Miklós Horthy was overthrown in October 1944. During his brief rule, Szálasi's men murdered thousands of Jews. Upon

liberation, Szálasi tried to flee to Germany but was caught by American troops. He was executed for crimes against the state in March 1946.

Tallit: A Jewish prayer shawl with fringes and special knots at the extremities, worn during Jewish morning prayers.

Talmud: A central text of mainstream Judaism, in the form of a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs, and history.

Third Reich (in German, *Drittes Reich*): The Nazi term for the country of Germany while governed by Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers' Party, from 1933 to 1945. The word *reich* means kingdom, while the term Third Reich denotes the Nazi state as a historical successor to the medieval Holy Roman Empire (962–1806) and to the modern German Empire (1871–1918).

Tiso, Jozef (1887–1947): A Slovak politician and Catholic priest who lead Slovakia from 1939 to 1945 as a satellite state of Nazi Germany. He was convicted and hanged after the war for supporting Nazism and treason.

Treaty of Trianon: A peace agreement signed in 1920 between the Allies of World War I and Hungary, dramatically redefining and reducing Hungary's borders.

Theresienstadt: A concentration camp (often referred to as Terezín) established by the Gestapo in the fortress and garrison city Theresienstadt, located in what is now the Czech Republic. In July 1944, the camp was presented by the Nazis as a model ghetto to the International Red Cross and other inspectors, who—after seeing the many cultural activities and conditions under which the inhabitants lived—dismissed claims of mistreatment.

Tutu, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo (1931–): A South African activist and Christian cleric who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

Verolino, Gennaro (1906–2005): Deputy to Monsignor Angelo Rotta at the office of the Papal Nuncio in Budapest. Father Verolino went on numerous rescue missions in support of Monsignor Rotta. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Vatican-protected houses in Budapest and supervised the many Vatican volunteers active in rescue operations.

Yellow Star: A cloth badge in the form of a yellow Star of David that Jews were ordered to sew on their outer garments in order to identify their religion in public. The use of the Yellow Star was first discussed among the Nazi leaders in 1938, after *Kristallnacht*, but was not implemented until after World War II began in September 1939. It is sometimes referred as Jewish Star or Jewish badge.

Yeshiva: An institution in classical Judaism for the study of its traditional, central texts.

Yom Kippur: The annual day of fasting and atonement. It is regarded as the most solemn and important occasion of the Jewish religious year.

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