

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Edith Csengeri**  
**October 30, 2001**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Edith Csengeri, conducted by Amy Rubin in Great Neck, New York on October 30, 2001 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

## **EDITH CSENGERI**

### **October 30, 2001**

#### Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri, conducted by Amy Rubin on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in Great Neck, New York. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, so please just begin by telling me -- tell me your name, and when and where you were born.

Answer: Okay. My name is Edith Csengeri, my maiden name is Klein. I was born March 4, 1926 in Nyíregyháza. I'm sorry. And I lived there until I was 15 years old, with my grandmother, because my parents earlier left Hungary. They went to France, you know, with friend, to start a new life. So [indecipherable] you no reason. And that time, you know, for Jews it was very hard in Hungary to make a living. And I la -- I lived with my grandmother and my brother, and I was told when they settled down, first they taking my brother because he was in school age, and later on they taking me. In the meantime, the war, you know, happen, and in France ha -- 1934, my father passed away. He got TB there and very shortly passed away. So it was difficult time for my mother, as I understand. And I was very happy with my grandmother, who was a very caring, loving old lady, you know. It was -- I liked her a lot.

Q: Can we go back so -- did you say exactly the day -- the year you were born, you were --

A: 1926, March four.

Q: And give me a little sense, before your parents left, what it was like in your home. Give me a sort of picture of your home life.

A: Amy, I was about -- I think more than three years old when they left, so I don't remember too much.

Q: It seems very unusual that they left.

A: It is. And late -- they have a, you know, problem there, settled down, and as I said, in the meantime I -- my father passed away and the war came, '39, and I was stuck. I shouldn't say -- wer -- use that word stuck, because I was very happy with my grandmother. A --

Q: But you were only three years old, so it was only 1929 or so, is that right?

A: 1920?

Q: I mean, when you say your -- your parents left --

A: Yes, just about it. And you know, in the meantime they tried to settle down, my father became sick, as I understand, a few years and that's why it happened.

Q: Now what -- what do you know about why they left? What kind of problems were they having?

A: I tell you the truth, I'm not sure, because I just understand they had difficulty making a living when they got, you know, after the marriage and they have friends who -- with them, you know, they decided to go to France and they both left with f -- you know. These people later took all the children to -- their name was Gomez, I understand. And they were friends over there, too, but --

Q: You had an older --

A: -- I don't -- I don't know.

Q: You had an older brother or a younger brother?

A: I have an older br -- two years older. He is in Florida now. We're not very close, you know, we're not grow -- we didn't grow up together. And when we came here, I was 30 years old, about 30 -- '56. And he has a different life here. My mother married a second time here, and me - - the man has a family who a -- who a -- became his family. So we never re -- was very close, and still not.

Q: So your parents left Hungary --

A: Right.

Q: -- very early. What kind of work was your father doing which wa --

A: He was a tailor, and the other couple was a tailor, too, you know, so they wanted to see [indecipherable] there.

Q: And they went to Paris, or they went somewhere --

A: Around Paris, in a bi -- in Paris the [indecipherable]. And when the World War, you know, broke out, we were real -- I really [indecipherable] but I heard from them. When it was over, we, you know, tried to make a -- you know, com -- correspond together, in the -- and my mother said that they are -- I have an aunt and uncle here in the United States, so my mother wrote to me that they are probably going with my brother here, and I -- I -- don't even think about, you know, staying there or getting married in Hungary because he will -- she will make, you know, steps to take me off here. But when -- later on, I was got married because I was going with my husband already, so I didn't have any intention that time to leave.

Q: So did you have contact before the war with your parents?

A: Occasionally, and after the war.

Q: Did you see them at all --

A: Once she came -- she came to Hungary, and you know, for awhile. I was married that time. And I don't feel very close, you know, to her. And she left, and when we came here, she was here already, as I said, married s -- the second time. And we came together, you know, met [indecipherable] there wasn't a real connection, you know. I feel much closer to my grandmother and aunt and my cousins.

Q: So tell me what your childhood was like. If your parents weren't there very much -- and you were around your brother, right? You were --

A: My brother, after awhile they -- went to France, too, you know. We lived in the [indecipherable] the city, in [indecipherable] and my grandmother has a house, with tenants, you know, there wasn't any problem. And she gave me everything, even love, and she was nice. I had a lot of friends there.

Q: Do you -- do you consider it a good childhood?

A: No, I don't think so, because she tried to give me everything, you know, but all of my friends has [indecipherable]

Q: Must have been hard to understand what was going on, right, as a young person?

A: Yes, it was. But, you know, I went to school, high school. I have -- we have very close friend across the street. I -- I mention specially this one because they are very close with us, and one of the girls I went to school with from the -- from -- since I was six years old, and we met in Auschwitz, it was three sisters. It was very rare, you know, that sisters or brothers or mothers and children could stay together, but they were lucky in a way, you know? And they were taken for a working camp to -- together. But the youngest one who I went to school, he [indecipherable] to Israel, and she got married there. I saw her once. The oldest one was really like a big sister to me, you know? Even in Auschwitz, and then when I got home. And I usually, when I go into Hungary, which has happened before, because my father, you know, was alive, and I -- we went to the -- we -- later on the cemetery, to my grandmother, you know, [indecipherable] and my sa - - father, you know, in Debrecen, almost 30 year. And we basically went -- I wa -- want to went only -- well, I want to see only this friend of mine who stay in Budapest, and he's -- she has a large family because she has two children and became a widow. And the man who married to, was a widower too, with a child. So they got married, and they have a child, you know, between them. So now we have a large family over there. Many, you know, successful children and

grandchildren. The problem is with -- now that, for months I didn't get any letter from her. About three or four years ago she got a major heart attack, but she was you know, o-okay. But -- ish -- and we, you know, corresponded regularly. But lately -- in April I sent two letters, especially the second one to the holiday, and no answer. I could call the -- them up, you know, but I don't want it.

Q: So this is -- this is a link to your hometown.

A: Right, right.

Q: And someone you feel close to. What's -- what's the name?

A: Edith Novradi.

Q: And what were the names of your parents, your brother, your grandmother?

A: My parent's name was Abe Klein, and my mother's name, [indecipherable] Deutsch. My brother's name is, you know, it's changed because it was Hungarian Imrah, now is Emrick, Emrick Klein. She -- he lives in [indecipherable].

Q: And your grandmother's name?

A: Deutsch shamran -- Kotts, Ida Kotts.

Q: And you -- you felt very close to her, did she seem --

A: Yes, I did.

Q: -- like Mother to you?

A: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. My grandmother was very regi -- religious, actually, you know? We went to temple with her every holiday, or -- not just on big holiday, on the less important holidays.

And I grow up, you know, with the religious -- I'm sorry -- milieu, and wa -- it's changed since I c-came back from the camp.

Q: You feel like your -- your feelings about religion have changed?

A: It is the religion hundred percent. I am a Jew. I can't be anything else. I'm sorry.

Q: That's okay. Okay. So, if you can, just tell me a little bit -- you feel like your feelings toward Judaism may have changed over time, right?

A: Judaism, if you mean to be Jew, I am a Jew. Inside and outside. I went to Jewish school, I was raised as a Jew, but I don't understand --

Q: It's okay. Just take -- take your time, don't rush.

A: I still can't understand how can they kill so many people, and looking for God. When I went in the [indecipherable] there was a [indecipherable] always think about was how they want to give us a [indecipherable] you know, praying? And some were children, and my ca -- my -- why was they killed? Where was everybody? They killed six million people. I -- I never go to the temple now, you know. I just -- I used to. When I was a child, I used to pray every night. I -- it was completely different as I feel now.

Q: Do you feel like you lost your faith in God, or --

A: I ca -- don't ke -- I -- I still looking, I can't s -- I can't get any explanation what -- what it happened. Nobody, you know? When we came back, we -- whoever we talked to, people around us, other -- especially here in America, nobody knew about it. It -- it wasn't done secretly, you know, at that location. The cattle wagon, you know, went through all Europe, during the day we were delivered to Auschwitz, and nobody knew about it. And we have a great big faith in Roosevelt. We talk about him and think about him like a -- a -- I should say a god, a savior, you know. And when we came back, we find out that he did this opposite. You know, is -- same thing was with Switzerland. We admired that little country, you know, that in the middle of Europe it can be neutral. And turn out to be they just did opposite, they serve Hitler.



Q: So let's -- let's try to go back to your growing up days. You -- you were in this -- in this place in Hungary, was it a -- give me a sense how large is that city, and what kind of --

A: Which one, my [indecipherable]

Q: -- your hometown, yeah.

A: It was a relatively large city, let's see, about a -- Budapest, Szeged, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza, about the fourth city after Budapest, you know? Especially, you know, when we went back, it was very nicely fixed up, you know? Actually, I never went to see it. We arrived to the station, took a cab and went to the cemetery and back. But even the railroad station, you know, was very nicely kept. I went to high school there for awhile, and in the -- it was different, the thinking of the Jewish youngster that time, you know? We all very studious, you know, talk about the world and Hitler, what will happen to us. And we were organize, somebody organized a movement, a [indecipherable] movement, and I belong there. Almost all of my friend yo -- belong there, you know? And they were talking about to [indecipherable], to Israel, and after the German occupied Hungary I lost almost -- I thought I lost almost all of them. Later on I find out some of them's living in Israel.

Q: So you got involved at about what age, how -- how young were you?

A: I was about 14 - 15, and were very, you know, excited about it. We loved it, our idea. In fact, one year -- I had a friend who belonged to that, her husband has a -- some kind of land owner. So, they let us go and they like a [indecipherable], you know, you understand? And we were working there, you know, and the payment went to Israel. After the -- when I got back, my friend I mentioned before, he already left. He went to -- you know, to there, and still there.

Q: So would you say when you were going to school in this town, did you interact with a lot of non-Jewish friends?

A: Yes, we have -- you know, it was that opened anti-Semitism, we knew it, we felt it. But the high school where I went, it was mixed, you know? And [indecipherable] there was a girl my age who went to the same high school. So we were friends, but that was it, they don't save any Jewish. When I hear, you know, a lot of people, Christian people save Jewish, I don't know anybody in -- in Hungary what did this. Maybe they did, but I don't know -- I won't know anybody.

Q: Do you -- do you remember any anti-Semitic incidents that you had to undergo as a youngster, not -- you know, before the war, and before --

A: As a youngster, it was in high school, it was the Hitler and Mussolini era already, and we have the -- in high school, yelling after the -- before the [indecipherable] in Hungary, they had Hitler and Mussolini. And I was quiet, and there was a girl who reported to the teacher that I'm not saying anything, and he wasn't very -- he just said, next time, do it. So I wasn't any punishment. Later, when I went home, after the war I saw that girl, and I thought I could report her to somebody, but I did not. I -- I didn't want to make a case about it.

Q: So did you go along with this, and say --

A: I just went -- kept quiet, I didn't go along, I just kept quiet. Maybe I shouldn't, but it was a real anti-Jewish --

Q: So you felt a certain kind of anti-Semitism in the air, you could just feel that people were --

A: We all knew, you know, Jews, who lived in Hungary at that time, that all the Hungarians were anti-Jewish -- you know, anti -- anti-Semitic. And they, during the war, after -- especially when the deportation happened, they overdo everything -- they try to overdo even what the Germans wanted.

Q: How, like politically aware were you once the war started, how -- how much did you follow the events --

A: When th -- when the war started?

Q: In 1939.

A: 1939, just about average, but later on it became more of, you know, more obviously we more -- we wer -- ger -- youngster were more serious about it, you know. Not like the youngster here, you know. It was -- it was like when I went to the other city [indecipherable] I became very good friend. We very seriously [indecipherable] and were [indecipherable] the grown-ups what happening, and very interested what will happen.

Q: When did you start to feel more interested, or maybe even more threatened about your own safety?

A: It was slowly but surely the government, the Hungarian government became more and more - - the people became more and more anti-Semitic, and the anti-Jewish people get in Poland more and more. So we -- we know that we are not too safe, but until, you know, the German actually occupied Hungary, we can walk, you know, I kind of -- I was studying cosmetic at that time. I could walk to the street, you know, I wasn't free to -- at night, we're not going out, but we were listening, before the Germans, the American radio -- the secret radio, and the European secret radio, and we -- you know, we were very optimistic that Hitler wo -- it looks like Hitler didn't win the war -- can't win the war, but you know, the allied, they si -- they didn't won yet, and that was the attitude, you know? It just -- it just a -- time. It will happen that, you know, he will lose completely.

Q: Now, did you -- did you know at that point any refugees from -- Jewish refugees from other countries?

A: Yes. Yeah, I do. One or two years before, they came over, you know, they fled from Czechoslovakia and -- and Poland, and we were -- we were so shocked to hear, you know, what they said to us. We couldn't believe it, you know, it was so terrible, we -- you know, just whispering, we were just whispering, we thought what will happen to that people? And we believed that it couldn't happen with us, you know, the -- it was a [indecipherable] in Hungary, not, you know, and it was a rumor that his wife has some Jewish background somewhere, so it was obvious to us that he wasn't really, you know [indecipherable] Hitler. It couldn't happen -- we feel -- we didn't feel -- we felt, you know, safe. It couldn't happen to us, what will happen. First of all, the Hungarian Jews, unfortunately, now I know, was first Hungarian and then we felt Jewish, you know? And we thought it -- it won't happen to us. It was a very surprise, was suddenly, without any warning, Hitler ca-came, you know, and occupied Hungary.

Q: What were some of the stories that you heard from other refugees at that time?

A: First I war -- I had a friend, her name was Eva, we went to, as I mentioned, to learn cosmetic together. And we -- we -- and they -- they were very well-to-do family in Debrecen, and they came [indecipherable] we called him, [indecipherable] was his, you know, [indecipherable] name, but he -- he got false papers, and he was eating [indecipherable] different Jewish [indecipherable] family. And he got a story from -- y-you know, from him, he was [indecipherable] with -- with other two brothers, they lived in the ci -- in the city, they -- separately, you know? With separ -- different names, all over, you know, they didn't even meet, basically. And he told us, you know, what happened over there. And they were lucky, because he was liberated he -- o-over there in the city, as a -- you know, as a Christian boy.

Q: Where did he come from first?

A: Czechoslovakia. Later on he came back, I will tell you later. Anyway, he suggested when -- when the German occ -- occupied Hungary that me -- he is getting us papers. Eva, my friend and myself, and we supposed to go to another city, and live there, and you know, one of us [indecipherable] because Eva parents was, as I said, well-to-do, and in that time, you know, it doesn't come, you know, everybody was willing i -- i -- to spend -- sell and spend everything. So we have, you know, money to go. And finally we -- he gave us the papers, and we went to Trovald. The plan was that we go to the station at night, because we -- we already was mandatory to wear the yellow star.

Q: You were hearing -- you were wearing the star?

A: Sure, that time. And we removed the star when we went to the station. But the reason was that we went at night because we want somebody to recognize us, you know, Christian, without a star, walking. Not to mention there was a curfew for the Jews. So --

Q: What time was that?

A: I don't remember it. Six, seven o'clock. That time there, they just planning the ghetto, it wasn't, you know, the retto -- ghetto ready. And we walked to the station and we wait for the, you know, the train to come, and we -- to be traveling to Szeged. So nobody [indecipherable] you know, in the train. I remember we -- we arrived and bought a newspaper, with advertisements, you know, and we saw -- we were looking for a room, and we find one with -- without [indecipherable] you know? Sounded good. And we went over there, it was the older lady, and she rented us the room. We told them that we coming from Budapest, because the bombardment started oder -- over there, and the parents send out -- send down to the city, and then we have the paper, according to the paper, we were sisters.

Q: Now, when was this? Do you know?

A: It was 1944, March 19 it came, the German occupied Hungary, and we left about April, the beginning of April, or the middle of April.

Q: So let's go back for a moment. Before the Germans occupied, there were -- there were more laws passed restricting the freedoms of Jews?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Tell me about those, and -- and what you experienced.

A: Like Jewish kid can't go to higher school. They were certain rule hiring Jewish man or woman, you know?

Q: Did you f -- did you -- were you very aware of those laws, and --

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Q: -- what was happening?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Did it --

A: Every day new -- a new law came out against the -- you know, against the Jews. And they -- you know, it was obvious, it was after when the German came in, you know, that they pal -- planning to build a ghetto, you know?

Q: And with those laws, did you start to get more and more worried?

A: We weren't worried, but -- worried, but we were very optimistic about the end of the war, how could it happen, you know? Maybe that's what we had was, you know, to getting -- you know, our survival [indecipherable]. We were sure that, even in Auschwitz, you know, in spite of fact my friend didn't come back, we -- we were -- couldn't imagine that we -- we'll die over there, you know? We always thought that war will be over, and -- very soon, and we will always come some [indecipherable], you know, that -- especially one time when there was a

[indecipherable] against Hitler, and they wanted to kill him. So we thought maybe -- we always was praying in the lager that they will bomb the -- the railroad, which is not what happened.

Q: Had you heard about Auschwitz already? When did you --

A: No, never, never until we got there. I think nobody knew about it, no.

Q: So, now tell me where you were, which city, and tell me a little bit more about the day that the Germans arrived.

A: I was in Debrecen as I remember. I remember the day very well because it was, you know, a big surprise for us. I went to a meeting at --

Q: Oh wait, there's a plane overhead.

A: Okay.

Q: I can hear it.

A: That's all right.

Q: The microphone picks up very well. Okay, maybe you could start over. So where were you and tell me about that day.

A: With -- you talking about when -- when the German occupied?

Q: Yes.

A: Okay. I came back -- it wa -- I was in a school, a elementary school, it was the meeting, you know, it was a underground meeting, naturally, nobody knew about it. I came out around, and sa --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri. This is tape number one, side B. Okay, sorry to ask you again, but we got interrupted on the other side. So now, tell me again that day, the day the Germans arrived.

A: Okay. As I said, it was a terrible shock. I was coming -- come from a -- a [indecipherable] meeting, and when I got home, my relatives already know, everybody was, you know, very scared, and what will happen now. And wa -- a -- I'm -- I remembered a [indecipherable] when we went to sleep, we want to be sure that we locked the door all over, you know?

Q: Was that unusual? Were --

A: It was unusual because it was a -- like a apartment building, but the door, the -- the [indecipherable] goes to the street, it was open, we never locked it. So from that point we locked the -- that door, too. But the following night, I went to -- back to work, and you know, my boss was -- were Jewish, too. It was unbelievable, you know, for everybody. We -- what happen -- what will happen now?

Q: So you didn't know anything about this happening the day before it happened?

A: No, no, no, it just happened. In fact, I understand that time Hitler called hi -- Horthy, the governor name was Horthy, to his headquarters to talk it over or something. And he wasn't even home in Hungary when they occupied Hungary.

Q: So you saw this as now a greater threat, a greater worry?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. We th -- expected to happened, you know, but let me -- [indecipherable] I think was okay [tape break]

Q: Okay. So now we're back and I -- I want to continue of course, asking you, in terms of the chronology of your experiences, but I wanted to take a moment now, before we continue with



your experiences, and just ask you about the fact that this is the first time that you've been interviewed, right? This is the first time?

A: Yeah, okay, okay.

Q: And just tell me what that's like for you.

A: It is a -- I -- you can see it's very emotional. You know, all of my friends have the same -- basically the same experience, not exactly the same because all of them was different places.

Everybody knew about it, but just to say my experience, you know, as it is happen, going all over it, you know, it is -- it's -- it is the first time. We're talking about episodes, you know, with my husband, and my friend, but not -- not the whole, you know, not -- not all the [indecipherable]. It is a little emotional, what can I say?

Q: And you did write about your experiences at one point. Was that emotional, very emotional to you?

A: Yes, but not -- not as telling. You know, I ne -- when I -- ma -- when my daughter was small, I always refused to tell her anything, because I wanted to grow -- to her -- to grow up, you know, without any handicap, how they say it, you know? But I don't have to tell her because she picked up here and there, and she know -- she knew the whole thing. And now when my -- ask my grandmother -- granddaughter to type it for me, you know, and I was dictate it to her, it was the first time to her, too, to hear it. And I saw, you know, she was -- wasn't even look up, she just tried to, you know, how you say, on the -- you know, it -- it -- I can tell that she was very, you know, affected by it, as my -- you know, in my opinion, later on the day that the second generation, li-like my daughter, was affected indirectly, I was the same as we [indecipherable] we went through. My daughter is a very smart girl, but she never ask me, and I never tell her

anything. And now, when it was typed on, I ask her, you want a copy? She said no. Save it for -- somewhere, maybe somewhere, I know everything. And she does.

Q: Now why -- why do you think you were ready to talk now?

A: I tell you what, three years ago, as I said, Frank called me up, she saw ma -- you know, when -- how could I go from where I started in -- in Debrecen to -- you know, to go that collecting camp, it's call -- called Sharvar. It's a big, big distance. And I told him over the phone, you know, just what happened, and he said why don't you let them, you know, tape it down. I said I do not go through it again. I -- I -- it just too -- it would be too much, and I wasn't even want to hear about it. But later on my grandchildren ask -- was asking, you know, me questions. They went to the movie, they read in books, you know, and they were asking me my experience, and then I started to think that it time to tell them. I don't think, you know, I never saw that movies, I never go to see the movies, not because it's affecting me, I don't think it's -- it's just a movie. They -- it can't be the same. It's no offense [indecipherable] but I don't think anybody can understand, only people who was there.

Q: How often do your memories come up of those days? Is it frequent, is it every day? How often?

A: You know what, since I mentioned to you we came to -- coming together with people, friends, since [indecipherable] here specially, all of them si -- most of them survivor. Some of them was hiding, but most of them survivor. It was unavoidable that w -- you know, is not come up, some ways, with some -- with -- you know, with -- we always -- some of them [indecipherable] not always the tragic way, you know, just as a fact, that's what it happened, that's -- and we went -- we went, you know, over it, and so it almost a -- you know what? I think that people who went through on this, they could be a millionaire, or a worker, or whatever, it's impossible that their

life wasn't affected if they went through, in some way. I don't think it's -- you know, money could make it easier for anybody. And, is a tragedy if, you know, people will forget. And they does, sometimes. I have a problem in my [indecipherable] you know, and I seeing a doctor regularly. She's a -- he's a real nice man, and a very good doctor, and [indecipherable] he was a [indecipherable]. And he -- he knew what we are survivors, so as he is talking about that he is, you know, [indecipherable] and so on, and what terrible thing was it, as it -- unspeakable and so on. And after the [indecipherable] when, you know, what happened, after that I saw him, and he said it's a terrible thing what happened here, which I agree. They just came, they don't care if they die, and killed -- drive away, 6,000 people is -- is just -- he said, you know, what you went through, the Holocaust was a terrible thing, but it was worse. I said -- I didn't say nothing, because he is a very nice man. But this time they killed 6,000 people, and you know, we are still in shock because we like that country. But they -- Hitler killed six million people, and I don't think it -- if even, you know, they can compare. I don't know what will happen here in the future. As I said, you know, we -- we like that country, you know? We are -- I must say we have a -- we worked -- we let -- they let us work here, they never ask we -- you are Jewish or not. We got job, we let the -- my daughter, you know send to school, and my granddaughters. This is a wonderful country. And what happened is terrible, but I don't think it -- it's -- you know, it's comparable what happened then.

Q: So now let's -- let's try to go back to what we were talking about, you were still telling me about the early moments of German occupation, and I was wondering, just so we make sure and get your chronology right, if you could explain how long you lived with your grandmother, and - and where you went after you moved from there.

A: Okay. She passed away 1941, and I went to live with my relatives in Debrecen, so I'm -- the other city, so I lived there approximately three years. So it was 1944 when the, you know, when the German came in and changed everything. The -- the -- in that three years I was, you know, studying -- I mean, start to learn cosmetic. It was a relatively very busy place, and it was nice. They were nice people over there.

Q: And how old were you when the Germans came in?

A: I was 17 years old. 17. I became 18 in the camp.

Q: So now, before you left Debrecen, what -- what were you doing, and what was it like with the Germans around?

A: Well, I wasn't with them that time too mu -- too long time, because, as I said, we were preparing to leave, and we -- you know, constantly were talking about it at their house, and planning, and we had to wait until the papers are ready, which was supposed to be very good papers, but it wasn't. We -- we don't have to use it. And we -- we were talking about the -- the distance, I mean, that time, your situation every day new and new, you know, law came out against, you know, against the Jews, the Jewish business, you know, they take over th-the business. And they were planning the -- to, you know [indecipherable] of the ghetto. They said which -- from which part of the city will, you know, will extended, you know? There was a li -- ha -- the limit there. And happens to be my -- my relative's house, you know, it was right there. So they had to take different people in their [indecipherable] you know, their -- their place. By that time I wasn't there already. When I came back from the camp, I went over there. It was some -- nobody was there in the apartment, and I went down the basement, you know, looking for some paper or something she's left, I find nothing.

Q: That's in your family's home?

A: It was, you know, for a few years. The first time when I got back from the camp, I went to Nyíregyháza where I came from. I have a very extended family, cousins and aunts and uncles, lot of them, you know. Nobody was there, nobody, not a soul. Then I went back to Debrecen because I heard that time that some of the people went to Austria, so there are more chance to meet, you know, maybe friend or somebody. But in the meantime in Auschwitz, you know -- I don't know, I'm going back and forth. If you want me to continue, or --

Q: Yeah, well let's -- let's go in an -- the order of how things happened. So -- so you were preparing to leave with these false papers, and you got these false papers through a friend of yours, right?

A: Through that boy who was a -- you know, fleeing from Czechoslovakia. So we went to Szeged, to the city, to the second largest city in Hungary. As I said, we rented a room, and we moved there. And for a few weeks we don't have any problem, the woman was very nice to us, you know, because we said we was -- you know, we came from the bombardment. And -- but later on they started to bombard the Szeged, the big city, and everybody has to go and went down to the shelter. And we were afraid to go down, you know, we were afraid to from the [indecipherable], we were not ready, you know -- you know, maybe say something, or turn out to be [indecipherable]. And we decided not to go down. We thought it's less dangerous than go down. But later on they start to tell our landlady why these young girl not coming down and so on. So we decided that we going [indecipherable] to Budapest. It's a big city and we, you know, somewhere, get around. And we traveled safely, but when we got down there was a big police quota, pick up the Jews, you know? With the yellow star too, was traveling. And they pick u-us too, and when they saw the paper, you know, it was brand new do -- you know, and we were very nervous probably. They find out, they ask question and yes, so they took a -- took us to the

police station with a lo -- with all of the Jews, you know, who were wearing stars or not wearing stars. And when we got there, the police -- chief wa -- chief of the police said we will get one week from the -- that place, the [indecipherable], and after that we will go back to the ghetto. But after more than one week, you know, went by, and more and more people came to that place, or was taken to that place. In fact, my friend, her name was Ava, find a lady who was traveling to Budapest to her daughter, gave birth to a first grandchild. Her husband was already in forced labor camp. And he was very nice, you know, to a young girl. It was a terrible experience, it was a [indecipherable] room, a [indecipherable] crowded room with all different kind of people beside the Jews, you know? And I think [indecipherable] the toilet was in the middle of the room, without any wall or nothing. It was the first, you know, demonizing experience. And --

Q: Wa -- what was your -- what was your name on the false papers?

A: Elizabeth [indecipherable]. And Ava was Julia -- Julian [indecipherable]

Q: And so the two of you --

A: It's a Hungarian --

Q: And the two of you were already very close by now.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Close friends, and --

A: Yeah, close friends, yeah.

Q: And you helped each other a lot during this, right?

A: We tried to help each other, the fact that we were not alone, first of all, we were friend, we were not alone, you know, we belong together. Sp -- and specially came this lady who was a -- you know, some friend of her mother, and she was about 45 years old and a very nice lady. In fact, that time she told us that we left her place -- she was a [indecipherable], and he said her

treasure, how -- how you say that, jewelry and everything, you know, where he get, you know, ex -- exactly explain it to us in case something happen to her that we tell her daughter whatever - - which is happen later on. And we went together too from there, after a few weeks. We were sad we were taken in a different camp. And we were -- we were walking to the ra -- the station and it was a big camp. A kapo was there who was the manager, I don't know what was there before, but we knew that before that it just -- it was a collecting camp. Not only that one, we know there are two more of us in Hungary.

Q: And what was it called?

A: Sharvar. It was very far from my original, you know, city, Nyíregyháza, other side of the country. And we were, you know, we have a little -- we felt a little bit better there because we could, you know, put some curtain up and wash ourself, our -- we have the toilet, you know. I don't know how many people was there, but at least there was a toilet. And we were waiting what will happen, we -- we thought something will happen, you know, we can't be here forever. And aft -- we stayed there at least a month. Oh, and that place, it was under -- the police [indecipherable] was standing under the -- it was a so called gerdarmes? You know that?

Q: Gendarmes?

A: Gen -- yeah, that's right. They are very [indecipherable] you know, they don't tell us anything, you know, whatever we asking.

Q: What kind of confrontations do you remember having, either when the Germans had occupied, or the police along the way? Was that very frightening to you? Do you have confrontations directly with these sort of police types, or soldiers, or --

A: Not really personally, no. No. We were a crowd, you know. It was just -- we were no -- when we got to Sharvar already, I -- the -- the camp, we felt like, you know, they were -- we were not

treated like a person, just like a number or something, you know? Nobody talked to us, we don't know what will happen. We can get questioned. At the door was th-this gendares, you know? And we were there at least a month when they came, the manager, or -- I don't know how you call him, and told us that we're taken now for a different camp, and it will take a few days, and there -- there was a counting over there in that -- in Sharvar. Everybody who has money can buy some food for the road. And every time it was some change we were glad, maybe this time we will have a chance to talk to somebody, we know what will happen to us, you know? And when we got to the station -- from that we were walking, and we got -- and we got to the station, there were cattle wagons all over, and there were SS standing at the door. And very fast they put as much as they can in one wagon. We had hardly any space to sta -- sit like this. We were sitting on the floor, on the -- our legs. It was really crowded, and they put the two pails in it, you know, one for toilet, one for we -- water.

Q: They put two what -- pots, you mean, or wa -- or pail, pail.

A: Yeah, yeah. And naturally the water never was enough. We were not hungry, we were always very, very thirsty. Sometimes when we went, the wagon -- the trains da -- stopped for some reason, and peasant women was all around, and gave us some water, and they changed another woman, the SS changed the pails. And we continue. We -- we went through beautiful area. We -- I heard a place, you know, like a [indecipherable] but I heard a place before, and you know, we looked out with this small window, and somebody recognized the place, it's called -- I don't know how you call it English, in Hungarian mogo shtatra.

Q: What did it look like? It was some sort of beautiful scenery, or --

A: Beautiful scenery with the mountains. It was a -- a resort area before -- I heard that, you know, it was la-later on, too. It was unbelievable. So we -- we --



Q: And so you knew a little bit about the direction that the train was going in?

A: Yeah, we -- we went through this one. I just remember this one, you know? This is the Czechoslovakia, I think now. There are some area which sometimes belong to Hungary, sometimes to Czechoslovakia. This -- this time it was Czechoslovakia, and -- and I think still it is. And we went a few days when the s -- when the train stopped. And we looked out, and we saw, you know, the barracks, with barbed wires all over it. And when they opened the door, a lot of SS soldier, and yelling to us, get out, schnell, schnell, out. And everybody keep the small thing what they had, you know, package, because they -- it will send after us. We knew that this can't happen, there was na -- no name on it, nothing.

Q: What did you have with you?

A: Maybe one sweater, or -- of -- when I was in the [indecipherable] house, I had a cousin in Budapest, and you cou -- [indecipherable] up and came in, and I gaved her everything. So is everybody else. This a na -- this lady [indecipherable], who called [indecipherable], she called her daughter, they came. She gave her the package, and pocketbook, or whatever. So we left just, you know, what was on us, a sweater, or whatever, not much and some food. But we [indecipherable]

Q: And you were wearing a Jewish star again, right? You were forced to, or not?

A: I don't think so, no, no. They know we are Jewish now, on that time.

Q: And you were on this transport with now both of the women that you --

A: Oh, with everybody, yeah.

Q: I mean, well th -- with your friend?

A: With my friends, and that [indecipherable] and the -- all of the ra -- rest of the people I don't know. The rest of the people I don't know, and they were the one who were taken to the

concentration camp -- I mean the death camp, the Hungarian camp. And before the [indecipherable] you know, we went together, that's -- as much as they can put that together and deliver it to the station and the wagons. So it -- I didn't know anybody else beside [indecipherable]

Q: How long was the journey?

A: It's -- I can't imagine, I'm not sure. It was days, maybe a week, maybe less. Sometimes we stopped for different reason, to change the [indecipherable] beside it, I don't know why they stopped the -- stopped the wagon.

Q: What did you -- what did you talk about during that time?

A: It was really sad. It was -- we -- we -- we were very uncomfortable, I don't have to tell it. We can't sleep, we can't eat, we were thirsty and naturally everybody had to use that toilet, very har -- it was -- it was terrible smell, terrible smell because of the toilet and because of the people, you know, [indecipherable] you know, putting together. It was a terrible, terrible smell. So, it wasn't a -- I don't even know where we going. We just think that time it was somehow so hopeless.

Q: Did you eat?

A: Not much. We couldn't eat. We had some food, you know. But as I remember back, everybody was very, very thirsty, and a -- we have -- we could -- we were thought that everybody can drink only three sip from the pail, you know, that went from one to another. It was -- it was not much, you know, so I don't know if we can even think, it was just a very sad and desperate situation. I remember a baby with a -- excuse me, you want to --

Q: [inaudible]

A: She was a very small baby and she fe -- she [indecipherable] her in the wagon. Sometimes I remember faces, but I think I made the remark about that it -- I don't think anybody could -- a-at least not too many people came back from that wagon. Not the baby with the mother, not the old men. Not the [indecipherable] who we went.

Q: Were people praying?

A: I remember that old man I mentioned, every mor --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri, conducted by Amy Rubin on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in Great Neck, New York. This is tape number two, side A. So maybe you could just finish telling me your memory of this man, this older man who was praying every morning.

A: He was praying every morning, and when I, you know, thinking back, that's sad that maybe this affected me that much that I am not religious any more. He was praying to who? And hundred percent that he was -- went right away to the gas chamber.

Q: He was an older man?

A: He was an older man.

Q: Did religion have a real role for you at that time?

A: No, I -- no, nothing. I don't think -- even think about religion, neither one of us. We just, you know, couldn't believe it, especially after that you know, we couldn't believe it, what happened. It wasn't real. And when we stopped finally, and the SS soldiers, you know, start yelling us, everybody schnell, schnell, everybody get out in one line, one after the other, and I remember the front of us was this Alma, Namey we called her. Namey means Aunt Alma. And then, you know, my friend and me, and the front of the line there was this German so -- not German how you call -- officer, Mengele, we didn't know that. And we saw that the younger people go one side, the oth -- the older people with children go to other side. So that time we thought this the [indecipherable] working people and older one on the -- the child -- mother with children, you know. They put in -- in different place. So we were talking about it, as soon -- you know, slowly as we went, and ish -- we knew that is better maybe, for us, do -- working for them. And when we reached this [indecipherable] I mean, officer, he was looking on [indecipherable] you know.

She wasn't more than 45, but she has grayish hair and long shoes, you know, for the traveling, she was wearing. And she to -- y-you know, waved her to go this side. And she knew that is not a good thing going with the older, and the ki -- and the kids. And she was speaking in German, and she -- she told him, [indecipherable] I can work, I am able to work. And she look at him, and -- you know. She was in that -- he [indecipherable] her again that go that side. I remember I looked at her, you know. He went -- she went like this, like somebody she knew that it doesn't, you know, it's not good what will happen to her.

Q: Did you have a chance to say good-bye at all?

A: No, it was just, you know, a matter of second. Later on her daughter visited me, came to Debrecen, because I-I send a message that I was with her mother, and you know, I told her really that she find a thing what she told us. And after that, her father -- her husband came too. She asked me to go to the rabbi and make a statement that I saw her to go to the other side. She wanted to get married, it was very shortly after the thing. So I went to the rabbi. He send me a big bucket of flowers, anyway.

Q: So when you arrived, first of all, you knew German, right? You could understand, or --

A: Not really, I si -- I study German in the school, in the high school, you know, but it wasn't much. It wasn't much.

Q: Did you have to pick up much more while you were there, while you were in Auschwitz?

A: No, beca -- in the camp? No, because all of the people around me, it was, you know mostly Jewish -- maybe they spe -- spoke Yiddish. Unfortunately Hungarian Jew very rarely speak Yiddish.

Q: So what were the languages you knew? Hungarian --

A: Hungarian. And when I got to the camp finally, [indecipherable] I lefting out some -- how I got there -- anyway, I find out that the people from Nyíregyháza, my original city where I was born, all of them th -- one lager, in the same -- it was the C lager, in one barracks. So --

Q: So I have -- I just want to make sure I understand where you were. So there's a couple maps here of -- of Auschwitz.

A: Oh really?

Q: You -- and I thought I'd ask you just to -- of course, this is -- you know, it's considered that there are three separate areas, Birkenau --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- Auschwitz one, Monowice, and --

A: We were here, Auschwitz-Birkenau, I was here. Who made this picture?

Q: This is from "Encyclopedia of the Holocaust."

A: Oh, I see, okay. We b -- I been here, Birkenau-Auschwitz. I never saw the big town. Here's the station, you see? This was a camp, supposed to.

Q: And in this page it shows -- this is actually -- and -- and when did you arrive to Auschwitz?

A: Exact date? I'm not sure, you know, because we been in Sharv -- we been first at the -- the [indecipherable] house, then Sharvar -- about a week, in Sharvar about maybe four weeks. So it could be May, around May.

Q: So this map is a plan of Birkenau in late October of '44.

A: I was in [indecipherable] until October --

Q: So I don't know if you recognize anything here.

A: You know what? I was spending time almost all the barracks, because as -- you know, the selecting of people, Mengele, every day, we always stay behind. We went through -- from

barracks to barracks, finding out. This is the -- we have a [indecipherable] there, you know, and the -- it wasn't regular toilet, it was call -- so-called -- I don't know how to say English, latrina?

Q: The latrine.

A: Yeah, okay.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: That's the [indecipherable] here. This is the -- which lager is this?

Q: This says --

A: I was in the si -- la -- C, lager C. Behind us there were the B. I -- I -- I remember, it was here, yeah.

Q: Now these, for instance, these say -- in fact there's one here that says, Hungarian women's camp.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Was that --

A: Yeah, that was it, yeah, where is it?

Q: This says B two -- the Roman numeral letter two and then C.

A: The C. I was in the lager C. I was the --

Q: This is B two, and I guess somewhere in here would be the letter --

A: The whole --

Q: Yeah.

A: The C?

Q: See, right here? B two A, B two B, B two C.

A: Yeah, I was here. I was here somewhere, la -- lager C. In fact, they called the lager C the farnichtenslager, you know, because everybody either went for work, or the rest of them went to

the camp -- I mean, the gas. So -- I don't know about wa -- oh, when we arrive, I like to go back there. We went in stripe uniform or what -- I don't know how to call it, men took us over. Then we went for awhile, and ja -- and Polish woman took us over, and I was told get the -- undress, everybody. And the men was walking around us, you know? They don't pay any attention to us anyway. They were very, very rude to us.

Q: Are these --

A: Later --

Q: Are these the SS at this point, or are these --

A: No, they are the ja -- and -- later I understand, you know, because they were there three, four years already in the camp before we got there. Hitler occupied Hungary that -- for the last country, and they -- we were told several times, the Hungarian ladies, they were, you know, at home in the -- comfortable and nice when we were already here. And as I understand later that these people has to put their own family to the gas chamber and the cremat -- crematorium. So when we got there already, they were not human being. At first this was shocking you know, when they yell at us, and sometimes they slapped people on the face, and they very rude. But later on I thought I'm not surprised they -- I'm not human being any more. They were not human being any more. They were survive -- few, not too many, but they paid the price.

Q: Were there lots of conflicts between one group of prisoners and another group from one country to the next, you know --

A: Like -- between us?

Q: Yeah, were there --

A: The hu -- no, it wasn't, no.

Q: From wa -- from Hungarian, you know, [indecipherable]



A: Not only that, you know. When we finally get to C lager, after you know, the certain procedure what they did for us, what we got for -- for -- let's see, for breakfast, a big plate, was black coffee, which was medicated already. And we constantly sleeping, so it was one reason nobody was fighting. The other -- and we realized was we saw me-medication in it, because the women stopped menstruating, you know? But it was when we got the borax already. Before that, you know, we had to -- you want me to get back? The -- he -- they told us to get undressed, and one woman cut all the hair on your -- all -- all of the body. And they -- we got some disinfectant on our body, and everybody got some piece of dress, it wasn't a dress, sometimes a skirt or a blouse, or whatever, it's fits, not fits. And most of the time it not -- doesn't fit. And finally we were tol -- we were, you know, put in a line again, but I remember back at that time -- I couldn't even think. I was like a -- foggy, you know? It couldn't happen. I couldn't believe it, what happening, you know? I -- it was just unreal. So we went to the barracks, and everybody was told to climb up, it was wooden barracks, wooden bunk bed. Five people up, five people down. And we climb up and we -- we just [indecipherable] thing to sleep, they were so tired. But the thing was, if somebody want to turn, everybody has to turn. And, you know, like -- like a [indecipherable]. And in the morning when we were given coffee, we were told to go and sit down in one line, and the front of us, the first one, got the big dish with black coffee. And he di - - he d -- he was told, drink a few, drink and give it back until it went all the way. At first it was terrible, you know, drinking after so many people. But it wasn't later, we don't care.

Q: How many people were you around at that point?

A: You mean the whole barracks? As I remember correctly, it was 800, a thousand people in one barrack -- barracks. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think that was the number.

Q: Were you still next to your friend, were you able to stay with her?

A: Yes, yeah, I was with my friend, and three other people, and it was little, we thought, maybe better the other place, so we went -- nobody cared, we went from barracks to barracks to try out. But during the day we were sleeping constantly. That was the only time we could sleep [indecipherable] on the floor out -- outside, because on the bunkbed, you know, it was very bad.

Q: What were you eating each day?

A: We got in the morning black coffee and some kind of soup for lunchtime, I think. And at night -- first we -- at the morning, s-standing appelle. You probably heard about it. The lageralteste came and counted with her [indecipherable], and then the SS came and counted us, and naturally, it n -- it never s -- never was all right, the number never was all right. So they started again, it takes hours. And we thought, and is probably true, it was one kind of torture. You standing there on the sun, or -- or rain, or whatever. And the same thing happened at night, too. And when we standing in the appelle at night, we got a piece of bread, and something went into the piece of [indecipherable] it's cheese or something. Was piece of salami [indecipherable] probably, I don't know what was it. Most of the people make very small slices, you know? They make it for the whole day, like paper, try to make it. And me and my friend we eat it at -- right away. We thought maybe we feel like eat something -- eat something. And then I went to visit my friend I mentioned before on the lager, where the Nyíregyháza, you know, most of the people, all of the people of -- from Nyíregyháza. I find a cousin there, and she had a -- about 13 - 14 years a daughter with her. They survived. They came home. Unfortunately my cousin, after a few years, passed away in cancer. And the girl who was with her, still in Nyíregyháza, I ha -- I never saw her since then, alone, completely alone. She got married, but she lost her husband and sh -- first she lost her mother at home. And she's completely all alone, and sh-she is not even healthy. She's a heart trouble, and so on.

Q: How -- how did you -- how did you make it through each of these days there? I mean, what were you thinking and how did you approach that?

A: Every day came Mengele to select people for work, and we always hoping, my Ava and me, to go, you know, to -- we were hoping that he select us, because you know, the rumor was that [indecipherable] stay here, going to the gas.

Q: How much were you hearing about the crematorium?

A: A lot, almost every day. We can see the smoke, you know, we can see this, you can smell this, you know, odor, [indecipherable]. And we were reminded by the lageralteste this -- you will go over there, where to see where your parents and relatives are. They don't -- they don't care any more, because you know, they went through. You know, it was first unbelievable for us to -- I thought he just -- she just talking, but she wasn't talking. And we always left behind because Mengele came every day, we were very, very skinny, both of us. 17 years old, on [indecipherable] was hungry and -- and he selected us, you know, send back always. So it happened one time that -- there was a so-called child lager, child oc -- they were put over there, I don't know what is, and l-later they disappeared. And it was empty, and that day Mengele came and selected a group, and for some reason, I never know why, they put the older people in that barrack and we find out that they coming for it the following day. But this time they said, as always, he separated friends, or sisters, or mother and child, or whatever. And they were crying and begging her to stay there. They rather stay there than going away and left them. But o -- of course it was nothing to him. So during the night, at least one-third of the people fled somewhere. They were locked in and lageralteste all over, and they somehow got out. Windows, and -- you know, they don't care if they beating them, or what. They get out. And they -- we saw the, you know, the problem what the lageralteste has. They had to have the number to -- the --

the right number. So my friend and me, and a lot of other people run in, you know? We were even more than it needed, and they li -- they put out -- after they got the -- counted, they put out the -- which are not -- don't needed, to the [indecipherable] and we s -- we stay inside. Can I stop [indecipherable] [tape break]

Q: All right, so we're back again, and so we're talking more about Auschwitz and the time you spent there, and first can you just tell me the period of time, the length of time you were there?

A: It was probably from May to October. October, it was, you know, four already, and at least three-quarter of the lager, the camp C lager, was out already. We were just the so-called leftovers. And for awhile seemed to us it's hopeless, but as I mention before, it happen that a selected group was staying in a -- was locked for the night in a former chi -- children barracks. And you know, some people run out, and we went, you know, we thought, with my friend Ava to try to get in. And we were successful for awhile. It was a following day Mengele came, and --

Q: An-And did you at this time when you were there, did you know his name? Had you --

A: Mengele, yes. Mengele we knew already. Yes.

Q: It wasn't -- it wasn't --

A: He was a very handsome man. Looking back, I wouldn't recognize him. Very handsome, very good looking. And ha -- very mean. I mean that.

Q: Did you have like direct interaction with him?

A: Not personally, but every selection, almost every day, you know, we saw him -- a saw us, and you know, selected our -- our -- us out.

Q: Did you speak with him at any point?

A: No, no.

Q: So you were saying -- so he -- he came --

A: He came, but that time he was just interested about the numbers, you know, that the number is the same. But my friend Ava has a lot of bug bite on her stomach, and you know, she -- it was itchy, and it was bloody. And she hi -- he notice right away, so he put her aside -- put him aside. And we were taken out very fast, so the [indecipherable] was okay, so we taken off very fast. We are taken to the lager B. We didn't know that time that that is the crematorium or whatever it is. And we were put in a barrack -- barrack, and later I find out that Ava, -- that was informally in the B lager -- B lager, and she was taken there, too, to [indecipherable]. Later, somebody saw her in berge -- Bergen-Belsen, so evidently she was taken from there too. So --

Q: And do you know if she survived?

A: No, she's not. She's not. I went back to the city, I met with her parents and I live with them [indecipherable] parents, I waited for hi -- her to come back. And she was very friendly before we left with the [indecipherable]. She came back after the liberation looking for her. I was corresponding with him, but he was -- he [indecipherable] find out that he is there or not. Anyway, I'm going back to the selection.

Q: So did the two of you get a chance to say good-bye, even?

A: Not good-bye, I met her once more. When we were in that barrack, we were closed in in the bay -- B lager, lager B. And this time everybody was very careful, even the haftlings, you know? Nobody can -- got in or out because everybody want to get out from Auschwitz. We thought -- and we -- we were told that we going for work. So it was impossible to get in. So some day Ava heard about it we are there [indecipherable] and came to the window. And we are talking, and right away, you know, that was around us, that -- because I ask, you know, maybe she can come in over the window, it was y -- no, they said no, not really, no, they don't let her in. But it wasn't

a good-bye because we knew that -- we didn't know that time which day we are going, maybe she will come back again, but she never did. That was the last time I saw her.

Q: When you -- even -- even before this point when you've been -- when you were in Auschwitz, did you have a lot of fear about being sent to the crematorium? Did you think --

A: Not really, no, no. First of all we took -- the first time, and later on, for awhile, we couldn't believe it, you know, we couldn't believe it, but the lageralteste told us. She was very mean, and she was right, you know? It was -- I didn't mention we were standing in the appelle, staying up, a -- and one of the girls start to saying her favorite recipe, a food, and everybody was listening, enjoying it, everybody has different recipe, and we enjoyed it, you know, that we spend time with this cooking. And one time, or more than one time, the lageralteste came, and he said, don't plan, you will go there while your parents [indecipherable] they were -- we were reminded constantly by them. And specially remember a gir -- girl, a lageralteste, he was a Czech origin. Her name was Vera Fisher, a large, heavy-set woman with a very bad complexion. She was very mean. She was -- she was nothing to sl -- you know, slap somebody on the face or kick her, whatever. And she was speaking Hungarian, you know, because the -- most of the Czech at -- at the border, you know, is Hungarian Czech or Slovakia's neighbors. So wa -- she was said -- spre -- speaking very well Hungarian. She was the meanest. There's the only one who I remember by name and by face, and --

Q: What were some of the things that she did that really bothered you, disturbed you at the time?

A: Nothing really. She was just -- she was just a mean person, you know? She was there for years [indecipherable]

Q: And you felt that she just wasn't even sensitive any more to --

A: No.

Q: -- to people.

A: No, definitely not. As I said before, they were not human being any more Amy, no, not even close. And I understand why not. It was terrible what they went through. Not just what we went through, but before us, they were the one who put their parents and -- and families in the crematorium.

Q: So how did you pass time during those days?

A: In -- in the camp?

Q: Yeah.

A: First of all we were sleeping during the day, because we couldn't sleep at night, you know, we were so crowded together, and during the day we just went one spot and lay down and sleep. But we don't have too much time because we -- at the morning we were standing appelle for hours, on the -- around, you know, four, five o'clock, I don't remember exactly what time, we started again, you know? So we went to the -- we went to the -- there was a bath over there, we could wash. Not every lager, the C lager happens to be -- has a bath. We have enough water. They mention to me, my friends, one of the B lager, they don't have enough water, they were delivering the water to them. And yes, I remember once when I was -- Ava and me standing in appelle, the other three girls, was three sisters who I know from Nyíregyháza, we were very good friend one --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri. This is tape number two, side B. So you can continue telling me the story.

A: As I said, there were th-three sisters, and one of my was very good friend who w-we both belong to the same organization, a Zionist organization. Anyway, we later -- they -- we were standing five of us, and always the -- one of the sister get at the front. First we don't realize what happening, then they -- here was the bread, and the piece of water, what they gave us, to us. They always choosed -- it wasn't cut exactly the same, but every bite was counted, you know? So we realized finally, all -- we always getting the smaller one. So after awhile we went to somewhere to stand, you know? It was a small episode, but I remember back -- didn't -- they didn't come back, either of them.

Q: Do you feel like, you know, the women you were around, was it mostly that you were -- all were helping each other, or was it just too hard to even help each other through each day?

A: You know, that was a new meaning the lag -- lager sisters. And one of -- no, a few groups, you know, went together, especially was working for me at the slave labor camp, were three of us, very close, you know, we were helping each other in every way. We watch each other, you know, that he is okay, she is okay. And yes, there was. In Auschwitz, you know, there sometimes, by accident, like my cousin and daughter, they took her there, you know, they were together. Or sisters, like my friends, these sisters. So it means a lot, you know, it's -- it's means life, too, because one of them was, you know, something happening with one of them, that was helping hand right away. If not real sisters, you know, as we called there the lager sisters. It was -  
- yes.

Q: And what did you talk about together during the days?

A: Probably as ever, food. Most of that time. I remember in the slave labor camp, av -- one of the girl was sitting with me who was my lager sister, and she was a married woman, a young married woman, and she was telling me her life story constantly. She has [indecipherable] and I enjoyed



it, you know? E -- do -- did the work and she was talking, that she was married, but not the real love of her -- his life, a other one, so on. And in the slave labor ca -- I -- slave labor camp, the fa -- half of the room was French political prisoners. They were not supposed to talk to us, you know? But some of the girls got even friendly with them, just -- you know, just whatever, during no -- sending notes all around. We -- we could hear the -- the news why -- from them, they -- you know, they drop paper or they send letters. And a few of the girls got some food from them.

Q: While you were back in -- in Auschwitz, did you learn more news about the war and what was happening?

A: Just rumors, you know, not -- not too many news. We just know when -- the time when we got there, it was -- always looked like it almost over, you know, even when we got there. It lasted about a year more, but we felt it very soon has to be over, if we have just has a opportunity to leave from there, because to stay in there, it means, you know, death. We are -- you know, could be safe. Well, wa --we got the slave labor camp, we have to work at least two months to the working place --

Q: Did you know you were going to leave, or how did that happen when you left Auschwitz?

A: Oh, they were told we going for work, everybody happy we got that piece of dress, and a coat and shoes, and we got -- everybody got a loaf of bread and a piece of margarine. And we thought it will be a long way to get wa -- somewhere. And I did the same thing that -- as usually before, eat the whole thing at once. I was so sick on that, that I paid for it.

Q: And you were very weak and thin at this point in time?

A: I was very weak and very -- I started to say, when we were walking to the working place, which was the telephone cam -- factory, I think it still exists. And it was harder and harder. Not

only me, for everybody. So we went, you know, arm in arm, having [indecipherable] but I don't think we could do it too long.

Q: But you weren't worried. As weak and thin as you were, you were not worried before that you would be sent to the crematorium, right? You weren't worried too much about that in Auschwitz?

A: In Auschwitz? Not really, we -- we always hoping that someday we will free, we -- I don't know, it wasn't really [indecipherable] believe me, because a lot of people went over there. It was a -- by accident. That's why I -- sometimes I was asking, why me, when everybody, my family, my friend, everybody was killed around.

Q: Could you actually smell something from the crematorium?

A: Oh yeah, it was a terrible odor. And you saw the smoke and everything. It wasn't far from us. We -- one -- you know, at the morning when I stepped out from the barracks -- they already were putting out the dead people. I don't know, I just -- I remember stepping over, you know?

Q: Did you have to get desensitized yourself as well, to make it through? You know, were you -- it sounds like you somehow kept some kind of optimism.

A: Right.

Q: And at the same times, did you have to lose some of your sensitivity to what you saw, to make it through?

A: I'm sure we did, but we got -- we were medicated, too, you know. That's why we were sleeping constantly. We were medicated. In the meantime, I don't know, we had -- not some hope. For sure we were some hope we would get out from there, especially when -- until my friend was alive. We were -- I don't know. We saw that a lot of people were taken to work. We didn't see the people taken to the gas chamber, because they left it there. Finally there wasn't too many. I mean, relatively too much. But we've just heard of what the lageralteste told us, we saw

the dead people, and to one side -- we were standing outside, a big van passed by with ma -- with naked bodies, dead bodies. Very shocked.

Q: Were there people -- were there women who died in -- in your barracks, in your area, on a regular basis? Around you, right around you, did -- were women dying there from --

A: You know, I wa -- I wasn't staying in the barracks from Nyíregyháza. We were st -- I was staying with -- I was staying with my friend, but I don't know. Not -- for Nyíregyháza, nobody w-went back, except my friend and my cousin, a-as I mentioned. Th -- a -- very, very few people, because the whole [indecipherable] city was sent to Auschwitz. In Debrecen was a difference. A few -- a few -- not a few, this one third of people went -- are sent to Austria. At Nyíregyháza everybody went. And when I was going through there, you know, to the cemetery, there is not even one face who I know. No Jewish face, nobody.

Q: So now tell me a little more details w-when you left Auschwitz and how you got to the next place, and where you went.

A: As I told you, we went -- we were told we were going f -- to work, so we went over there, that place. It was a big, large stone barracks. I don't know what was it before, but we were locked in. On the basement was a kitchen. They were the lucky one, you know, who were working in the kitchen, they always have enough food. I remember once I sold one of the women -- I had a coat, a -- it was a summer coat, actually, but the lining, I take it out. They made a blouse out of material for -- on it, and I got I think three or four e-extra plate of soup. And what can I tell, we were walking over there, SS woman -- this time woman was si -- st -- staying with us, and escorted us to the working place. We don't -- we don't see any more, it was a -- it was supposed to ba -- be -- we -- we saw it later on, a beautiful factory, beautiful place, but we saw only one room. We went over there, we got your work, which wasn't very difficult. We have to check the

-- how you call it -- part of the airplane [indecipherable] we have to check you know, the -- the wire on it, which was nothing. They didn't use that part [indecipherable] the Germans later on. And we were talking. We weren't -- were not supposed to talk while somebody came, you know. She -- we were quiet that. That was -- it was the only entertainment. We thought, you know, she was talking, I was just [indecipherable]

Q: How far away is this place from Auschwitz?

A: [indecipherable] Auschwitz is in Poland, right?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: This is Czechoslovakia. So we went about a week, I guess. I -- I am not sure how far was it. We went about a week.

Q: And that was also on a -- a train, a cattle car again, or how did you go?

A: Cattle car. That was the same thing, we were [indecipherable]

Q: And very, very uncomfortable conditions?

A: Right. It wasn't that bad than the first time I went, you know, from Sharvar, it was different. First of all, there wasn't kids. Wasn't old, very old people. We were, you know, younger. And later on in the camp, the sl-slave labor camps, were [indecipherable] the name, a few people got typhus, you know, and they passed away practically before the liberation.

Q: Did you -- did you feel like when you left Auschwitz that you were going to something better?

A: Bet -- yeah, right. We were very hap -- happy. We were, you know, looking forward to that. We felt maybe we survived. If we going to work for them, you know, they won't kill us right away. But they don't have a chance. In fact -- and one time I find out that there are people here in United States from [indecipherable]. I got these letters, and I called up the registration. I talked

to Meagan, okay. She told me there are -- oh yes, there are a lot of -- I says, how many? She said about 49. I was shocked. She didn't tell me any name or nothing. She said, if you want to get contact, send me a letter, and I send back to them, which I did. I get a lot of response, telephone and letters and even I find somebody who is in Jersey. Unfortunately -- she is about my age, she got a stroke or something, she hardly could speak. A very good looking girl was. Anyway. And a-all of them was very happy to hear some -- from somebody. They talked, they -- we should meet, and I find out in that place where I thought we were alone, 200 women, we were 200 taken from Auschwitz, that not far on that area, there was 300 other women. We never saw them, they never saw us. They just heard about it through that people, was taken there to -- in the stone barracks. And I was in contact with them for awhile, and I had the accident where I wa -- we used to live in Suffolk, Long Island. Every morning I was walking around about two miles, you know, I had to walk. And I didn't notice [indecipherable] cement block was sunk, and I tripped, and I fell. I broke my arm, my face was broken, and I hurt my neck, which was already ma -- damaged. So I was in very bad condition, and I stopped the connection. Since then we moved, and you know, I -- I always think maybe I should call. I even talked to that girl who is in Jersey that we will meet. I invited them to our house. She said why don't -- we are going because she is sick. I just remember her, you know, a very good looking young girl, exactly about my age, and got a stroke about a few years back. She said the only thing which she has no -- hard to si -- talk, you know, damage of talking.

Q: Now, any of the people here, any of the women you got in contact with, were they women you -- you knew back then?

A: This one.

Q: This one is.

A: This one we were in the same barracks and we were talking over the telephone, she knew a few of them, she passed away, she was her friend over there. But --

Q: Was it -- was that meaningful for you to --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: [Indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, it was. I just felt bad, you know, after two or three years. It was my accident I hardly get over, you know. This year I had an other surgeon on my foot, so I have had a problem, and I still have with my -- cervical spine.

Q: Let me check my questions, make sure. So maybe you can paint a little more of a -- a picture of what it's like to have been in this forced labor situation, how difficult it was, what the daily routine was like.

A: At the morning, you know, we got some black coffee and a piece of bread, and we were -- we have to walk over there to the factory. And as I said, it was every day harder and harder. I mentioned to you before that letter which came from the city or town [Indecipherable], a teacher wrote me when they find out, you know, for -- at the registration that I was there. And he -- she ask me to write it down, my experience, she were a teacher in the school. And I felt bad, at -- I never answer either of the [Indecipherable] because we were walking there four times a day. Nobody ever come and give us a piece of bread. Maybe they couldn't because the SS woman was there. But even there, you know, nobody noticed us, or seems to me nobody noticed us.

Q: Did you see people out?

A: Yes, we saw people, yeah.

Q: So these would be Czech people?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Walking around and they making their work. And -- oh, I have to mention

too, my last few days after the liberation, it was -- it was just a nice end, you know, the whole thing. We're sitting -- after the Russians were [indecipherable] Russian ha -- soldiers liberated us, they went through on the village, and the most of the girls -- as I said, there about 200, a few less because they passed away, went to the town to look around, but begging for food, and I think they went to see [indecipherable] later, you know, there is a big town too. And m-myself and other five or six girl -- oh -- were sitting outside, this is a very nice -- it was May, very nice day. And a German came, a civil, and he ask us about her -- his coat, that somebody stole his coat. Which wasn't impossible because we -- there was a restaurant around the corner, and my f - - I -- other girls and myself, we went to where the -- nobody was there, they left -- they fled from the ger -- Russians. So, but [indecipherable] so, we [indecipherable] the top. But she wa -- he was looking for the coat, is no wa -- none of us knew about that. And he has a gun, and he said, if you don't give us my coat back, I kill you. And turn to the [indecipherable] and I felt funny, you know. Here is the liberation and we will die now. So he sent somebody oh -- with her -- him to the barracks, he will [indecipherable]. So one of the girls runs inside, he -- you know, looked every bed. And naturally he didn't find nothing. And we thought [indecipherable] he left, but it was a -- it was just a funny finish for that experience.

Q: Was it hard to believe that -- that you were truly liberated, that the war was truly over?

A: No, we are -- we were very happy. We believed it before this happened, or after. Oh yes, we knew that. We are very, very happy. We are -- we have only one problem, how we get home. We don't have money. We tried to get on the train until, you know, the -- the conductor came, we don't have money, right away he send us down from the train. Sometimes the people, you know, went against him and told him let u-us stay, but most of the time we have to come off. And after a few days some were walking, and this way I get to Budapest, and we were told where we can

go to get some help, Jewish organization and so on. And I had the uncle in Budapest, I went looking for them. And they place was too in the ghetto area and I was told that the -- it was bombarded, the house was bombarded, and my aunt, and my cousin, who was married, but he was that time alone, her husband was taken away on the forced labor, she had two kids. One of them was sitting her lap, the other one the grandmother lap, and they got the bomb -- bombed, you know? She and the little girl passed away and the grandmother with the other girl stay alive. And that time, because of the situation, there is only one big temple in Hungary, maybe you heard about it [indecipherable] is still the only, and the nicest Jewish temple. And the [indecipherable] there are -- she is -- she was buried over there with her daughter. She is still there, you know. And the grandmother passed away later, and the little girl is live somewhere over there.

Q: What did -- what did you know about your -- your parents at this point?

A: My mother -- later on, I was married already, she came to the United State with my brother. I had an aunt and uncle here. They, you know, they [indecipherable] her.

Q: Did you know -- did you know where your mother was at the very end of the war?

A: No, I don't know. She was hiding in Paris, around Paris somewhere. My brother, too.

Q: And when did you have contact with her again?

A: After the war she came once to visit that I was wum -- I was married already, as I mentioned, we were not in -- we were not -- how you say it in English?

Q: You weren't really close, it seems.

A: No, we were not. She was --

Q: Is that very difficult for you, or have you accepted it?



A: It was dif -- no, it was very difficult for me, and she doesn't understand. And later on, when my -- I -- we were here, after '56, whenever she visited, and it was my same attitude, she was really angry with me, and you know, we stop talking. And that -- my attitude, my brother, too, why you know, I hardly know, he hardly -- he hardly know me. She just knew that I have a nice family, grandchildren. She never -- he never married. You know, sometime it was, after my mother passed away here, my brother la -- lived alone, and he became sick, he got a -- he was taken to the hospital and emergency room. He -- he wa -- has nobody except this, you know, the stepfather family. And I was called up, but I went and turn out to be he needed a bypass surgery. And I was there every day, and after 10 days that he was told that he wa -- he has to go to the convalescent home, and she was very u -- he was very upset, and I took him home, and you know, we gave him a room, and sometimes at night he has -- we have to take him back to the emergency room. Actually, I ki -- feel I took good care of him. And after that, he moved to -- shortly after that he moved to Florida and he became sick again. We went down to Florida just for the wintertime, we were there, and I thought this very funny because the doctor, the emergency room told us, you're not supposed to have this kind of pain, you had surgery. He -- he was taken -- I called the ambulance, he was taken to the hospital over there, and they make tests again, and they find out that -- that chur -- surgery was -- as -- they say that a butcher job. Every artery was closed. Actually, it was done, maybe you know the North Shore hospital, the surgery was done here, probably by student, I don't know. Anyway, they needed a other surgery over there, after five months, in Florida. And we were -- took care of him, with my husband and myself. I thought maybe I have only one relative, but I don't think one as f -- as -- soon as he got well, he said he doesn't even remember to be that sick. So I [indecipherable]. I think --

Q: Do you -- do you feel very hurt nowadays, thinking about your parent and them having -- to me it's so unusual they left you, and I just wondered --

A: It is unusual.

Q: -- wondered how you think about that.

A: I felt very bad when I was young and younger. And I felt even worse when I came here and we met. And I can't suppress, you know? I -- I just can't. And sh -- the -- she knows, and she doesn't understand. It was the circumstance and so on. I just can't imitate something which I don't feel ar -- I feel the opposite. You know what? Now, thinking back, I feel lucky that I was raised my -- by my grandmother. I got a lot of love and everything. She was a nice woman and I'm go ba -- when will I going back, I'm going to the cemetery and be sure -- make it sure that a -- it's okay. No, I don't feel bad about that she didn't raise me. And my brother is very -- very, very jealous, because, as I said, beside -- she thinks I am a millionaire. We -- both of us, my husband and myself, we worked very hard since we are here, and our first priority was to send me -- my daughter to school, you know? We thanks God we have a beautiful family. Is enough.

Q: So let's just go back to liberation, and what you specifically remember about the Russians arriving, about the Germans leaving. What do you remember?

A: Days before the Russian came, the French workers already, you know, let us know that they coming closer. And about two days before they reach us, every German left, around us, you know? The rumors all disappeared, and we went out, we find there was a barracks beside us, frozen potato, a lot of fro -- frozen potato what we already right away took and with a little oven in the room, which was heating over, we made potato, and a lot of --

Q: Go ahead.

A: -- yellow -- how you say that, pea? You know, yellow -- not green pea --

Q: So that's -- oh, split pea?

A: Split pea, yeah, and we eat it, and we right away became sick already, very sick, because we're not used to regular food.

Q: And where did you get that food?

A: It was over there, we -- we didn't get it from the German, you know, we just get almost empty soup.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri, conducted by Amy Rubin, on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in Great Neck, New York. This is tape number three, side A. So continue, if you will, to talk about liberation and more of the details of that la --

A: Liberation was unbelievable, you know. I can't even find a word -- jubilant? We realize we are free. And as I said, beside that incident, what happened the other end, we have only one problem, to get -- how to get home. It was a long -- you know when sometimes we got the station and we -- they don't let us in, few of us went to the top of this train, and we have a [indecipherable] or something, and we traveling there. Sometime the Russian soldiers who was there in the station, you know, don't let us stay there. They -- you know. We climb down and when they left we climb back. And many times we took the ride home on the top of the train. It wasn't unusual. Every train was crowded. And when we -- as I said, when I finally reach Budapest, I don't stay too long. The same --

Q: Were you -- were you by yourself, did you travel with others?

A: I travel with others until Budapest. That point, every do ve -- everybody left, looking for ri -- a friend or s -- relatives, or somebody, which I did, too. And when I didn't find nobody and I heard what -- I went to my relatives, the same way I went home to Debrecen, what I originally arri -- you know, started. And I heard there that some people was taken to Austria, so I had more chance to see somebody. But after a long time, nobody was there, you know? So I decided to go to Nyíregyháza. Even less people, completely. But, as I [indecipherable] ghost town. No Jewish face, nobody. And I was very upset later on and I went back to Debrecen and my friend's family came back. My -- Ava ha -- her father was taken the same way as my father-in-law. So he, and she had a sister, was taken to Austria after that. And her mother was hiding in Budapest. So after

the war they -- you know, everybody was there except Ava. So I told her -- told them what happened. But that -- that time, people just started to know about Auschwitz, nobody knew about Auschwitz. And -- but more and more people came home and you know, told the same story, I-like [indecipherable]. I remember I was sitting one day at their house, and a common -- not friend, a man came by and ask, when I told what happen, he -- how come you came back and Ava didn't? And I was so shocked, you know, because as I said, for a long time they di -- nobody realize what happened. And I had this -- my conscious, you know? Why did I came back, really? How come everybody else beside her, stays. For a long time I couldn't understand. Even now sometime wondering, you know? So many [indecipherable] they killed everybody.

Q: Had you already given up on God at this point?

A: I didn't give it up, I looking for it, so far. I couldn't understand how come -- I just couldn't understand how come God let kill so many innocent people. I don't talking about now the people who should have. I know there is a saying in the very religious people, you know, [indecipherable] maybe you heard, you're not supposed to ask why did let this happened. But I -- I -- I still asking, how c -- how could this happen? I don't know how they explain that, simply they ignore it. I don't know.

Q: So there was a lot of pain when you went back to these cities and couldn't find people?

A: Yeah. I [indecipherable] that. I usually not going, as I said. I'm sitting the cab or taxi, going to the cemetery and back. I never go back to Nyíregyháza, to the city. We once slept over -- we came back and on the way back we stopped Debrecen is, you know, in the [indecipherable] way, and we had to sleep over there. And I came out one -- in the morning, looking around, you know. Not one Jewish face. Because there are some Jews now, who came from the vicinity, you know? But the people who were there either was killed or left.

Q: When have you been back after -- after you moved to the U.S., when have you been back to Hungary?

A: My si -- father-in-law was alive, you know? He got married again. So we went back, three of us. Ava was -- I think he was in college that time, the first time I went back. And then my husba -- he -- he became sick. My husband went alone. And then every few years we went back, because -- I especially went back to the ci -- beside the cemetery, I have this friend over there in Budapest, they moved to Budapest with a big family and they always waited for us, you know, with so much love, and -- and just like the war time, I remember she was always so nice to me. And now I think I'm -- I -- I -- I -- I just don't know. So, in that case we -- I don't think we ever go back again. We have nobody, nothing to look for.

Q: How di -- how did you piece together your life after liberation, after the end of the war?

A: Well, when I got home, as I said, people who came by piece by piece from Austria, are some of my friend, who was at the cosmetic, at the other one. She came back with her mother and the lager friend, too. And we came friends with the girl who I know before, and sh -- I mentioned she got mar -- married before they left the camp, and she was expecting a child, she lost that child finally. So she beca-came very good friends of me. So, you know, people lost so many friends, they tried to make friends with, you know, somebody who had the same ex -- ex -- experience, and -- and [indecipherable] we came here, too. We have about eight or 10 couple who has the same back -- background, same past, most of them who were, you know, I se -- unfortunately half of them is gone, mostly the mens. I still have a friend, we talking every day, meeting every week. She's a widow, and another one who lost her husband, all of them survivors. We have a few around here. That was one of the reason that we moved here. They not driving, and we said -- they came together once over there, and they said, I should understand it's

very, very far from everybody. My daughter is came every week over there, but it must [indecipherable] here, too. And my gr -- one of -- grandson lives here in the neighborhood.

Q: So you -- you -- you stayed in Hungary, you thought that you would continue living there? You didn't plan to move, right?

A: Up to -- that time, no. Because you know, they started to go back to old lifestyle, you know? There wasn't enemy, you know. And they were, you know, they started a new -- to make a -- sorry, it's a cramp.

Q: You -- you want to -- you okay?

A: I'm okay. They started to build a new life, getting married. One of the uncle getting married -- got married, he -- his father got married, we got married. So we started a new life, and after awhile it was okay.

Q: You met your husband in what year, in --

A: Right after when I got home. Actually, he -- he used to go out before me with a girl who went to Auschwitz, for awhile, and you know, didn't come back. He came -- you know, we went out together. We got married -- 1956 we started, and '57 -- ah, '46, and '47 we got married. And we lived there for awhile peacefully, until you know, the Communist regime. But there wan -- wasn't any way to leave the country that time.

Q: So when did you leave, and how did you leave?

A: 1956 there was a big revolution, and the borders was open [indecipherable] and every kind of people, you know, who were not allowed from the -- from the -- anywhere, th-the most -- lowest people, you know, came around and they hanged people and -- and so on. And they started to talk again -- against the Jews, everything -- the Jews was the reason this happened and so on. So my daughter was about seven years old, and I was thinking it's just can't happen to her again,

what happened to me. So it was -- we decided to leave. And this girl I mentioned who was my friend, who was -- came back from Austria with her husband and that was a [indecipherable] and the [indecipherable] my husband, we decided together to leave the country. So we just walked out, left everything, and we -- we were traveling to the city, which is a -- at the borderline, it's called Porshoi, and now it belongs to -- belongs to Czechoslovakia anyway. And we got so- somebody -- lot of people le -- left that time, you know, 1956. So somebody recommended as a leader who can't really let leaders through the border, and you know, we were walking through to Austria. And we were staying in Austria at least a month. That was a, you know, Jewish -- HIAS it's called, what, you know, arrange the coming. And eventually we got here, 1950. We left n -- Budapest 1956, December 10, and we got here 1957, February, my -- my daughter birthday, February of the fifth, you know? And I have an uncle and auntie in the Long Island, we got the, you know, apartment from them. And we start our life. We didn't like it here because there wasn't any -- my husband s -- actually, I was pregnant and I lost the child. I was four months pregnant. My husband was working and there wasn't any transportation, only the railroad. And we can't see our friends, we couldn't travel anywhere, we were very lonely here. So we moved to the -- to Brooklyn first, and we were -- were living then [indecipherable], we came back to live here in the island. We lived -- we used to live one spot, 32 years. We got the house there finally, and we sold the house, we went to live in Suffolk county, you know? It was a very nice place, actually, we have a very nice place over there, a co-op -- a condo. It was a retirement development. The -- as I mentioned, everybody thought this is the end of the world, so we moved here, we sold that place, and we could buy that and move here. We were very happy -- happy here, you know, it's a -- completely -- I don't know if you heard about it, it's a very Jewish neighborhood, a lot of Jewish temple. It has a reputation everybody's a millionaire, which



is not true. At least I didn't see -- I don't know nobody -- I don't see nobody saving account, but in this house, I didn't see anybody who is -- actually, there is a lady upstairs who is a survivor, too.

Q: So do you -- do you notice very much the impact that the Holocaust has had on your life during all these years after that?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. As I think I mentioned before, I don't think anybody, whoever it is, or she is -- come to the mind the name George Hirsch -- Hirsch, maybe, he was a survivor. I don't think anybody could not be affected all her lifetime, what happened, in one way or another, no I don't think so. It's always -- still, we're talking.

Q: Has it -- has it seriously depressed you, do you think?

A: No. I know some people became sick. No, but I tried to get over in a way that I raised the child, as I mentioned, and I don't want her to be affected, which I -- it -- I was mistaken. It could not happen. It could not happen. [indecipherable] She's a very sensitive girl. She -- she knew everything, what happened, how it happened, but some way she doesn't want to hear my story in details, you know? She's very good to us, you know, she knows both of us survivors and she tries to help us. And I don't mean me -- financially. We don't need that, thank God. You know, we're getting from the Germans, and pension and we have enough to -- you know.

Q: Did you get an additional compensation for doing slave labor work?

A: Yeah. But it was a one-time payment, the slave labor, yeah. And we got some money, well not the big money, a thousand, each of us. Actually, my daughter -- my husband didn't even get it yet, from the Swiss. But we got, every three months, some money from the Germans which, this helps.

Q: And now that there's sort of new world events for all of us to ponder and process, do you think back to World War II and that time period, now, what you see today?

A: Specially what happening now? Yes. Yes, I -- I li -- do, because it's like we coming to the war situation here. Everybody is -- even then, the d -- American people doesn't know what is the deal, war, you know? Forget about the Holocaust [indecipherable], you know. We got -- we didn't have enough food, we don't have nothing. And we were constant fear from the bombardment. Now we have a constant fear here what will happen the next minute with this anthrax, you know, or what is next. And at -- the government doesn't know who is dealing with, you know? And I still saying is a -- this is a beautiful country, this is a wonderful country. Some people not realizing it, believe me. They taking for granted. We know the difference, you know, and we don't know what will happen. Yes, is a terrible thing. Is a terrible thing what happening now.

Q: Do you -- do you re-react as an American to [indecipherable]

A: Yes, I am an American.

Q: I mean, do you feel that internally, that --

A: Yeah, right. I am an American. I'm not Hungarian. Definitely not Hungarian. I-I am a Jew, hung -- American. Not just a paper on the citizen, I feel -- the day where we arrived here, we were [indecipherable] of here, you know? They send an airplane for us, '56, it was a -- a war plane. We have to si -- go down two or three times. But even there, you know, it was Eisenhower that time the president. And since then, we were allowed to work. I had the better work because of that I had a nice salary. Later on, when I was very tired, I retired, and I had a stationery store. My husband was working, and you know, my -- I have a beautiful family. Everybody has, you know, college education. My grandchildren. My son-in-law is a lawyer. We have a beautiful life

here, if they let us -- is a terrible thing. Especially they -- we don't know what will happen next, and we don't know how to, you know, save or not save, you know. We don't know who the -- who we -- who are we dealing with, because they, you know, I think these people still here in the country who putting this -- sending these letters.

Q: Well, I think I've looked through my -- my questions, and I just want to make sure before we conclude, if there's anything else you would like to share, or mention.

A: Not -- I'm sorry. I don't know. I hope my children and grandchildren will have a nicer life and future. They don't have -- they won't have this experience when we went through, my husband and I, so that's my only wishes.

Q: Do you speak with your husband a lot about each of your experiences?

A: We -- we never speak like this, not with our friends either, you know, that's why, you know, it -- sometimes it's hard for me. We just playing [indecipherable] that something remind us [indecipherable] and say it, what is always happening. And we go through in it, and talking something else, and our thinking is, you know, goes through on this experience. I can't tell you how, but it just there.

Q: It's always -- it's always with you.

A: It's -- it's always there.

Q: Well, I want to --

A: I just hope it never happened -- never happen ag -- never happening again.

Q: I want to thank you, and I'm going to conclude the tape here.

A: I thank you to come.

Q: Thank you. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Csengeri.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview