

EHRlich, Eva Hevesi
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One Videocassette
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Abstract

Eva Ehrlich, née Hevesi, was born in 1924 in Budapest. Her grandfather was Chief Rabbi of Hungary, and her father succeeded him. She says that the Jewish community thrived before the war, despite some anti-Semitism. When war began, little changed, except Jews had to go to labor camps on the Russian front instead of into the military.

On March 19, 1944, Nazi Germany occupied Hungary. Eichmann set up headquarters in the mountains of Buda. He summoned Jewish community leaders and told them what to expect. Her father went several times to Eichmann's headquarters, but never talked about it. A *Judenrat* was formed, and Jews had to wear the yellow star. Beginning in March 1944, all Jews in country towns were deported. Also in 1944, all Jewish businesses, property, and jewelry were confiscated. She terms the Arrow Cross "worse than the Nazis."

Her mother and Eva bought false identification papers. Her father went into hiding. But a rabbi, who was a collaborator, turned him in. Eva and her mother were turned in also. But all three remained safe, with some narrow escapes, and were reunited around the time the "wild" Russians invaded.

Eva's fiancée begged her to come with him at one point. He and others were shot in the Danube. She recalls seeing people eating meat from dead horses in the streets. Eva and her father went to the synagogue, where they found piles of frozen corpses.

After the war, as chief rabbi again, and with JDC and UJA help, he went to England and the US to speak on behalf of Hungarian Jewry. He founded Budapest's first B'nai B'rith lodge.

Eva met a Hungarian in the US Army, and moved with him to the US in 1947. Her father officiated at their wedding in New York City. The rabbi and his wife were warned not to return to Hungary because the Communists were gaining power.

Eva's marriage ended, and she stayed with her parents first in Dalton, Georgia, then in Washington, DC. She worked for the Library of Congress and met her current husband.

She says she will always remember surviving such a terrible time. She has learned to appreciate her good life in the US, and not to take anything for granted.

Testimony

- :27** Eva Hevesi Ehrlich was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1924.
- : 41** Eva's father was a respected rabbi in a fairly large synagogue in Székesfehérvár, Hungary, where the family lived until Eva was six years old. In 1930, her father was invited to become an associate rabbi of Dohany Synagogue in Budapest. His father was the Chief Rabbi of Hungary, and was an outstanding teacher, scholar, and philosopher. After he died in 1943, Eva's father became Chief Rabbi.
- 2:36** Eva has only a few memories of Székesfehérvár, including walking with playmates to a lake where they ice skated, and visiting a friend's farm where a turkey chased her.
- 3:05** In Budapest, Jews met at synagogue on Friday and Saturday. Very religious Jews prayed every day. Eva describes her nice, middle class community. Her nanny walked her back and forth to elementary school.
- 4:22** She went to junior high and high school in Budapest until 1942. Before the war, the Jewish community was thriving. Despite some anti-Semitism, it was a good life. Jews were merchants, manufacturers, scholars, teachers, and professionals. All were integrated. Most people lived in apartments. Only the wealthy had beautiful homes.
- 6:09** Eva did not personally experience anti-Semitism. Her grandfather and father believed in assimilation. They were Hungarians first. Judaism was a religion, not a nationality.
- 8:10** Eva's family was very close. Aunts, uncles, and cousins gathered all the time, often at her grandparents' apartment. Her father and grandfather were well-respected. On Sunday mornings, her grandmother would walk along the Danube, and when she encountered friends, she would invite them for lunch.
- 9:55** When the war broke out in 1941-1942, little changed, except that young Jewish people had to go to labor camps on the Russian front instead of the military.
- 10:50** Everyone learned about the war in 1939 through the BBC, so they knew about Hitler and what was going on in Germany. When the family went on vacation in Austria prior to 1939, they observed children being trained by Nazis. Schools remained open. Nothing changed, except air raids began. The Jewish community did become concerned about what might happen if the Nazis won.
- 13:07** They learned about labor camps through her father's contacts. Eva remembers hearing about a young man who had starved to death. He had sent his diary to his mother. They knew about *Kristallnacht* and many other things, but the Jewish community kept thinking nothing would happen. After 1942, Eva went to college.

She wanted to be a doctor, but could not be accepted into medical school. Friends of her father helped her get into a liberal arts college, where she majored in philosophy. Because Hungary cooperated with the Nazis, Germany did not invade the country. Most people stayed in Budapest. While in college, the only change Eva noted was that young men were being taken away.

- 18:11** Eva's grandfather died in 1943. Her father became the chief rabbi, but accepted the position only on the condition that he could share the rabbinate with a close colleague.
- 19:02** The BBC kept everyone informed about concentration camps. She stayed in school, and her family continued to go on summer vacations. In 1940-41, Germans gave back some territories lost by Hungary after WWI. Eva and her father traveled in those areas. Nothing momentous happened between 1942 and 1944, she says.
- 21:35** On March 19, 1944, Nazis occupied Hungary. Eichmann set up headquarters in the mountains of Buda. He called in leaders of the Jewish community and told them what to expect. Her father went several times to Eichmann's headquarters. He was always exhausted when he came home. He never talked about it.
- 22:15** Instructions were given to form a *Judenrat*. Jews had to wear yellow stars. Jews were instructed to move in with one family, than 20 families had to share one room. A curfew was imposed, but people in the *Judenrat* were given longer hours. Buying groceries became very difficult. Eva was required to file cards with the names of all Jewish people. She could not go back to college, but in 1945-1946 she was given credit for time lost.
- 25:18** Services were held throughout period, including during the time of the Russian occupation. Beginning in March 1944, all Jews in country towns were deported.
- 26:20** On October 15, 1945, (actually 1944) the Arrow Cross Party came into power. They did whatever Germans did not want to do. They were worse than Nazis. The mistress of the head of the Arrow Cross Party lived in same apartment house as Eva. The party leader was always respectful of Eva's father. In 1944, all Jewish businesses, property, and jewelry were taken away. There was very little food. People were taken off streetcars, placed in a brick factory, and then deported. During March through October of 1944, some Zionists tried to form *aliyah* groups to go to Palestine. Their trains ended up in Germany.
- 31:05** Her father did not want to leave his congregation and his people. Eva and her mother bought identification documents from gentiles. Her father, who was too well known, went into hiding.
- 32:10** The Arrow Cross Party took over Oct. 15, 1945 (actually 1944). Ghetto formed. Everyone from her apartment building was sent into the ghetto. The Germans had

- no time to deport anyone, because they were being attacked by Russians and Allies. Everyone assumed Germans would bomb the ghetto.
- 33:12** Many people went from the ghetto into hiding. Jews paid gentiles to take them in, but some gentiles turned them in.
- 35:44** On October 15, 1944, Eva's father was almost caught in hiding. Everyone was warned that they were going to be taken. Her father went away. Eva and her mother took documents, and ultimately found a one-room apartment in the far side of old Buda. Two men in the apartment house discovered Eva's and her mother's true identity.
- 37: 54** Her father stayed with a distant relative who was married to a gentile in Buda. He was thrown out, and then went to a sanitarium owned by an American on the Pest side. He stayed there until a rabbi, who was a collaborator, turned him in. Her father never mentioned his name.
- 40:30** Fortunately, when Nazis came to the sanitarium to arrest him, the doctor said that father would not survive the night. In the middle of the night, he went to an apartment building in same neighborhood where Eva and mother were living. Her father went to a building owned by a retired officer who hid several Jews. An underground organization had a liaison, Nicklose Gasper, who kept people informed about each other. Gasper had been a rabbinical student of Eva's grandfather, and her family had known him for a long time. He told Eva and her mother where her father was, and vice versa.
- 44:31** Eva and her mother were turned in by people in the apartment house in old Buda. They went back to Pest and stayed with a non-Jewish family for a few days, then went to an apartment near their old apartment. They walked to the building where her father was hidden. A colonel took them in, and they stayed until January.
- 46:36** They learned that Germans had blown up bridges between Pest and Buda half an hour after they had left Buda.
- 47:41** The Nazis found out about the colonel who was hiding Jews. The colonel shot a block commander, who threatened to kill all the Jews in the apartment.
- 50:02** The Russians came into Budapest and dug through the basements. When they came in, all the people in the apartment came down. The Russians were dirty, hungry, wild, not very refined.
- 51:04** Eva's family stayed a few days to look for other family members. Her maternal grandmother died a few days later. Her father's mother starved to death in sanitarium. Food was very scarce. Some people ate meat from dead horses that were lying in the streets. People had to stand in line for hours at far-away food distribution centers for beans and flour.

- 53:53** Eva remembers young gentile men in her apartment house who invited her to go to the movies. She was reluctant to go, but had to; otherwise he might find out who she really was. Eva also remembers an American paratrooper who had been killed in front of her apartment.
- 55:05** Eva's fiancée lived in another building. He begged her to come with him. Everyone was taken out and shot in the Danube.
- 56:01** Russians remained in Budapest, and fighting continued. Germans were shelling from Buda to Pest. Eva and her father went to the synagogue, where they found a horrible sight. Frozen corpses were piled up. Eva's father performed a mass funeral service in the Heroes Cemetery for those unidentified corpses. Those who were identified were taken in wheelbarrows and stretchers to a distant cemetery. The ground was frozen. Eva's family still lived in the colonel's building, but at the end of February 1945, they went back to their own apartment.
- 1:01:12** Their apartment was slowly restored with window panes and heat. The janitor had taken their furnishings, but he brought them back. Her father resumed his job as chief rabbi. He was also the chief of Jewish chaplains in the army, with the rank of Major General. Two Russian officers stayed in their apartment. They brought them food, and Eva and her mother cooked for them.
- 1:02:06** The family went to services every weekend. People slowly returned from concentration camps and searched for family members. Businesses started opening up. Eva went back to school, and received credits for classes she could not attend during the occupation. She met and married a Hungarian in the US Army. In 1946, her father went to England and the US with help of JDC and UJA, and spoke on behalf of Hungarian Jews. He founded the first B'nai Brith lodge in Budapest 1945-1946.
- 1:08:14** Eva went to the US with the soldier in 1947. Her father officiated at her wedding in New York City. Her mother was given permission to attend ceremony. Her parents were ready to return to Hungary, but her father was warned not to come back. Communists started gaining power. Her father always felt bad about leaving his congregation.
- 1:10:36** Eva's marriage dissolved. She stayed with her parents who went to Dalton, Georgia, and then to Washington, DC, where she worked at the Library of Congress, and met her current husband. Her father was invited to a congregation in Hawaii for one year. He was offered a good position at Georgetown University, and was planning to return to DC, but he died in Hawaii.
- 1:12:53** Eva knew English from high school. Life in America has been good.
- 1:13:33** Eva shows the following pictures:

1. Parents' wedding and large reception.
2. Grandfather in a Hapsburg reception.
3. Rabbinical graduation seminary.
4. Grandfather dedicating Heroes Cemetery after war at the Dohane Synagogue.
5. Father and grandfather relaxing.
6. Dedication of American cemetery 1946.
7. Burning of Jewish books in 1944, when Arrow Cross Party took over.
8. Picture of Jewish man being taken away by Arrow Cross soldiers.

1:17:07 To survive such a terrible time will always be remembered. But she learned to appreciate the good life in the United States, and not to take anything for granted.