

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Miriam Ofer  
November 30, 2015 and December 1, 2015  
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## PREFACE

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**MIRIAM OFER**  
**November 30, 2015**

Noemi J. Szekely-Popescu: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview taped on November 30, 2015 with Miriam Ofer. The interviewer is Noemi Szekely-Popescu. This interview is conducted in Washington, DC. Miriam, could you state your name at birth, please.

Miriam Ofer: Yes, Marta.

Q: And your maiden name. Yes, everything is working. And your maiden name.

A: Marta Brichta

Q: And can you --

A: Spell it. (both talking) B-R-I-C-H-T-A.

Q: And what date were you born?

A: November 10, 1932.

Q: November tenth.

A: Yes.

Q: And where were you born?

A: In Bratislava.

Q: And what were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was Abraham Brichta. 1902.

Q: He was born in 1902.

A: Yes. My mother's name **Kutner**, **Jolán Kutner**.

Q: Is **Kutner** with two T's?

A: No, one T. Let's see to make sure I don't give you the wrong—

Q: And what year was she born?

A: Oh. She was born 06, 1906.

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Q: Can you tell me where they were born approximately.

A: **Kuttner**, actually it says two T's here, but now I leave it alone. Excuse me.

Q: Where were your parents born?

A: It was **Gúta** then which is **Kolárovo** today. Here I have the wedding papers for my parents. And –

Q: So who was born in **Kolárovo**, your father or your mother.

A: No, my mama. My father was born in **Vel'ka Kostol'any**.

Q: When did they move to Bratislava.

A: I have no, right after the wedding I guess.

Q: When were they married?

A: When were they married? In 1928.

Q: Were they married in Bratislava?

A: In **Gúta**.

Q: Did you have any siblings? Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: I had a brother. He still lives in Israel.

Q: When was he born?

A: In 1929. Robert Brichta.

Q: So he's the eldest?

A: He is.

Q: Was he born in Bratislava?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Can you spell his last name?

A: Last name Brichta. Still Brichta.

Q: Still has that last name?

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A: And my sister, she was born Cecelia Brichta. And she was born in 1930, August yeah.

Q: So you were the baby?

A: I was the baby, right.

Q: So can you tell me a few memories of Bratislava? Anything that comes to your mind right now.

A: Anything. At the beginning I didn't understand that it was already troubled times. At that time because in 33 in Vienna Hitler already came to some power and we lived very close to Vienna.

Q: In 38.

A: Of course. It was like 25 miles from Bratislava. Or on the Danube or you go by train.

Q: So you were six years old in 38.

A: Six, in winter 68. Then it was almost I remember that by the time I was in first grade we had to move from a neighborhood that wasn't Jewish to the Jewish, it was open ghetto. You know, just curfew. There was no wall.

Q: Do you remember where you were first before you had to move.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me the street?

A: Yes. Do, uh, **Donau Gasse**. This to know but they tore it down already.

Q: And then you're saying in 1938 you had to leave to a different part.

A: Exactly. To the, where all the Jews were gathered and it was like a Jewish quarter which they razed down now everything.

Q: Do you remember where?

A: Yes. They lived on **Nikolarska**, on, **Nikolarska**. I don't remember the number anymore but you could go out on the Jewish street and on the non-Jewish street. You know it had two, it was three units there. And people were there already like you know only Jews mostly living on one side and on the other side were also non-Jews.

Q: Did you start school before you had to move or only after.

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A: Before. Actually to first grade. I started before I was six because November. You understand. They took me in a couple of months.

Q: Which school were you at?

A: It was in the Jewish school. I forgot to bring the picture. I even had my friends all-girls school. In the Jewish school on, I have to look up that street was, but I'm sure we can find it in the, on the computer now.

Q: Did your brother and sister also go to that school?

A: Oh my sister even went to kindergarten yet. And my brother went separate.

Q: But he went to a Jewish school too?

A: All, yeah. That's right and also he started already there to learn in the yeshiva. You know this was the religious school. Not that he liked it but it was close by where we lived and my father put him in. It was a religious school.

Q: You said your sister already was there for kindergarten.

A: Oh yes.

Q: Were you sent to kindergarten?

A: No, no, not anymore. No, no, no, no. I was home. And then we still could play with non-Jewish kids because in, where we lived before on **Donau Gasse** we went playing with the kids.

Q: But why weren't you in kindergarten?

A: Because they were they didn't have enough money already to send me to, they couldn't --

Q: So it was paying --

A: Because my dad, my father lost the license, already in 38.

Q: What did he lose?

A: He was partner in a candy store. Him and another one. His other, his partner was Greenwood I think or **Kastner**, I forgot already the name. And it was in a good place. But they took away their license. And he had to be a representative for some time, watches, whatever he could get a job. To travel you know like a traveling sales person.

Q: So this candy store was in Bratislava?

A: Yes.

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Q: Do you remember where it was?

A: Yeah. It was on the main center. If I show you on a map I can show you. Where the market place was. On a good place, very good place.

Q: And he had a partner?

A: Yes and he actually moved to Palestine.

Q: The partner?

A: Yeah.

Q: So the partner was Jewish?

A: And he survived, yes.

Q: Do you know when they opened the candy store, when was it established.

A: I don't know. This I don't know. My brother probably do but I don't.

Q: Do you know what your father's work was before the candy store? Was he a businessman. He had different projects.

A: No, no, no. He worked by somebody I think. I, I really don't know. What I don't know about my father, I don't know. Unfortunately.

Q: How about your mother. Did she stay at home with the children.

A: Oh yeah, well she was making bread, everything we have. you know by hand.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about what she made?

A: Oh my god. My mother, she baked those delicious breads, you know what they make the **babka**, the peasant bread but it's big and round. Thick crust and everything. And she baked the challah, **mákos kalács (with poppy seed)**, challah, **diós kalács (with walnut)**, **kakaós (with cocoa)**, she was really Hungarian like because it went back and forth. See. And she was a cook. And grandpa had a store in **Gúta** with a big lots with all kinds of store, you know what you buy and you sell. From when you are born til you die. Everything. Like a country store.

Q: A general store?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: So your maternal grandfather was a shop keeper?

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A: Yes.

Q: How about your paternal grandparents. Do you know what they did?

A: Oh yes. They had a little shop for selling **baromfi, kacs, liba** [poultry, ducks and goose], no. Kosher label you know how they call it kosher. Poultry, kosher only. And then putting at the fat and making **töporlyú , and máj (cracklings, and goose liver), and put it the bödönbe (big pot) and it froze in the spájz (larder).** Heated water. You didn't need the Frigidaire. In the –

Q: It kept.

A: It kept forever.

Q: Where were they?

A: Bratislava. I knew them.

Q: So then your father's family was from Bratislava.

A: From upper Slovakia, **Vel'ka Kostol'any** and then they moved to Bratislava. You know there were always skirmishes off and on. But they were there for a long time.

Q: Do you know what languages were spoken in the home of your father and mother? So not yet your home, but what languages did they grow up with, your father and mother?

A: German. Slovak. My mom, no, my mom she spoke mostly German and Hungarian. But better Hungarian than German because I remember her reading the books you know the novels in Hungarian language.

Q: And your father spoke German and Slovak.

A: That's it.

Q: He did not speak Hungarian.

A: Not at all.

Q: Did either of them understand or speak Yiddish.

A: Not at all. Yiddish was not in our vocabulary at all. I learned whatever I know in Yiddish, I understand after the war when we took in Palestine. I was there in orphanage you know. With the Polish survivors and all that.

Q: What was their religious background, your father or your mother.



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A: Both very religious.

Q: How?

A: Orthodox.

Q: Orthodox.

A: My mom had 13 sisters and one brother. Some of them passed away when they delivered the kids and that was the history. You know everybody was had lots of children and everything.

Q: And in your home, so once they're together and they have the three children, what languages were spoken there?

A: Just German.

Q: Just German. They didn't speak Slovak or Hungarian to you.

A: Slovak they could speak but not with us. Only German at home because there was in 1940 also how, a census. To where do you belong. My father put down German culture. And I have here letters and everything. I have one letter from Auschwitz. He was working in Auschwitz three years, in **Birkenau** in the **Arbeitslager** lager. In German. They kept him because he kept perfect records, beautiful handwriting. I gave the paper in **Yad Vashem** in Israel. But I have the copy of it here.

Q: Thank you. I'm going to look at it right after we're done with the interview.

A: Sure just have to see where I put it.

Q: Don't worry about that now. Can you describe to me what kind of religious education you got in your home. So they were both Orthodox. Did you go to shul every Friday?

A: Girls, no. Only my father and my brother. Not my mom, not me. I went only when it was Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. And they were allowed to eat only not all day fasting but half day because we were too little. So after half a day kids go home and food is there.

Q: Did you or your sister receive any instruction to read Hebrew.

A: Not at all.

Q: Not at all.

A: No. I learned after the war, everything I knew and I know well because I went to school. Two years **Bet Hakom** [? ph] in Jerusalem.

Q: Do you remember any of your friends from that first year when you're about six years old in the first grade? Any friends from school or outside of school?

A: I did, not anymore. It was not good times anymore. And my bigger sister, she was a very studious girl. First of all my brother had to study a lot and just make sure you get good grades and very strict upbringing. My sister was a very good student and she was a bit different. Tough but needy more. And I was like playing jacks like you know with the horseshoes we played and jumping with the things when I had time. But I cannot tell you that we were allowed to do too much anymore because we were in fear. Not too far from us there were a gang of boys who came beating up, not so much the girls like the boys and my mother was fearful for us.

Q: Did you see any of that or were you –

A: Oh yes I have seen.

Q: What did you see?

A: What did I see? We were by the window watching out for Nicholas day. You know St. Nicholas. Yeah in December. It was for us interesting to see because we see on the other side of the street they celebrated. But then during the **gerekfonden** [don't understand -ph] oh away from the window, **schnell** (quick) because they threw rocks through the windows and threw you know.

Q: Your window or windows around?

A: Wherever the Jews were, this is a Jewish house. They were very nasty.

Q: How did they know?

A: Because it was the Jewish quarter already in 38. Not before.

Q: After you were moved? Or before. It was after you were moved.

A: Yes. Before. No, no. It was you see in fact my father he had brought home one time you know all kinds of chocolate for Easter. The rabbit in chocolate

Q: You had Easter chocolates?

A: Yes. With that together that he was religious, they were selling it for the c, you know for everybody. It was in a good spot.

Q: Did you get anything on St. Nicholas day, on –

A: Oh no, this they were scared I guess.

Q: But you did get Easter chocolates?

A: Oh yes. It was a rabbit. I remember it. And we were so happy you know. To get chocolate.

Q: Tell me about after your move to the Jewish quarter. That you called the Jewish quarter. How old were you then?

A: I was in 1938, or 9. I don't remember exactly. I must ask my brother because he knows exactly when they moved. He remembered when I was born. So I don't remember exactly but there was a broken house, a broken house across from us. Where some of our cousins lived. And they could play there but it had walls, thick walls you know. That is the old city Bratislava. There was a house before but there were wars and everything so it was a closed in but it was mostly Jewish people living in that house. And in the yard we could play, play with the balls, like baseball you know. **Bilitska (Slovak -?)**, all kinds of games. They played til 1940. Beginning of 40 they already seen big trucks because we had a lot of Polish refugees. In Bratislava. And whoever was from Poland they had to, they put them on the trucks. Out from here. you don't belong here, Jewish people. And they schlepped them to I guess to the port, to for the **deportation** already then.

Q: Did you meet any of these Polish refugees.

A: I had one friend who was in our class.

Q: Can you tell me about this person?

A: That little girl. I forgot her name already but when I came home from school one day I have seen her. She's going on the truck and I run home and I tell my mother that my friend they took her away with the truck. This is nothing. Don't worry about it. that's how they wanted to protect us, not to be afraid.

Q: So she was your friend in school.

A: Yes.

Q: Was this the same school?

A: The religious school.

Q: So you continued going to the same school after you were taken to the Jewish quarter

A: Oh yes.

Q: You continued going to school

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A: Going to in you go, in fact it was closer. You know it was ~~kaputz~~ **Kapucinska**. It was not too much work. And going down there where we lived before it was at least two miles to walk

Q: You walked it with your –

A: Oh always, by myself.

Q: By yourself?

A: Oh yeah by us you know my son even in Tel Aviv, he was little. He was five and a half, six years old, to school he walked to in the main, a lot of blocks by himself to school. I didn't know anything else. Who raised me. I was independent. I says you have to go. I took him once, I took him twice. He knew the road, so he went

Q: Do you have any other memories of the Polish refugees?

A: About the Polish. They were scared. And they spoke, they were dressed differently. They were –

Q: How were they dressed?

A: They had no, the Chasidic taste. By us there was not that. it wasn't in style. I never seen a **shtradner** before til I came to Palestine. Then I said what the hell are they wearing for. But they said this is the Chasidic trend. By us they never wore that. Only hats.

Q: Do you remember how the adults related to these newcomers?

A: I had no clue but they didn't like us to have too much friendship with them. They didn't want the Polish kids to come to us or we should go there for instance.

Q: Do you remember anyone telling you that?

A: They were scared maybe. They don't know these people, not to learn something incorrect. I don't know why. I wouldn't be able to tell you.

Q: Do you remember how you communicated with your friend, your Polish friend?

A: Slovak, she knew already Slovak. Yeah probably was there long already you know. And she was just like one of the rest. But you know how it is with this kind of things. Just like I don't know about you. Have you been in Israel?

Q: I'll tell you all about myself once we are done but this interview is about you.

A: Ok. I'm asking. Because everybody, every group has another name there. [**Magyarok ütődöttek – Hungarians are nutty**]

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Q: It's funny that you switch to Hungarian when you are describing this.

A: I even don't like to say it in any other language because it's not correct to do. In my books –

Q: But you say it in Hungarian.

A: In Hungarian I could tell you.

Q: Do you know why that is?

A: Because the Hungarians, that's how they were there too. Wherever they went and the Romanians were how you pick up the culture from the people around where you live with the Jews were usually adopting to the government. That's what I said. And now I see where another movement of people is around, those poor people I said not too many. I feel bad for the mothers and the kids. But the men should fight for their own countries. They put and fight away just like the partisans tried to fight for freedom. But it doesn't work anyway. Does it?

Q: Getting back to the Poles or the people that we are calling Poles, they, can you tell me how they left or disappeared? What did you see? Did you know they were going to leave?

A: I did not. I told you. That's the only time I have seen it because after that my parents decided to put us first in hiding so they won't catch us and make a plan to go to Hungary because they didn't deport people from there. But I didn't know that they were going to, they didn't speak in front of us at all about danger. We just thought they have to go elsewhere just like we have to go from one place to come and move here. They didn't want the Polish people live there because somebody else should have their place. I don't know.

Q: So are you saying that your parents started making plans to leave that town because of the roundup of the so called Polish Jews.

A: Not only Polish Jews were round up. Young group of Slovak Jewish women who went like who went that religious and they had gatherings. I had a cousin. She was already 18 years old.

Q: What was her name?

A: ~~Sweker~~. **Zwicker**

Q: That was the last name.

A: That was her last name, I forgot. I forgot her first name. What was her, Edith, Edith **Zwicker** ~~Sweker~~.

Q: And these people were rounded up?

A: The girls were rounded up. She was blond and blue eyed. And then they found out later that they rounded her up and deported her for service for the German soldiers.

Q: How did they find out?

A: This I don't know, honey. Ask me the question that I really don't know. That's why I say I didn't tell my kids. I never spoke so much about these things. Not to traumatize the family. And my husband he was more, he was smarter than I. He was more educated. And he was a brilliant person and he was older. He had knowledge. You don't make trauma. You make the best of what you can. And that's how I guess he survived.

Q: I want to hear all about him but –

A: There is a lot to hear about him.

Q: chronologically I'm still very interested in what you just said. This round up of Slovak Jews. Can you tell me more about that?

A: That was it. Somebody hiding. I had a aunt there. She was three years in hiding.

Q: When were they in hiding? What year are we right now?

A: 42.

Q: So the so called Polish Jews are they rounded up in 41?

A: Absolutely sooner right.

Q: Sooner than the rest right?

A: Yes, yes because they were not citizens supposedly.

Q: IS that why they were rounded up?

A: Jews.

Q: But you were a Jew too.

A: But I was a citizen of Slovak.

Q: So it was about their citizenship.

A: Yeah I had it right here. There is a book about this woman who wrote whole thing. See this is my whole family here. I have a whole thing that I have here. See this is the letter from Auschwitz, Birkenau.

Q: We will look at that but what I'm trying to figure out –

A: Yeah I am trying to find that letter about the, oh here. I want to buy this book because I don't have you heard about the last four year old by Yuri Deutsch. And Katya something, **Krausova**.

Q: There are many things I haven't heard about.

A: No kidding. This is the history of how it was over there by us.

Q: But what I'm interested in is what you remember of the history. So if the so called Polish Jews were rounded up before the Slovak Jews

A: Yes

Q: Do you remember how much later the Slovak Jews were rounded up?

A: Not exactly because we were, well we didn't know what's happening at all. We really didn't know just we knew that something a war is coming on us but we didn't know that deportation at all. It was very secretive. They said they put into some work lager you know to work they need for the war effort and everything. The (both talking)

Q: But your cousin Edith, do you remember how you heard about the fact that she was taken?

A: Because that was my mother's oldest sister's daughter and we lived close by and that was close to the, where the ghetto was, where the main synagogue was there. And it was a lot of trauma as a result there. But they didn't want to traumatize us. They didn't speak to us about it.

Q: They didn't tell you about the fact that Edith disappeared.

A: They just heard that she was taken but they didn't know where.

Q: Do you know who she was taken by?

A: I don't know. Oh the Slovaks probably or the Germans. They worked together. You know the Slovak government was the only who paid a lot of money for each Jew what they can take, let them go. We give you, I don't know 500 **Kronen** in anything you can just take them out. **Tiso** he was such an anti-Semite. He wanted to get rid of them. But then he found out that the killing him. He regretted the fact but they caught him after the war and they hung him. They put him for a trial. This I know when I came back in 1945.

Q: Do you remember for those I'm going to assume it was maybe two years that you spent in the Jewish quarter. Am I right?

A: Yeah, no. yeah. more, more.

Q: Three.

A: Yeah, oh yeah. Til 42.

Q: Can you tell me about your living situation?

A: Well we were one couple lived in one room. We shared the same kitchen and the same toilet. There was no shower yet. We had to bathe in **lavor (round bucket)** you know. First top then bottom. That's the and we shared it with that family. And we had one bedroom and I still had to sleep in my crib. And my sister had to sleep with my mama and my brother had to sleep on the sofa.

Q: So there were five of you? And there was another couple.

A: Yes.

Q: And you were in tell me again how many rooms.

A: ~~Nikolarska~~. **Mikulás utca**

Q: Was it, how many rooms?

A: How many rooms. One, like two bedroom place. And a kitchen and this common for everybody and the toilet.

Q: So the couple was in one room and the five of you were in the other room.

A: Other room, yeah. And there was, we were we had the table with the vitrine where we could eat.

Q: Do you remember the couple's name?

A: ~~Sweker~~, **Zwicker** also. Relatives.

Q: They were relatives.

A: Yes but the. The husband was the relative. You know they come from another, but they were relatives. The brother of the, he was the n, the uncle of that girl.

Q: Of Edith.

A: Yeah there were two ~~Swekers~~ **Zwickers** in Bratislava.

Q: Do you remember what you had to eat during those years.

A: We still ate not too much. Everything was kind of rationed. And there was a big store. They called **Jedla**. You know **Jedla** is to eat [**food in Slovak**]. It was like you could buy flour, sugar, bread, and stuff. And they were mostly vegetarian because my father and every year there were a lot of relatives also in Vienna. They were already then vegetarian.



Q: Was he getting any news from his cousins in Vienna?

A: Oh a lot. Even my mom. One time they brought a cousin over. Over there it was even worse than by us. They buried her alive in a grave and when she heard it's quiet, she, she

Q: Dug out

A: Dug out and somehow she doesn't know where she came to us but—

Q: When did she come?

A: I don't remember but we were still home.

Q: You weren't in the Jewish quarter.

A: In the Jewish quarter.

Q: You were in the Jewish quarter?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: Not anymore.

Q: Do you know what happened to her?

A: They took her on the transport. Just like they caught my mother and father. They wanted to go to Hungary like we were sent separate. I even have here a note what my mother wrote. We sent the kids away and please take good care of them. She never seen us again. It breaks my heart. (cries) Now that I am a mother. I can understand how painful it was. But we were jolly to go. We didn't know what we were go. We were walking.

Q: The three of you went together?

A: With a person who was paid to get us across the border to **Gúta**, where she was born, to **Gúta**. To —

Q: Do you know who this person was?

A: I don't know but he was a nice person. He took us. We walked the whole night in corn field. First by train we went and then he took us off the train and we were walking the whole night in corn field.

Q: Do you know, do you remember if it was warm or cold? Was it winter or summer?

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A: No it was summer because we went in spring. After Passover it was.

Q: After Passover.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did your parents tell you? Why –

A: We were going to the grandparents. We used to go there every summer before so we were happy to go. Who wants to live in pain and you know. What does a kid understand? At that age you not to like today you have the, you know. You have computer, you know everything. So that was it. But there we had fun actually. But then the bad times because my other cousins from Vienna they send them there too. They didn't want to be my mother's sister's children came but they had to go away in a hurry. And we had to go away –

Q: What year was this? It was Passover what year.

A: That was in 42. Then they had to go you know what you had to do. Then gendarmerie there, gendarmes, **csendőörök**. They wouldn't let us stay. As a **[Jolán gyerekei – Jolán's children]** Budapest.

Q: So let's just before we get to that. So it's after Passover 42 that you're sent to your grandparents.

A: Very short time. I was only there maybe a month.

Q: What were their names.

A: Whose?

Q: Your grandparents.

A: Oh my grandparents were dead. **Kuttner**, but they were dead already.

Q: But you were being sent to your grandparents home.

A: Oh there were sisters living on the same property and one brother.

Q: So this is your mother's sister.

A: Family, yeah.

Q: Ok this is your aunt.

A: And my uncle too. He was still there.

Q: And what are their names?

A: Brichta. Ah the other one, the **Fischer**. I have to look it up. See you forget. I don't know. Not Fleishman. I have to look it up.

Q: What was your aunt's first name?

A: My aunt's first name was wait a minute. **Kuttner**. I know the picture I have at home. She was pregnant with the kids. See I forget now names. Ella. Ella was her name. Ella let me think. Fisher. She was –

Q: Not **Kuttner**?

A: Oh yeah but she was married. Oh she was married. I think that was Fisher. I'm not sure now.

Q: So it was her property. You stayed at her place.

A: Oh yeah that was the grandparents whole thing. They had a **szikviz gyár** (carbonated water factory). A **szikviz** (carbonated water) to do lemonade. And they had a mill in. You have to look up –

Q: They had a mill?

A: Yeah. The **Kuttners** I got from here a picture. From a gentleman who took all the pictures and I don't know where I put it.

Q: So your grandparents owned a mill?

A: Oh yes the only mill in **Gúta** and now it's a museum for the people who lived there. And who perished.

Q: So the three of you were staying with your aunt Ella. Were there other children there?

A: Oh yes everybody had kids.

Q: But those people were already living there. They weren't sent there.

A: My cousin from Vienna was there too.

Q: What was that person's name?

A: I don't remember. Only my brother but you can look it up on the computer, under **Kuttners**. There was a full house there.

Q: That person was a child or an adult.

A: Older than I. I was –

Q: Not a child.

A: A young man, yeah. Of course, they were all young. So they took us to the gendarmes took us to the Budapest **utca (street), a börtönbe (to prison)**.

Q: They took you to prison.

A: Yeah to the how do you call the jail over there.

Q: I mean it's jail.

A: No yeah but I remember it even the name. And all of a sudden we were separated. My and my sister were together in one room. As, **nem jó nők** (women of ill repute). You know.

Q: Women of ill repute.

A: Right. And they stole our food and everything.

Q: You had food on you.

A: We had food there and there were a lot of people in a small room. And then they took us to take showers and everything. And all of a sudden we meet our brother by chance on the stairs. Or that was the second time. He was separated from us because he was boy.

Q: Were any of the other children taken from Ella's house, by the gendarmes?

A: Oh no.

Q: Just you.

A: Oh we had to go and register by them and they took us to the train station, took us to Budapest.

Q: SO just for me to understand. Did Ella need to register you? Or did someone –

A: No they had to register us because somebody came to talk from the, I guess Jewish agency. Everybody had you know in the small villages one person who was in charge with the government and with the Jews.

Q: So that person came to register you –

A: Came to talk, to no we had to go to the gendarmerie to be registered.

Q: But it was because that person knew that you were there?

A: No, I think because he wanted to give us up front notice to get us out from there and not to cause trouble for the rest of them. Maybe that's how it was.

Q: Why would you have caused trouble?

A: Because we were from Slovakia and we weren't allowed to be there. We were foreigners, just like the Polacks were foreigners in Hungary. The Hungarians didn't want Slovaks.

Q: Do you remember whether the gendarmes came or you had to go over to the gendarmerie.

A: We had to go over there. To the train. They took us to the train station.

Q: Well first they took you to the jail.

A: To the gendarme—and that was no jail. Then they took us to Budapest in jail.

Q: Oh so the jail wasn't there.

A: No.

Q: So you had to go to the gendarmerie. And what happened at the gendarmerie?

A: With my brother and sister. So they registered us. That we are from Slovakia and we going up to Budapest.

Q: For what reason?

A: Because he said you have to be registered in Budapest by the Jewish agency. And that woman **Bolgár** she was a second cousin to my father but she still had the first cousin was Weinstein.

Q: I'm sorry, who was **Bolgár** in this story. She was the one you were being sent to?

A: No. She was born in Hungary.

Q: Ok but she was in Budapest.

A: Yes.

Q: You were being sent to **Bolgár**.

A: No to the jail first.

Q: Ok but ultimately you were going to stay with her.

A: No, no. First of all there was the cousin of my father. Her mother, **Bolgár**, the woman's **Muci**, she was the daughter of **Mamika** Weinstein and she was the first cousin of my father and she says to my father. I will accept the kids and bail them out from the jail.

Q: In Budapest.

A: In Budapest. I take one kid because I have already two kids she said. The, **Muci** and **Mamika** was living with her too and she had to take in later than –

Q: **Muci** is the same person as **Bolgár**.

A: **Bolgár** and **Mamika** Weinstein.

Q: **Mamika** is her mother.

A: Yeah she was the grandmother.

Q: So when you were you presented yourself at the gendarmerie, still in the provinces. The gendarmerie said you have to –

A: With my brother and sister.

Q: To Budapest. Did you, did they send you home to pack? Can you describe what happened?

A: No they just packed a little bag with one set of clothes and they gave us food for the road.

Q: Who did?

A: Ella in **Gúta**.

Q: Ella gave you?

A: Yeah of course.

Q: So did you first have to go to the gendarmerie and then they sent you home to pack.

A: No, no, no. They are --

Q: You already packed when you went to the gendarmerie.

A: Yes.

Q: Why did they send you to the gendarmerie with clothes?

## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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A: They came with us. Somebody came with us. But I don't know any more who came.

Q: But why did they send you to the gendarmerie –

A: Because we went to the railroad station.

Q: So they knew that you were being sent off?

A: Yeah they knew to whom too. They contacted each other. I guess.

Q: Ella contacted **Muci**.

A: I g, I don't know if it was Ella or the brother, yeah.

Q: Or someone else. Were you told why you are going, where you are going?

A: I wasn't told anything period. If anybody was told, it was my brother. I was the smallest. See that's why I don't remember so well. I just followed all this, everybody.

Q: Was there an adult with you? On this trip?

A: Oh no, just the gendarmerie.

Q: The gendarme was there on the train.

A: Oh con, oh he was on full watch on us. He wouldn't let us because not to run away or something. Because we were foreign citizens. They didn't want to have foreigners. Just like the Hungarians don't want to have no foreigners here. They're only Hungarians. We didn't speak very well Hungarian yet then.

Q: You arrived in Budapest. Can you tell me exactly what you remember getting off the train? Is that when you, when they took you to jail. Can you describe

A: Straight to the jail we went. But I forgot now which one. But I know the daughter came to bail us out. She took me to her house and my brother and sister had to go **Mamika** had a brother who was never married, **agglegény**. **In Nagyfuvaros utca** (street). That's where my sister and my brother went.

Q: And you were alone.

A: I was alone with **Muci**. With her two kids.

Q: Do you remember anything else about the prison?

A: The prison. I was there for a brief time. Only that they checked us, if we are healthy, if we don't have lice or –

Q: Did you have to spend the night.

A: Oh yes, not only one.

Q: How many?

A: Maybe two or three or more. But I don't remember.

Q: Ok we're back. Go ahead.

A: Can I speak?

Q: Yes.

A: So you hear. So when we went to Budapest, she bailed us out.

Q: This is **Mucika**.

A: **Mucika**.

Q: Do you remember what her real name was?

A: I just knew her **Muci Bolgár**.

Q: But **Bolgár** was her last name.

A: **Bolgár** was her last name.

Q: It was her husband's name.

A: Yes and he passed on the Russian front when the kid, the second child who is over 70 now, 73. He doesn't remember even his father. Only from she was very well educated. She went to Paris and everything, my aunt, this one. From Budapest.

Q: Was **Mucika's** husband already taken to the front when you came.

A: Oh yeah I didn't see him ever. Never. Only his other families came to live with us there so she couldn't handle, you know that was before so she says you have an aunt in **Nagymagyar** and you go there.

Q: **Mucika** says this.

A: Yeah and they will take care of you guys there. And we went.



Q: When she first found you or got you at the jail, did she already have the child or was she pregnant.

A: Oh yes she had. No. I really, one she had already. I know **Gyurka**, he's older. He is going to be 80 now. **Muci**, trying to remember how old she was but I have no idea. She was young woman though.

Q: When she came to get you did you already know who she was.

A: No. Never seen her before. You see they were not religious and we were religious so that was not a good ticket to do.

Q: And remind me, she was –

A: Keep family –

Q: She was your father's family or your mother's family?

A: My father. My father actually had actually a brother who was doctor in Budapest, but grandpa expelled him because he wasn't religious. He turned away from religion. He didn't, we didn't know till people came back from the war that he had another brother. They didn't even speak of him. You know the religious people are crazy. Nuts.

Q: So **Mucika** came to get you. You stay with her. Your siblings stay with another cousin.

A: Wait. Very brief. Maybe 2 or 3 days and then we went straight to **Nagymagyar**.

Q: Did she explain to you why you were being sent there

A: Yeah because I have too much. My husband is not here. I understood and I was happy to go to **Nagymagyar** area no. to my father's family and I knew more about them than about these people.

Q: Had you been to **Nagymagyar** before.

A: Before I wasn't but my brother remembered things. they came to visit in Bratislava. She was the twin sister of my father. I don't remember. I really don't. I'm not going to tell you what.

Q: And how did you go from Budapest to **Nagymagyar**

A: By train.

Q: With your siblings?

A: Yes.

## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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Q: Any adult supervision?

A: I don't remember this either but I know somebody picked us up from the train station. And then came a buggy. With a buggy. They came to take us from the train station to **Nagymagyar**.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about where you stayed.

A: In **Nagymagyar**. Oh that was a good household. She had poor woman. She was the business lady because she already went to Prague to university. And she had a degree in those days.

Q: What was her first name.

A: Brichta.

Q: That was her last name. What was her first name.

A: Hedwig yeah Hedwig and she was very well educate. She did the whole business. She went with the horse and buggy and helpers. They worked confection clothes like you know like Levis to take to the villages around but she had seven kids. And she took us three in. Robert had to go and sew, learn how to sew. We had to mend all the socks for the kids for the Sabbath you know because we were a little bigger than her kids.

Q: You said she was educated in Prague

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of education?

A: She had a business degree. Right, for me that's

Q: And she was orthodox too.

A: Totally.

Q: What does that mean?

A: I mean with the kerchief and Sabbath holy day. No work. Nothing, but as soon as the Sabbath went out everybody in that time go to work.

Q: What about her husband.

A: He was childish kind of a guy but he liked the war.

Q: He liked the war?

A: The war. He came with the medals. He liked to play chess.

Q: He was in the First World War.

A: Yes in Italy. I remember him talking but you know what did I understand then by war. Even to play with the rest of the kids.

Q: Do you remember his name?

A: Yeah, **Simon**. Blau **Simon**. To be exact.

Q: So the family was called Blau.

A: Blau yeah.

Q: Do you know what his work was? was he working with his wife?

A: Together. Helper. He was she taught him how to be a cutter. He was the cutter but there was trouble. Immediately my brother had to work and they had refugees from all over coming to work for him so they can sustain themselves.

Q: What kind of refugees?

A: Refugees from **Carpatorus (Carpatho-Ruthenia)**, Jewish and some you know there were all kinds of things going on there. in the work place. how do you say this was line work. One was cutting. One was finishing. One was sewing.

Q: Like an assembly –

A: Assembly. I forget already. See that's it. My brother worked there too. He learned how to sew and everything.

Q: Was there any school?

A: He didn't go to school. I went to school because I was the smallest and my sister maybe no she had to help.

Q: How long were you in **Nagymagyar**.

A: In **Nagymagyar** from 1943

Q: 43?

A: The begin, no end of 42 beginning when the not, about one and a half years or two years. When was 44 when the Germans physically walked in

Q: March.

A: That's when they took us up again back to the jail with the gendarmerie.

Q: Same jail?

A: Same jail and my brother was already living in **Dunaszerdahely** they had because they didn't want to have so many kids there. Only me and my sister were there. So they took us first to **Komárom**

Q: Well wait a second, hold on. So I want to hear about that year and a half that you spent in –

A: Yeah I went to school.

Q: You went to school. Did you meet any of the other children. She had many children.

A: Oh they all went to school but not the big one.

Q: So how big did you have to be not to go to school.

A: (sigh) 15.

Q: your sister was already 15.

A: Oh yes she didn't go. I went.

Q: And this was Jewish school?

A: Jew, only Jewish school.

Q: Were you learning any, were you only learning –

A: Hungarian.

Q: Were they all speaking Hungarian?

A: Yeah, nothing in Yiddish or anything but it was on Jewish property because that's where the temple was and the **shrifet**,(???) you know and I remember if they wanted to have for the Sabbath chickens, they gave us the chickens where to take it and they did and we had to clean the feathers off. You know and all that.

Q: You had to do that?

A: Oh yeah I did it with the younger kids.

Q: Was that the first time you had to clean a chicken?

A: No. Because I had it with my grandparents already. they had a store I told you and I was taken to my grandparents. They lived about three houses down from us. Every Saturday we went to visit and when the Sabbath went out we had to start the feathers cleaning for making for the coats and blankets separate the head. You know the hair net and we were sitting in a line all the little kids and we had to do this job.

Q: Do you remember this as fun?

A: Yeah because we got to eat **töpörtyű, libamáj kenyeret** (crackling, goose liver bread) it was fun. We got good food you know.

Q: Do you remember that year and a half. Did you ever have any shortages of food or did you generally have enough food.

A: Generally enough food but everything had to be of course with limits but generally never hungry.

Q: Do you remember any harassment. Any unpleasantness from the locals?

A: Not from the locals directly. Only in Budapest when we came back second time. And wants \_\_\_\_\_ (inaudible). We had to wear already the star.

Q: You mentioned while the tape was on pause. What happened to your parents. Can you tell me about that?

A: They were caught on the border.

Q: So what was their plan?

A: The plan was to come to Hungary, **Ujpest**.

Q: When was this.

A: When we went.

Q: When you were in **Nagymagyar**?

A: Not yet. Before.

Q: When you were with **Muci**?

A: when we went first to across the border to **Gúta**.

Q: They were already caught then?

A: They were caught then. That's why in early on already. No beforehand they were caught.

Q: But it was after you were –

A: After we were gone. You know not immediately the second day. Another group we were, you know to see first the kids settled and how and what

Q: But they were going to go and reunite with you?

A: Yeah in **Ujpest**.

Q: But you were in **Gúta**.

A: No but that's where they wanted to go, not to come because everybody would recognize her there. She was born there. I guess.

Q: So the plan was to send you off to **Ujpest** and reunite with your parents there.

A: But never came about.

Q: So can you tell me what happened to them exactly?

A: They caught them on the border. They took them to **Sered**. On the border. The border.

Q: Border guards?

A: Yes but I don't know which one the Slovak or the Hungarian. And they took them to **Sered** first and then **Theresienstadt** too and then Auschwitz, they arrive in 1942 August eighth.

Q: Did your family know that they had been caught? Was there any news?

A: Maybe they knew, they wouldn't tell us. They never spoke nothing about parents. In fact, in 44 before the new **nyilas** came here, they came in October I think, **Szálasi**, right. Before and in summer, **Muci** bought fake papers from a dead girl. Tried to send us back to Bratislava because there were already people, all the Jewish were gone. Only or they were in hiding. There were no more Jews there. But there came some kind of an uprising. But on the way I had the fake papers. My sister and my brother too. I forgot the name. We studied it by heart and she woke me up at night. You are this and this, you know false paper. The guys came up. They looked it up. **Hát, the rohadt zsidó vagy! Másszunk cask le. Gyerünk ide Komáromba. Várunk mig jön egy a vonat, megyünk Németországba (Hey, you are a rotten Jew! Get down, come, we are in Komárom. We wait for another train and will go to Germany).**

Q: So we're jumping ahead of it.

A: My brain is always jumping.

Q: No, no but this is good. This is very good. Do you know when you learned of your parents' fate?

A: No after the war. But this is another story to tell you. In 1945. After the war was over in B, in all over there was over in winter. It was still winter, cold. My brother and sister were already back in Bratislava and they went every day to the train station to see who comes back. So they met people. They said your parents are dead. Don't even wait any more. then **Muci** came to get me. You know when the, after the **Szálasi** business we were taken almost to, she put me in **Hermina tér zárda (square and convent)**

Q: Convent?

A: Yeah in Budapest, I was there.

Q: But we're getting ahead of ourselves. So right now you're in **Nagymagyar**. And you're there until the German occupation.

A: I don't know exactly. Yeah til they came. They said oh the kids go up to Budapest again. Then I stayed with **Muci**.

Q: Who said that?

A: The **csendőőrök (gendamerie)**, Slovaks.

Q: So you're sent back to Budapest and you're sent to the same prison.

A: Exactly and **Muci** came to get us out.

Q: Second time.

A: Second time but then for good. I mean to stay with her.

Q: All three?

A: All three, but wait not so fast. We went first to **Kistarcsa** is a place up where they had kids up there and all kinds of characters who were waiting maybe to be deported. But **Muci** got us away from that too.

Q: Did she pick you up in **Kistarcsa** or in Budapest.

A: In Budapest again. She begged us.

Q: How long were you in **Kistarcsa**.

A: I didn't know. Not too long. Short time. She probably wanted us back to her. She felt guilty maybe that she should help us or something. Then **Mamika** mainly. You know she knew already what happened.

Q: But you were taken to **Kistarcsa** from the prison before you were picked up or were you picked up by **Muci** and then for some reason –

A: No, no, no first we went to **Kistarcsa** and then but she bailed us out. To go –

Q: How did she know you were there?

A: They were probably telling them from **Gúta**.

Q: Still from **Gúta**.

A: Oh from **Nagymagyar**. Pardon, **Nagymagyar**. Where we came from **Nagymagyar** already. Because from that place they gathered the people from the villages to go to ghettos. Someplace else they were in ghetto. They weren't in **Nagymagyar** anymore. Everybody was going to be shipped out so we were shipped to the jail because we were the foreigners. That's the thing. Now I know.

Q: When she picks you up the second time, she takes all three of you to her home.

A: No, to that old uncle **agglegény (unmarried man)** again, the brother of my real relative and I to her house with the two kids and she still had a maid who raised her and her brother. She was non-Jewish girl and she was like a family member.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: Somehow I do but I have to think. It will come back to me because I know when I think sometime it will come back. I tell you her name.

Q: Do you remember the street where she lived?

A: She lived with us.

Q: Where was the street.

A: Oh **Károly Körut 5**.

Q: What part?

A: **Károly Körut 5**, negyedik emelet (fourth floor), közel a Dohány utcai templom (close the synagogue in Dohány Street) . But we don't [go there] she was totally assimilated.



Q: But what was, we might have talked about this so I apologize if we already did, but what was her –

A: Profession?

Q: Did she have a profession?

A: Oh yeah. She had a **bijouterie** in **Szervita tér (square)**. Very fancy. She went every year. She showed me slides from Paris. I was like I'm in heaven. What is she showing me here? You know we were the poor relatives. They had, she was on the road you know. My father's family was more advanced as far as a religion or open minded, like I know they went to opera in Vienna. So that wasn't that religious thing to do. But he kept it because my grandpa **Brichta**, he was a very tough, tough grandpa and we come to him, kiss the hand. Sit down. Don't speak. Only when you are spoken to you know.

Q: And **Muci**. We already talked about the fact that we don't remember her first name, right.

A: **Muci** no, **Muci Bolgár**. But her maiden name, Weinstein.

Q: And that's what side of your family.

A: That is my father's family. Actually you know what they say. I shouldn't cut in, that the name **Brichta** comes from **Jan Hus**. You heard about **Jan Hus**. There were a time always where expulsions and all that. You have to be this religion and not Protestant and not be Catholic. The **Brichtas** came from there supposedly. My brother calls me up, a woman from Bratislava comes and she speaks to him in Slovak and she tells here there is a guy in the Parliament. He was never a Jew and he comes from the tribe and all the **Brichtas** come from there. so what am I going to do? I was still without parents. Right.

Q: So at this point in time you're in **Károly Körut 5**.(boulevard), right.

A: Pardon me. I am on **Károly Körut 5. Madách tér, Vilmos Császár ut...**

I remember it like I am now there. And this.

Q: Tell me a little bit about that. What was the apartment like there?

A: Oh gorgeous. Elegant. Crystal. You know, chandeliers. Persian rugs. She had already the silent videos. How you –

Q: Silent movies.

A: Movies, yes, everything.

Q: What was her husband doing?

## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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A: I have no idea.

Q: Was he around?

A: No he was already –

Q: He was already gone in 42, right. Right. How big was that apartment?

A: Oh the maid's quarter, **konyha mellett külön szoba, nagy spájz (separate room next to the kitchen, big larder)**. I slept in one of the rooms on a bed. The kids slept with **Muci** in her bedroom. But then later the **Bolgár** family came to live with her too already when the **nyilas** came.

Q: But that's six months later.

A: Exactly.

Q: So what happens in March?

A: She wanted, yeah when she heard that in late spring that no danger in the, you know they were connected somehow with some underground. I don't know which one. Get the papers. I pay for the guy. He will get them. Guess what?

Q: Wait. She's paying to do what exactly?

A: To take us back to Bratislava. Not to be sent to the Germany.

Q: And this is what the false papers, false identities –

A: exactly and come the **csendőr (gendarmerie) at Komárom**. That was the border then.

Q: Were you on the train alone?

A: No with my brother and sister.

Q: No adult supervision.

A: One that guy, one guy. I don't know who he was.

Q: A guy that she entrusted you with.

A: Yes.

Q: But you don't know what organization it was.

A: I have no clue. I have no clue. We go there. **Gyertek, másszatok le, ti három zsidó gyerek! (Come on, you three Jewish kids, get down)**

Q: How did they know, how did they know it was false?

A: I guess we were dressed maybe different. We didn't look so peasant-ish. Like the peasants. I don't know. Do I know? He asked me the question how does it sound, hulyeseg ? (stupid). But they were actually kind to us. You know what they did. They took us to their jail. And they brought us food to eat. **Gyerekek, kaptok enni, míg jön egy traszport és aztan mentek tovább Németországba. (Kids, you get to eat, we wait for a transport, and then you will go to Germany)**

Q: This was in **Komárom**.

A: **Komárom**. On the corner. We figure we go wherever they take us. What did we know. Everybody was silent, even the Hungarian Jews didn't know that they going to be the ovens.

Q: You were with your two siblings.

A: Yeah.

Q: Your brother was 15 by then.

A: Yeah but he didn't know exactly that there was a burning. The key people there.

Q: Can you recall what month this was when she was trying to send you back.

A: I tell you it was before the summer she came.

Q: But was it spring or was it summer.

A: It was close to summer. I think it was like light clothes I was wearing.

Q: Where, were you in Budapest did you need to wear a star?

A: Oh yes.

Q: When?

A: I don't remember exactly but soon after. In fact they checked if it's sewed properly. If they cannot put a pen through. In between. It had to be tightly and then I walking –

Q: Hold on. I'm very interested in this. Who sewed your stars?

A: I don't know if it was the help.

Q: The help was still there.

A: Oh she was there through the end.

Q: Did they make you move out of that apartment at any time?

A: Not immediately til you know what happened. We had to go down a few times. Order all the Jews down from the apartments to the second floor was a big yard. And of course I was between them. But **Muci** didn't have to go down. So I was there alone. She gave me a couple of dresses to go to the train station. I didn't know for what.

Q: But they didn't take you?

A: Nobody took me. I went down by myself. **Menj le a második emeletre! Két ruha volt rajtam, egy szveter, hogy ne fázzak (Go down to the second floor, I was wearing two dresses and a cardigan not to get cold)**

Q: **Ez nyáron volt? (was it in the summer?)**

A: **Nem tudom pontosan (I don't exactly know)**

Q: **Ez többször történt? (Did this happen more than one times?)**

A: **Egyszer vagy kétszer (once or twice).**

Q: but hold on, hold on. So you're saying some very interesting things. You said **Muci** didn't go down. Actually you said **Muci** didn't have to go down.

A: No.

Q: Why was that?

A: Probably because the foreignness. I was a foreigner. I was a foreign.

Q: I understand that. The other people, were they not Hungarian Jews.

A: I don't know. Maybe they were but they spoke Hungarian. Just I speak by then Hungarian good because I learned in **Nagymagyar** already good.

Q: So just remind me at this point you are separated from your siblings, right.

A: Yes, alone.

Q: Did **Muci** wear a star?

A: I didn't even. She didn't go out.

Q: Ever

A: I don't remember. I really don't remember.

Q: How did the days go by? What did you do?

A: What did I do? You know what. She did really well. Ok she had a beautiful place and I says I like to help out in cleaning the house. She taught me how to do the, on my foot, how to

Q: Shine

A: Shine the floor. You know. For me it was like going roller skate or something. You know it was fun. Then she had bars for exercise. I liked to do that. The kids liked, they had a piano.

Q: What kind of bars?

A: Round where you can pull yourself up like in a playground.

Q: Like gymnastics.

A: yes and I liked always to do. Because I had a aunt in Bratislava, an uncle from my father, not the uncle. A brother who was a rabbi in **Edelgasse**, in Bratislava and she was a very high class woman from **Bukovina**. Seamstress, first class. The Germans kept her alive because she sewed the elegant gowns for the wives of the SS and the nice, even when Budapest was already. She went to Budapest too. They kept here there.

Q: This was a family member.

A: My aunt.

Q: What was her name?

A: **Brichta**. Her first name I have to look it up but it's here. I have it written down. I have –

Q: So getting back to those days when you're at **Károly Körut 5**. Do you go outside at any time, for any reason.

A: I did with the star. I wasn't afraid what can happen.

Q: What would you go out to do?

A: **Hozzal valamit haza. You know, vasarolni. (Bring something home. Shopping)**

Q: You ran errands.

A: Oh yes. Gladly. I wasn't afraid.

Q: Did you have any bad experiences. Did anyone say anything about your star?

A: Not, not it wasn't too long because it didn't take too long for the – in fact you know what was happening then. Not everybody wore the star. I remember that because I see my brother. He never came to visit me. But I went to visit him. He didn't wear a star. Because you know what. He was told there were already Germans there with the Hungarians plotting for deportations. Somehow. They wanted to do that beforehand. Before **Szálasi**. You know what. **(Aber Du sprichst so ein gutes Deutsch. Du bist kein Jud'- you speak such good German. You are not Jewish!)** He didn't look like a Jew.

Q: Is that what they said to his ---

A: To my brother.

Q: To your brother. Remind me who were they staying with. they were staying with the **agglegény (unmarried man)**. But we don't remember his name.

A: You will remember in a minute if I can think of him. My brother he really knows it. Hm. That, I didn't even bother putting it down because I had such a bad experience there. You know what.

Q: Where was it in the city?

A: In Budapest.

Q: Where?

A: There. What happened is I lived with **Muci** right. And she had one brother. Who was Weinstein Pali. And he was in the army, some kind of a **munkaszolgálatos (forced laborer)**. But on a higher rank somehow. You know I don't know. With money you could do something. So he arranged the papers to go to the **zárda**. So I went with him to the **zárda** too, they took me.á

Q: But this was already in October.

A: Yes. But when we came back. Then from **Érsekújvár** but they caught us again. I told you. They took us first to **Kistarcsa** jail.

Q: Are we talking about the fall or the spring?

A: That was in between, before winter yet. Before **Szálasi**, because in Bratislava there were no more Jews. There were no more transports going through Bratislava.

Q: Right. So actually there's two things I would like more information on. When you're caught trying to go back to Bratislava.

A: Yeah I told you.

Q: But what happens there?

A: What happened. We were in **Komárom** waiting with the gendarmerie for a train to somehow somebody exploded the

Q: Tracks –

A: The train tracks sabotage. (Soviet?) attack.

Q: The gendarmes sent you back to Budapest.

A: No, they came with us. They took us back.

Q: Where did they drop you off?

A: First to the jail again and then to **Kistarcsa**.

Q: So this is the third time you were –

A: Exactly true. I was there plenty times.

Q: And that's when you went to **Kistarcsa**

A: Exactly and then she bailed me out

Q: Third time

A: Me and the uncle who was my, her mother's brother took my sister and her. But you know what happened. In a hurry. After a few months came the **Szálasi**. My brother went immediately to run to the Red Cross.

Q: Well hold on because this is getting very exciting but I want to make sure that we're documenting everything. So when you are caught trying to go back to Slovakia, sent back, what month are we?

A: Approximately July maybe.

Q: When we were talking about what you spent your days doing and sometimes –

A: Ah what was I doing ok. We just played around.

Q: With whom?

A: With the bigger boy who was younger the brother of youth (laughs). I'm sorry. He was younger than me, four years younger. Ok.

Q: HE was living at that apartment.

A: Oh yeah. He is going to be now 80 in January. So he had piano lesson, came a woman teaching him English, mind you.

Q: This is during the summer of 44.

A: This is during the war.

Q: But were you there –

A: Oh sure. He used to sing. I was singing.

Q: Hold on so **Gyurka** is **Muci's** brother's son.

A: Big. No **Muci's** son, big son and she had the small son. They are still alive, the two boys.

Q: What is the other son's name.

A: **Andris**.

Q: And are they both **Bolgár**.

A: **Bolgár. Ott laknak, van nekik valami nyári ház, közel Budapesthez (They live there, they have a summer house close to Budapest)**

Q: So **Gyurka** had had private lessons.

A: Oh yes, piano lessons and English lessons.

Q: Did the lessons continue when you were there?

A: Yes and I learned and I was a better student than him. I wanted to learn and then you know what **Muci** said, I'm going to invite my women friends. There is no men any more around and we're going to have a card game, a séance. You know they called in the spirits. We are big enough. Come, put up a play. You speak German, Miri. I remember like today. (**German song** – sings a song) Like Marlene Dietrich. I was acting for them and they were clapping.



Q: These lady friends spoke German?

A: No. Hungarian.

Q: Did **Muci** speak German?

A: **Muci**, yes. She knew and she spoke French too. She was very intelligent.

Q: What was happening with her shop?

A: Now after the war it went bong. The kids inherited.

Q: What was happening to her shop when you were there in 1944.

A: Somebody took whoever worked there, took it over and she got it back. I guess after the war. She got it back.

Q: Where would you play with **Gyurka**?

A: Just in the house.

Q: Not outside?

A: No.

Q: Did he have to wear a star?

A: I don't remember putting a star on him. Because he never came with me.

Q: Do you remember where your brother was living? What street?

A: I do. **Nagyfuvaros (Street)**.

Q: And Cecelia was with him there?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were they doing those days? Did they have to work?

A: Oh she was helping out to cook there, my sister. And then they were angry at her. I heard the language what they spoke. They said **Hát már udvarolnak neki, mert olyan gyönyörű kék szeme van és göndör a haja (boys are already courting her, because she has such beautiful blue eyes and curly hair)**. Boys were crazy for her. She had such a big beautiful blue eyes and curly hair. You know she was good looking at that time. **Lici**. And they came to serenade to her. And she had to **mosogatni, takarítani (wash the dishes, clean)**

Q: Was your brother working?

A: My brother. I don't know what he did. He was kind of a, he was on the edge somehow because he spoke German and he heard a lot of Germans speaking and he heard some underground thing what people have to go and do. He was very clever.

Q: What did he hear?

A: He heard that you have to find a place between the orphans and the Red Cross and with your name --

Q: In October --

A: You will be safe there.

Q: This was in October.

A: And you know what happened. Just they took my sister already to the ghetto with my uncles which were deported. To the train station. And he came with another person who looked like he was probably an Aryan. And spoke German or something and they went and they said this woman comes with us. We have to take her out of here and they let it go. What's the difference. One more or one less you know.

Q: That's how they saved Cecelia.

A: That's it and she was til end of the war with them and I was first in **Hermina** street in the **zárda**

Q: This is the convent.

A: Convent. But somebody spilled the beans.

Q: Hold on. We're jumping ahead again. So between the spring and the fall of 44 --

A: We went back again to --

Q: You tried to get back. You were caught. You were sent back but basically you're at the **Károly körut** residence that whole time. Is that right?

A: After. From **Kistarcsa**. Yeah.

Q: From **Kistarcsa**. And that whole time your other two siblings are in **Nagyfuvaros (street)**.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And are they, they are with that family. Are there other people living there too?

A: No just two older guys who were cousins. Him and another cousin and my sister and my brother.

Q: Ok. And so what happens at one point you said you have to go down, you had many layers of clothing on you. You had to go down –

A: That's when they heard there will be deportation already. it was rumored but we didn't know what they were going to work for Germany.

Q: Where did they take you from, from the house?

A: No place. We stayed only downstairs on second floor is a big like you have a terrace outside –

Q: Courtyard

A: Courtyard. Correct.

Q: How long did you stay there

A: They waited for the orders. They waited for the people went to marched to the railroad because there were plenty already there.

Q: But you never marched to the railroad.

A: I never marched to the railroad.

Q: So you have to stay downstairs and sooner or later you went back upstairs.

A: Exactly. And then another time it happened. And the same thing happened.

Q: Were you worried at all when they sent you down?

A: Not at all. I see whatever we go with those guys will be –

Q: Did **Muci** say anything why you have to go down?

A: Not a single word. You have to go where they call you because you are a foreign citizen. That's it.

Q: Ok and did anything else happen while you were living with **Muci**? Were there any raids? Were there any –

A: Not by us. Not by us. Really not for me. I didn't know. Maybe it happened. To others but not to me. but what happened is I know for a fact from the suburbs they were already deporting sooner the people. Later I did not –

Q: But you only learned this later.

A: I know it now. I read about **zsidó** (Jewish) Budapest so I know it now. My husband didn't want to talk about, he knew because he used to go to Budapest a lot from **Nagymagyar**. Doing business because his father went broke. They wouldn't let the Jews work on the fields. They were farmers.

Q: Did you have enough food when you stayed with **Muci**?

A: Yes. Yes. I mean we had you know normal eating.

Q: Did you ever see any Germans?

A: If I seen.

Q: German soldiers.

A: Yes, just walking in the street with civil clothes of Hungarians and other people. Yes. I heard them speaking.

Q: Did you ever have any interactions with Germans?

A: Nothing. Nothing then. No not in look a little girl who in the hell pays attention to her. Out of the ghetto I was. I wasn't then in the ghetto yet. And then I was in **zárda** so I thought I'm going to be safe there.

Q: So do I understand correctly that from **Muci's** location you go or are taken to the convent because your brother –

A: She went too. **Muci**, she –

Q: You both go.

A: We all go. The whole family with the kids.

Q: Two boys, you.

A: Yeah everybody with the **Mamika**. The whole gang went.

Q: But Cecelia and your brother are –

A: No I didn't know where they were.

Q: And the idea came from your brother?

A: What, no. His, her brother.

Q: Oh it was her brother.

A: Her, **Muci's** brother. He was **munkaszolgálatos [forced laborer]**. She knew.

Q: He knew which convent?

A: I don't know who arranged the convent. But he knew what's happening but they don't speak in front of me.

Q: Do you remember which convent you were –

A: Yeah in **Hermina ut (street)**. There were the nuns. Some of them spoke French and in 2006 I met one who remembers everything. You have the pictures there. I left them on your sofa there. I didn't want to bring it here.

Q: So what was the group called?

A: Oh there were many Jews there.

Q: What was the order called?

A: The order in some Franciscan or something.

Q: Franciscan?

A: The ones they spoke French there. Your daughter speaks so well French. She translated everything to them.

Q: How were you received at the nunnery?

A: Very nicely. We went to pray. We went to convert. We did the whole nine yards. Reports on water or not. Fine.

Q: So they baptized you?

A: Kind of. I say what is it. Do you really think that's going to save me?

Q: How many people were hiding there? Were you hiding?

A: Later.

Q: Ok so you were not hiding yet. How many other people were there?

A: They were hiding. Nobody knew that there were Jews there. But somebody. How many. How shall I tell you. It's hard to say the words but I'm sure if you look up that part. Thirty, 40 people. I don't know. And some kids, were a few kids. But what was. I was always willing to move around. You know help on the stair. Or you need to clean. Many times **menj a spajzba (go to the larder)** so I went. There was like a staircase and under the staircase was a door built in. You don't see it. You know how.

Q: It's a trap door. It's a hiding –

A: But it was for food and I know where the key was because they sent me to, so when they squealed on us, somebody. **Schnell, schnell, schnell, heraus, raus, raus** (in German: quickly, quickly, out...) I wake up in the morning. I am in a line and **Muci** is gone.

Q: Well wait a second. Just for, to understand what time we are talking about. When do you arrive at the nunnery?

A: Would I be smart to know. I wouldn't. Not the date. But it was beginning of **Szálasi**. Totally the beginning because they knew it will be massive deportation.

Q: So it was after the **Szálasi** coup?

A: Yes.

Q: And when they take you in and the baptize you, do they explain that you are supposed to say that you're not Jewish. What did they explain to you?

A: Nothing honey. **Gyertek gyerekek, ti keresztények vagytok...(Come children, you are Christians)**

Q: They don't tell you not to tell people.

A: Nothing. No more star. Nothing in the –

Q: How do you take the star off of your clothes?

A: Oh I had it only on one clothes. Nothing else. On one. And then I have no papers. I have nothing.

Q: Did they tell you to say you were an orphan?

A: No. They said you just pray and don't worry about anything. God will help us.

Q: Did they ever let you outside?

A: Are you kidding? Nobody go outside, no. **Muci** was there too. But you know I was just wandering around but one day somebody spilled the beans. The Germans came.

Q: When was that? How long were you there before they squealed.

A: This I don't know exactly but least a month I would say. I knew everything, every early there and everything. How to go about.

Q: Did you have enough food when you were there for that month?

A: I wasn't hungry really but you know it was kind of careful already.

Q: Describe to me what happened when somebody squealed on you?

A: Not on me, on every, on the group. They came.

Q: Who came?

A: The Germans, early morning to make sure that everybody –

Q: How did you know they were German?

A: Because they spoke German. **Magyarul is beszéltek, de németül is (they spoke in Hungarian, but also in German)**

Q: And you heard them?

A: Yes. Hungarian, German too. But **gyerünk zsidok, gyerünk zsidók (come on Jews, come on Jews)**. But **Muci** wasn't there anymore. At night before when they knew that there will be something. I tell you those guys had information. The brother took him.

Q: Took **Muci**.

A: **Muci** and the whole family. **Gyurka, Andris** to the maid's house. She was non-Jewish.

Q: She lived in Budapest.

A: She lived in Budapest. And it so happened, I wasn't that stupid. I heard where the sister lives.

Q: The sister or the maid?

A: The maid and the sister lived. They had an apartment. Separate. So they came from us to go and march. Right.

Q: So you knew that **Muci** and her family was escaping the night before.

A: No I was just –

Q: You just knew where the maid lived ok.

A: **Muci** wasn't there. I was looking for her. Right, and for the kids. So we were together yesterday. We are here today. Oh no they are not here. Maybe they left already. I say what, we cannot figure out everything. Not, nobody was there. They maybe come to the sister. They were hiding for a while and then they took them to another hiding place to make sure that they will be safe. They left me behind and I went to that –

Q: To that door underneath the staircase.

A: I knew it was upstairs the key. I took that key and there were already six people hiding in the corner and they were shivering adults. I was the only kid there. So I was child. You know people scared. They knew what was happening. I was an idiot. For me I thought it was Indians and Americans.

Q: But you knew enough that you needed to hide. So what –

A: That much.

Q: What made you think you needed to hide whereas earlier –

A: I was a Jew. This I learned in Bratislava.

Q: But earlier you were told to go down to the courtyard and you did it without worrying that you needed to hide.

A: No because everybody. I couldn't say to **Muci** no. I was with the star of David and I was a foreigner. I say I have to go.

Q: But here you knew you had to hide. Why?

A: Why? Because I heard rumors. People were talking. Adults between themselves and I pay attention.

Q: Do you remember anything you heard?

A: **Viszik öket el dolgozni (they are taken away to work)**, they say. That's all.

Q: And that seemed scary enough that you needed to –

A: Well I says, I too little for **dolgozni (work)**. You know I wasn't I was 12 something, 12. Right. What **dolgozni (work)**. I do what I can. But I knew kids, but I wasn't afraid. Oh I am stupid. I'm slow. I'll be honest with you.



Q: And when you ran to get the key and then you went hiding.

A: Then I was scared. Then I was scared. And I knew something will happen. If people hide like this and they were talking, I heard what they were saying. **Kivisznak a Dunához, megölnék. Megyünk a vízbe (They take us to the Danube and will kill us. We go into the water.)** I learned to swim in Bratislava.

Q: They said that.

A: I said so in coming years but so we go to the rug. I learned to swim when I was young in Bratislava.

Q: So you were hiding under the trap door. The adults were telling you to be quiet. And what happens then.

A: After everything quiet down, past midnight, dark outside.

Q: When was the raid, was it morning, evening.

A: Early morning.

Q: So you stayed there 12 hours?

A: Stayed there a long time, trust me. But there was food there see.

Q: Because that's where they kept the food.

A: Exactly so we weren't really hungry. But we come slowly out. Of course the nuns had their shock.

Q: The nuns are still there?

A: Oh yeah, the nuns stayed there. The nuns, the one nun tells me, Mártika, because Márta **Brichta. Te nem vagy zsidó (you are not a Jew)** And she gave me a big chain with the cross you know. **Itt nem nessze van a (here closeby is the]** Sacre Coeur. **Menj oda, menj oda (go there, go there)**

Q: What was the Sacre Coeur.

A: Sacre Coeur was the nunnery.

Q: But this was a nunnery.

A: But the other nunnery had kids too. I didn't know that.

Q: So she was sending you to another nunnery.

A: Exact. Sacre Coeur. The French one. Knock on the big door. They will open you the door. You can go in but I figure myself. why should I go to the nunnery. I heard the address where the maid lives.

Q: What was the address?

A: I forgot. The address, I went there. I knock on the door. Maybe: **Ki van ott? Keresem, elfelejtettem hogy hívták a cselédet (Who is there? I am looking for, but forgot the name of the maid)** forgot the name. So I says I want to talk to her.]. She knew I was in Jew trouble. She didn't open even the door. So I went to the nunnery and I knocked –

Q: And this was in the middle of the night.

A: In middle. And I went by the wall always. So nobody will see me. It was cold, winter already then.

Q: Was there anyone on the streets?

A: I knocked on the door.

Q: Were you afraid, running around in Budapest in the middle of the night?

A: You know what, you get used to it to run like a dog. I went there and I knocked on the door.

Q: And this was –

A: Please let me in. **Akarok imátkozni, fázom (I would like to pray, I am cold)** She opened the door. She put me with other kids. Guess what. After three days they come and march us.

Q: Did they ask you who you were when they took you in the Sacre Coeur nuns.

A: I told her. I told her that the nun told me to come to you.

Q: But did you tell her you were a Jew?

A: But I was already with the thing. I say I am already a Christian kid and I pray this, how did they say. I forgot. I knew how to pray.

Q: The Lord's prayer.

A: Yeah just the main thing like Baruch Atah. You know.

Q: But you didn't tell her you were a Jew. You just said I'm coming from that nunnery. They said come here.

A: Yeah but she, they are not—

Q: I understand. I'm just curious what you said.

A: So she took me in. I had breakfast.

Q: How many other children were there?

A: There were a pack of kids actually there. A whole like, at least served the kids. Just kids.

Q: Did you talk to any of them?

A: Guess what. After two days they come, kids march.

Q: Who's coming?

A: The Hungarians and the Germans.

Q: Do you remember if Germans were there?

A: By the uniform maybe but I am not sure if I heard German to speak but Hungarian.  
**Gyerünk, kölykök megyünk (Come on brats, come on brats we are leaving).**

Q: So this was three days after –

A: Maybe three, maybe four. I don't know.

Q: Did they tell you where they were taking you?

A: **Megyünk máshova (we go somewhere else).** They start marching. Adults marching and other already marching toward the Danube.

Q: The adults were at the nunnery.

A: No, I don't know from where they marching but we –

Q: Did they take any of the nuns?

A: No. none. But we maybe they did but not that I know of. I cannot, not that I know. One column this way, one column go this way. Slowly we are the kids that are, **gyerünk kölykök, gyerünk kölykök (come on brats, come on)** again. All of a sudden not too far from the Danube, a big plaza. **Egy olyan körút, de már nem tudom melyik (like a boulevard, but I don't know, which one)** They talk with the man. He looked like a German to me in the, Wallenberg. On one thing. Kids go my way. Marching this way. The other one go to the dying.

## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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Q: So you're saying that Wallenberg appeared –

A: I had Swedish paper.

Q: When did you have Swedish paper.

A: Over there I got it. and I –

Q: Well but this is before

A: Before I went in.

Q: Ok so you're taken from Sacre Coeur. You're marched towards the Danube and on a large street --

A: Large square. The round one. It was even a statue but I don't know which one. I don't remember any more honey.

Q: So that is where he intercepts.

A: Yes and he took to the Swedish houses.

Q: But what did he, do you remember if he said anything. What did he say who was he, where is he taking the children.

A: We just go. I was always in the middle. I never was in the front. So that much I know. Never been in the front and never be too much in the middle either. Just go on the side.

Q: Why did you know that?

A: Maybe you find an escape or something. Then I learned already it's no good. And we heard a lot of shooting but it was very, lots of shots and very cold and people were bombarded already as a **szőnyeg (carpet)** bomber. We didn't allowed even to go to the shelter. We were looking and laughing **ide megy a bomba, nem ide megy (the bomb is falling here, not here)**. If he didn't hit us we are here. There we already hungry. In the Swedish house.

Q: So when Wallenberg intercepts your group you don't really hear how he gets to take the children.

A: No I didn't know but they gave us document in that building. With my picture on it. I don't know.

Q: Which building did he take you?

A: I don't know. It's a Swedish house there. From outside the Swedish flag was on it. That's what I think I remember but we got inside a paper and I used to have too thin, I have very small

hair. **Két copf** (two braidings) and I had it with my picture til we came to America and here I got it lost. I had it must be in the Swedish consulate.

Q: Did they take your picture there?

A: Yes with my pictures stand down, Swedish house. After two weeks the **nyilas (Arrow Cross)** came, **be a gettóba** (to the ghetto)

Q: Can you tell me about what the Swedish house looked like?

A: That was people with apartments living in crowded quarters. Some in the basement because there were so many bombardments. We didn't even bother going down any more.

Q: Why, why didn't you bother.

A: Because we wanted to be free and run around. Maybe hide someplace or something. The rest of them didn't have parents either. From Sacre Coeur already.

Q: Were these children –

A: Mostly Jewish.

Q: But they were staying together in this house.

A: No everybody got other places to go to.

Q: Other houses?

A: No other apartments that wasn't like a ghetto. It just crowded quarters.

Q: But the whole house was full of Jews who were under the protection of Wallenberg.

A: Correct. Some had food, some didn't so some had a little more some less. But this lasted very little time.

Q: One week.

A: Maybe two weeks, maybe one week. I don't remember times --

Q: How did you pass the time there?

A: Oh we were running around in the yard. It was a courtyard there.

Q: You weren't worried after –

A: No **most a svéd házakban, meg vagyunk menekülve (now in the Swedish houses, we are saved)**. Even the adults thought that they are safe. but then they came the **nyilas, be a gettóba (the Arrow Cross, to the ghetto)**

Q: How did you know they were Yiddish?

A: Because there wasn't anybody else who spoke Hungarian. They didn't speak German. This was the dirty work they did, you know.

Q: Who did they take from the building?

A: Everybody.

Q: Everybody. They emptied the building?

A: Everybody. If you didn't come they put the bullet to you, right there.

Q: Where did they take you?

A: To the main ghetto but I don't know which entrance it was. But there was a big line. And in the line already I got to know so many people. **Hát mit csináltak itt gyerekek, mint a kutya (what are you doing here children, like dogs)** in the courtyard they say you walking like a pack of dogs together. One of them she was kind of an artist. She had a studio someplace in Italy. She spoke Italian. **Nincs anyuka, nyincs apuka, gyertek velem (no mama, no papa, come with me)**

Q: This is a woman –

A: A woman in the line to go to –

Q: But they had never seen her before?

A: Never. I say I'm not going with nobody. I was fed up to go to adults. I didn't want to be, I want to be only with the kids I say. She says I - **te hülye vagy (you are stupid)** inaudible). I didn't care. I said going to shoot me, let them shoot me. Then they enter by a gate. I still had two earrings on me. **Gyere vedd már le, ugyis megölnék (come, take it off, you will be killed anyway)**

Q: Who said to take the earrings –

A: The guy who took us in. And you have money. You have watch. I said we have nothing but we have a earring. Oh this, **ugyis megölnék (you will be killed anyway)** and they will kill you anyway they can.

Q: Who said this?

A: The guy who took us, by the, the Hungarian with the gun.

Q: So he was a guard.

A: Oh yeah and there were a lot of people around us. In the white snow already dead. One his brain was blown off and it was still moving. I see it with my own eyes.

Q: This is inside of the ghetto.

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Was this the first time you saw dead bodies?

A: I don't think so because in Budapest you could see beforehand already people on the street, because it was a lot of bombardment. But who was dead and lying already there. Ok but this one, first time. And then.

Q: First time what, what was –

A: That I see a person being shot and the body still the brain moves outside the head.

Q: But you didn't see him get shot.

A: No, no but I seen now ([**phrase in other language -?? Not Hungarian, not German**], you know they go down and the blood and you know. We were, so we march. They march us to a school.

Q: Inside the ghetto.

A: Inside the ghetto. Down in the basement because it, there is no other place to go.

Q: The guards are still with you

A: Yes, they marched us to that place. So we had to go where they put us. And they were downstairs. The level was like there and we were down like in a gym or something. You know a **pince (basement)** where –

Q: It was underground?

A: Under yeah, but it was good because it was already packed with people. Go find a place and you'll be here.

Q: Not only children.

A: Oh the other kids too.

Q: But the people underground were not only children.

A: Not only, adults.

Q: Do you remember which high school or school this was.

A: I don't know the name. And then next day we were hungry. Maybe a little bread or something. You know what we do. We went to the people who brought the food with them. We stood there and we looked into their mouth. They felt bad for us. They gave us a piece. What could you do. We went out to the snow. Licking snow, (sound effect). It's ok.

Q: So you were allowed to go outside.

A: In the yard, of the school yard.

Q: But not outside of the ghetto.

A: Oh yeah you could **spazieren** (German: walk) in the ghetto. They came anyway. They did all kinds of there was a butcher shop. It says kosher, bazaar kosher. From the bottom til the top people were dead people lying up on each other. And I stood there and I was watching.

Q: Why were they in the butcher shop?

A: They were dead, one top of the other. They had to remove them from the streets, not to just hang out in the street. The Jews had to clean it up.

Q: It was used as a morgue.

A: Pardon me.

Q: It was used as a morgue.

A: Exactly. Like sardines. So I looked. Now I tell you comes January and I see snow. I am in Budapest. That scene never lets me go.

Q: The bodies. That scene.

A: Lined up like this.

Q: Did you talk about this to anyone? The other children?

A: To whom. The kids were seeing it there. They did the same what I did. I was kind of the vagabond because I, we went into the broken houses where nobody was already only the shell to dig in and see where can we hide maybe. I say come on kids, let's go.

Q: Why did you feel you needed to hide?



A: To hide because I've seen death enough in front of me. Right.

Q: But you were already underground with the other people?

A: But that underground was still their place. It was just the place that we couldn't live any place above the ground because it was constantly the shooting and everything.

Q: But did you feel that you needed another place to hide?

A: I would have gone. We tried with the kids but and we started going and we seen everywhere just dead, dead, dead. What the hell are we going?

Q: You were seeing dead people on the street?

A: Oh yeah everywhere honey. If they were dead, but for fun, shooting, target shooting.

Q: And you were trying to find another hiding place.

A: I would have with another girl, kid. I went together with her because the two of us stuck together. She didn't have anybody and I didn't have anybody.

Q: What was her name?

A: I forgot.

Q: Did you find another hiding place?

A: No that's where we were all of a sudden, ooh, ooh, there was a lot of shooting. And supposing they were supposed to have bombs all around us and to blow us up. Not only the school. The whole ghetto. But the Russians beat us. Then I hear Russians speaking, it's a little bit like Slovak too. This will be our ticket out. You know and that it was.

Q: How long were you in the ghetto.

A: Not long. I don't know how long but it was long enough to learn what life is all about.

Q: You must have had very little food there.

A: I was like skin and like a bone.

Q: You had not brought food with you when you were –

A: Nothing are you kidding.

Q: So how did you survive.

A: I tell you like begging. Somebody seen us standing by them when they eat some and of course eat when **akarsz valamit, itt van egy darabka (you want something, here is a little piece)** They brought food with them who were coming with the you know they had, we were naked as they say. And not only naked, we were wet too. The shoe was already full of water. We put newspapers in it. Or above it or under it. To go.

Q: Did anyone have any kind of medical problems because of this?

A: I apparently had but I didn't know that I had it. You know I had something with my lung. A hole in my lung. I don't know how and what because that came out after already all this and the teeth were moving left and right. You know, no nutrients.

Q: Did you catch any diseases?

A: You know what we called. The only thing we caught is, it was when the Russians were already there but we were as a result we had lice. Even the little hair what I had. **Rühes (scabies)**. You know what that is. I even have ugly spots on my body. Look this is now. Look at this. I qualify for something here right. But I see who pays attention to me.

Q: When did you start having lice?

A: There are some –

Q: In the ghetto.

A: Yeah because what happened is after the Russians came so I went back to **Muci's** house because I knew where she lived, **Károly körut**.

Q: Just one question before. This whole time the nunneries, the ghetto, do you have any information on your brother and sister.

A: Nothing and not about **Muci** either.

Q: Well you assumed that **Muci** was staying with the sister of the maid but you didn't know.

A: I didn't know. So when we got liberated and –

Q: Tell me about liberation first. How did you know you were liberated?

A: Because they opened the gate. **Szabadok vagyunk! (we are free)**  
A **dromsta (???)** started to say **Itt van a mentiség! (we escaped!)**. The people who were in the ghetto said **Most mar ölik a magyarokat, nem minket! Nemcsak a zsidókat ölik, mar ölik a magyarokat is. Itt vannak az oroszok! (Now the Hungarians are killed, not we. Not only the Jews are killed, now the Hungarians are too! Here are the Russians)**. You know so they were happy to hear. But I didn't know that after they came out from the ghetto and Budapest had

tough fights. You know every floor sometimes, top was still this and the Russians came from top take down and all of that. It was brutal. I guess I was by then hardened or not understanding just let's go and have some food you know. And warm clothes. I go back to the place where **Muci** was with my little friend.

Q: **Károly körut.**

A: **Károly körut 5.** She was still in the bunker down. She couldn't come up because half of the house was bombed. Her apartment was kind of gone. And we go and we find her there. With the whole family, but not the whole family. Then my brother stood those two older guys they were taken and her mother in law and **Bolgár** the whole family was taken and didn't come back. Only one woman. From concentration camp.

Q: Did you actually find her in the bunker?

A: I did and she was in the bunker with her mother and the two kids and she could get another person's apartment and she gave me even to eat in her for about maybe a week. And then she says honey. I'm sorry. My whole family is wiped out. I heard that your brother is alive and your sister. **Kőbányán, A Vöröskeresztben (in Kőbánya, in the Red Cross).** Go and find him. There was no transportations. The half of the Budapest was still shootings. And everything. And me and that little girl started to walk by –

Q: The little girl who stayed with you that week with **Mucika.**

A: Just for a few days and then she went. I caught her again. I started to walk and I started asking. **Hol van a Vöröskereszt Kőbányán? (where is the Red Cross?)** But it was dark already. We were so tired and so hungry. What are we going to do? We started knocking on people's doors. Not Jews. Please we are hungry. We are looking for the Red Cross. We want some food. Would you let us in just on the floor to be a little warm. We go early morning. One guy and a wife was nice. They let us in the kitchen on the floor. They gave us a little bread and something to drink. **Hajnalban mentek tovább (you are leaving at dawn).** Comes you know daylight. We go. We went. He opened the door. Out we went. We walked another day. We found the Red Cross. One kid.

Q: How did you know how to get to **Kőbánya.**

A: I was asking. There was no transportation. There was shootings but no transportation.

Q: So that one couple helped you. Did you ask other people for help?

A: Yeah and they slammed the door at us. They slammed the door. They have had it. You know. Then you are involved, who wants, just like have you seen Faithless. That brought me back my memories. **Hát én itt laktam, Mi az? Tünj el innen! (I used to live here. What? Get out of here!)**

Q: So you get to **Kőbánya** and you're with your friend? Why is your friend coming with you? Is there someone?

A: She has nobody so I says it's better to walk with somebody than alone. Besides we were scared of the Russians. Anything was woman was six years old, they were raping or eight years old.

Q: How did you know?

A: Because we were told. They rape everybody and they have watch us from here til here and they ---

Q: Who told you they were raping people?

A: In the street you hear, what they talk. I knew the language already, Hungarian. **Mindenkit megerőszakolnak (they rape everybody)** And then we go there and you know what you come to the Red Cross. They took us in. My brother has typhus. He almost died. On the thing, he was killed like oh like this. And **Lici** she was upstairs with the girls. There was an attic room in there. There a big closet was covering up for the door to the attic and that's where we sat every night for at least ten days til there was no more Russians coming.

Q: So you're saying that the closet was covering up the door to the attic.

A: The girls.

Q: To keep it secret.

A: Yes.

Q: So all the girls were hidden?

A: There, exactly. Whoever wasn't was raped so it's up to you. You want to be raped you stay down there.

Q: You were in that room too.

A: I was there. Sitting with them.

Q: You were 13. 12.

A: Not quite 13. Not yet. 1940, around there you know almost. What's the difference.

Q: What did you understand or did you understand what that meant? The word rape.

A: Rape, oh that I understood.

Q: Why?

A: Because they said when you get your period you get pregnant when you are raped.

Q: Who told you that?

A: I heard it from the bigger ones. I was always the small one.

Q: So other children discussed sexual violence.

A: Yes, oh yes I'm sure so, of course. **Azok mindenkire raámásznak. Ha nem akkor megölnek (They climb on everyone. If [you don't let them] they kill you)** And then you know what happened. From that Red Cross in a hurry they tried to alleviate the hunger and it was bad times to **Szeged** by train.

Q: For everyone.

A: Just the kids.

Q: Was your sister there?

A: Sister, my brother too but they had ---

Q: Your brother was healthy enough to travel?

A: After, after he was well.

Q: How long did it take for him to get well.

A: I don't know exactly. It was at least it was actually how shall I tell you. Two months maybe or less. They got some medication or something for him. Otherwise he would have died.

Q: Was there enough food in those two months. This is --

A: Not really. That's why they took the--

Q: February.

A: No it was around March, April when we went down to **Szeged**. To the, with the Red Cross in wagons. Like when you were only kids were in that like with the kettle thing but **Szeged**. And they came families. The bigger kids went to work on farm and I was put in with a woman who was a seamstress and she was sewing and she was a very good friend with the Russians. She had food. And I come there and they make food and they stuffed my stomach on an empty one. I got so sick they had to shift me to the hospital.

Q: Describe the sickness. What was it?

A: I, my stomach couldn't bear rich food. Bacon, bread, and whatever. **Egyél, egyél, egyél** (eat, eat, eat) I got sick. I thought that I was hollering like mad. Besides I was afraid to stay where this woman was good friends with the Russians. I didn't want to go back to her.

Q: You were afraid of the Russians.

A: Yes. Look they were raping everybody. Why would I want to be raped. Besides I was religious. Not supposed to touch me.

Q: Did this woman know that you were a Jewish person.

A: I don't think so.

Q: You didn't talk about being Jewish.

A: Everywhere was the cross. I said it's not a good ticket to be a Jew.

Q: How long do you stay with this person? In **Szeged**

A: Oh not too long because I got sick after she fed me. I couldn't bear it. I was throwing up. Yeah they gave me or clean up or whatever they did. I don't know if I'm going to live or die. I like to have died.

Q: How long were you in the hospital?

A: At least a couple of days, this came another lady. A little peasant lady and she prepared me a really nice room. She put a huge cross above my bed. I said no this is already a curse by now. I don't know if I can do it. You know what I did. She gave me food and she wanted to really help me. Just delicate and rice or something. I don't know where she got it. She must have had it. After breakfast I took off back to the Red Cross. I didn't have clothes, I didn't have nothing. What can I do?

Q: How did you know how to get back to the Red Cross.

A: I asked where is the headquarter. And I went. Then I got, he was a totally assimilated Jew. With a woman who was not a Jew at all. And he survived because he dealt with **gabona** (**grains**), you know this was, he had a maid and I was always with a maid.

Q: I'm sorry. Where was this.

A: **Szeged**.

Q: This was after you go back to the Red Cross.

A: They gave me this person.

Q: A new person.

A: And they didn't have kids.

Q: What was their name?

A: I wish, I had. I have to look it up. At home I have the names but I am not sure if I have it.

Q: So they had food at home.

A: Food. Luxury. And he had a library. To die for. I was dying to see a book. To read or do something and had offices there. Everybody what brought and what not brought. But then one day you know **kaszárnya (military barracks)** where the people came back from camps. There was a camp. A guy comes there. And the person who took me in he says **itt van egy zsidó gyerek (here is a Jewish child)**. This is, this is –

Q: How did he know?

A: He knew because I told him I'm a Jew. But for him already I said because I didn't want to be only with non-Jews. I wanted to go back to my roots. That was after I ran away to the Red Cross. Remember where the woman fed me and I got sick. And this guy I seen his library. I said this is educated person. But then I knew he was a Jew because that fellow came to visit and he took him in and they spoke about everything but he celebrated only Christmas. They had a maid. I was eating with the maid. I wasn't eating with them.

Q: But you suspected or you somehow understood that he was Jewish?

A: Exactly, by the culture what I seen by the books and everything and I liked books to read and look at it and everything. Maps you know.

Q: Where were your siblings during this time?

A: Working on farm and then –

Q: Also near **Szeged**.

A: **Szeged** but then they were taking back to Budapest and the relatives, **Muci** she told him go back with your sister, back to **Shkizalife (???)**. She came back from Auschwitz. This was the sister –

Q: She said go back to where?

A: To back to my aunt who was a sister of my father from Auschwitz, from Bratislava. She came back but she lost her son.

Q: She went to Budapest?

A: She was in Budapest. **Ujpest**, but they deported her to Auschwitz. But she came back from Budapest, she went back to Bratislava.

Q: And that's when **Muci** says go find –

A: Go back to your aunt and there is another aunt, now kids. Go back. but I was still in **Szeged**. I didn't know that. One day she writes me a letter there where I was. Because she knew where I was. **Gyere vissza**, come back here. Because I have news for you that your brother and your sister is already in Bratislava back and they will come and get you she says. So I was happy I have a brother and a sister who will come and get me to be with the family in my own home town. But I didn't expect that. We went back you know how yet. Like the people used to travel in India, on top of the train. We climbed up the trains. The Russians still and everything. Before we arrived to **Komárom**.

Q: Who is we?

A: My brother came to get me. There in **vissza** (back).

Q: How did you get back to Budapest from **Szeged**.

A: That's what I told you. First my aunt wrote to me and the Red Cross took me back.

Q: The Red Cross took you back.

A: Yes that not order. And I gave them every year contribution for that. You know that's the least help out other people. Now there is a whole game going again right.

Q: And your brother came down from Bratislava to get you?

A: Yes but they caught us on the border. First you need documents. I didn't –

Q: Were you riding on top of the train?

A: On top of the train holding on for dear life and he was next to me.

Q: It sounds very scary.

A: No, I wasn't. I was lying down and I went with the program.

Q: And you were doing that why?



A: Why, because I wanted to go back. I wanted my parents. I wanted to go back to my roots.

Q: But you knew you needed papers and that's why you were hiding on top of the train.

A: I know we had to go on top of the train. There was no room in the train.

Q: Oh it was because it was too crowded.

A: It was movement of the peoples from the, but, at that time that was already not **Magyarország, Komárom. Komarno**, Czechoslovakia. Again. They stopped us in **Komárom** to the jail there. Comes from the Jewish agency, somebody **Ki van itt zsidó ember, aki Magyarországról jött, honnan ki van itt? (Who is Jewish here, who came from Hungary, where from Hungary, who is here?)** He took us immediately out from there. and this was in the night. We didn't spend there was already some movement going from the Jewish agency to help. I don't know what they called it. UMRA or I don't know what. They organized. Ok that was it.

Q: We're going to pause.

Noemi Szekely-Popescu: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview in Washington, DC on December 1, with Miriam Ofer. The interviewer is Noemi Szekely-Popescu and this is the second half of the interview that we started yesterday, November 30, 2015. I want to go back to a couple of parts of the interview that you gave yesterday and my first question is when you were marched towards the Danube on a wide street and Wallenberg appeared, when did you know who Wallenberg was. Or what did you know who that man was at that time.

Miriam Ofer: I didn't know a thing. I just knew about the Swedish houses and the Swiss houses. But that they are safe and secure but it wasn't that way. Because after a short time we were not marched to the real ghetto.

Q: So you didn't know at the time that Wallenberg saved you who he was.

A: Only after the war. When they started to say that the Russians took him to Russia and he died there. That's when I was aware, oh Wallenberg. I was there. I stay in the house for a short time.

Q: But when did you realize or how did you learn that the man who was there on that street was Wallenberg and not let's say a colleague of his.

A: Oh that is a good question because I didn't know but we had to make big exhibit about Raoul Wallenberg in San Francisco about his history. So I says I was in that house and it's probably he is the one but I wasn't sure if it was him because I was not in front. But I am sure. It must have been his colleagues or somebody from the Swedish, but they were dressed as soldiers and they said this way.

Q: And then I have another question because we talked about this when the, when the tape wasn't rolling but you said that you met your future husband during the war.

A: Yes, **Nagymagyar** where I was staying for a year and a half.

Q: What was his name?

A: At that time. Benjamin **Sherhofer**.

Q: And how did you meet him? What is your first memory of him?

A: Oh he came to my uncle to play chess as I said and he always beat me. In the chess game, but this I knew only when later in life when this, he loved to play chess, my husband. That is I always beat him. Then even my neighbors in San Francisco. He plays, he used to play chess with them. He beat them all. He had a good brain. He was a brilliant person.

Q: What year was he born?

A: 1924.

Q: How old was your uncle? Were they contemporaries? He was much older?

A: No. Much older. He had already seven kids. He was in World War I, soldier in Italy. Right.

Q: How did he know your future husband, considering the age difference.

A: The same village. It was clan of 1500 Jews living there. That's all but they lived together with everybody else. It wasn't a ghetto or anything. But Jews were kind of you know doing business with everybody.

Q: So he would come to the house to play chess.

A: To play. And then his father was the head of the Jewish in charge with the gendarmerie. To, in charge if there was something to be straightened out. You know.

Q: Was he the head of the Jewish council?

A: Right.

Q: What was his name?

A: **Sherhofer**. His father's name. I don't know. But maybe it's here between demonstrators. I don't know. I'm not sure that it wasn't. I usually don't know. Wait a minute. This is not, not, maybe in the other thing. Only I didn't bring, oh yeah **Sherhofer**. Oh yeah. Would you believe I have his roots here. My father, my p. My father's parent's Henry. No that's his grandparents. **Henrik Sherhofer, Illésháza**.. Rose Schwartz was his grandpa.

Q: His grandmother was Rose.

A: Yes. But wait let me see about his father. You see.

Q: Were they both from, you said **Illésháza**, is that where they're from?

A: I give you this because I can hardly read his handwriting now. He wrote all this very, that's his grandparents and then his brothers and sisters. **Babush**. **Babush** was your father.

Q: So he was, was he 18 when you met him?

A: He was probably 18 or more. 18 and a half or more. Yeah.

Q: Was he studying. Had he finished school?

A: He worked and he was, he studied til he was 16. But then his father went broke because they had a farm you know in the big depression. And he had to help out to feed the family and he was clever. As I said. So he took **gabona (grains)** and everything from the farm.

Q: Grain.

A: Is the word, yeah everything. He bribed the, because the Jews weren't allowed to ship stuff to Budapest anymore. Somebody he knew, you know the father knew had connection with the community and he was born not too far from there. They got a place to put the grain in that wagon and ship it and he went to sell it in Budapest.

Q: What year was this?

A: In 19..., before they were in the, before the Germans came. He was 16 years old when they did it. That's when he started til the Jews were –

Q: He was 16 in 1940.

A: He was, 40, then it was in 41 and in 40 and maybe before he tried to help already.

Q: So he was doing this for many years.

A: Til they didn't take him to work camp. He had to go to work. You know **munkaszolgálatos (forced laborer)**

Q: When was he –

A: When they –

Q: Drafted.

A: When they started to take the people there. to **munkaszolgálatos (forced laborer)** around the villages that to work for farmers and build things and all that. I remember because we went to take my uncle where we lived. The launch. We went two kilometers from **Nagymagyar**. Someplace in that area the road work to do. They worked those guys.

Q: He was doing labor close to where he lived.

A: Yes, like two miles but then when the ghetto came in 44, they took the young ones to work **Esztergom** or **Győr** and all these places on the railroad before they put them on a transport to, he was in the camps as I said. **Buchenwald, Mauthausen**. Wherever it says on the paper. You have it there. I gave you the Sherhofer. Oh she is reading it, ok.

Q: So when you met him he was 18 and you were about ten.

A: Yeah but there was nothing between us. It just –

Q: What do you remember from then?

A: Oh just –

Q: First memories.

A: I just paid attention that they played chess and I was going out to play with the younger kids because there were a lot of kids in the back yard. But when he came back from the war, he went back to the village and the Communists came. Normally he – (someone speaking in background) You know what. The Communists came. They packed up. The Russians took the whole house away from them and they made a kolhoz out of it. You know **ez egy ilyen falusi ház volt, ott dolgoztak, de már nem volt az övék (this was village house, they worked there, but it did not belong them any longer)**

Q: **[Tehát az ő családi háza volt, nem az Önöké? (it was his family home, not yours?)**

A: **[Nem ezek nem jöttek vissza, az egész család (no, they did not come back, nobody from the family)**

Q: What happened to the house of your family?

A: My family. The family, they took it, confiscated. Nobody came back. The Russians took it for themselves. Or the Hungarians.

Q: What happened to it? Do you know who got it. Do you know what they used it for?

A: No clue. I have, I have no clue honey because nobody came back. I never went after the house of theirs.

Q: But you know what happened to your husband's family's house.

A: Because my husband told me. He probably knew what happened to that house. But none of us interested in houses. Not for my husband. I tell you I would live in a one-bedroom house.

Q: You said that his father had gone bankrupt or broke during the great depression, during the crash. Do you know what he did before, what did he go broke –

A: He was the landowner. Landowner, he had a lot of land around him. Even rented land and he grew things. In fact my husband was lucky. They called the names when he was in the camps. Who is here, **Sherhofer, Sherhofer**, I want to see him come forward. So he went. He thought they going to kill him or something. One of the people who worked for his father in one of the camps was an overseer for the workers. He says I will bring you some food every day on the side because I can help you out.

Your father was really generous to me.

Q: You don't know who this person was?

A: No.

Q: You don't know which camp it was in?

A: I don't know in which camp it, in Mauthausen. See he is **shvetseta** [?- which language ?ph]. I didn't even know many things because he didn't want me to see it. But I say we have to do something. Then he made that with the Shoah Foundation in Los Angeles, before he died.

Q: So you had, do you remember having any other interactions at that point, when you first meet him and –

A: He didn't know I was alive either. Because he came back to Bratislava. No he came back and my aunt from Bratislava the one who survived she lived in Israel. She came after 48. In 49 when it was already Israel. And that's when he came. He was in Vienna. So he says before I go to Israel whatever money I have left or whatever, he made business. I'm going to buy some equipment for a baker and I will work as a baker there. Because he was handy in everything, kind of a person.

Q: Where did he have money left over from?

A: I guess maybe something they got back from some people that they hid for them in the village. I didn't never ask him about, no. I wasn't interested to know.

Q: Do you know of any stories from your own family where anyone got something back?

A: Oh I did know but you know what they did? My aunt, the one Berta, where she told him to go and look after me. I was living then in Jaffa in 48. With the Arabs there together. And I went to work in Ramat Gan. All of a sudden the soldiers in Egypt comes there. And he checks out that where are the girls. Me and my sister. To see, to check on us. And he actually wanted to go out maybe first with my sister. Because she was older than I but she had from Romania the boyfriend, **Nagyvárad [Oradea]**. That's Romania, Transylvania. And he came and she was charmed by him. So she married him. But then Ben came, Benjamin my husband. He came back. I like to try to go out with you. You want to come out. Say I can go out with you.

Q: What year was this?

A: I was then 16 and a half years old. In Jaffa. **[somebody is speaking in the background]** Sixteen and a half years old. Is it. I think you going to be my wife. I say you must be kidding. Go with your age girls. I don't want –

Q: How did he have, we're jumping ahead. How did he find you again after the war?

A: From my aunt. The one who found something from my grandparents hidden and she took it all for herself. She never gave us a penny, nothing.

Q: Was this your aunt Berta?

A: Yeah.

Q: Not **Mucika**.

A: No. **Mucika** was already out of the picture. They were gone. In 45 when they left to **ne csináld, édes – don't do it, sweetie (speaking to someone in the background)**].

Q: So we're back after a brief pause. He found you in Israel, thanks to Berta.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did he find Berta?

A: Berta. Because he lived, she lived in **Bnai Barach** and he had a sister in **Bnai Barach**. So you know they were connected.

Q: People knew each other.

A: Exactly. All survivors were always going one after. That's how it was.

Q: How did Berta get to Israel?

A: By boat and she was also in a **klyta** [Hebrew ???]. You know she was in a how do you say, there were for waiting to get a place to go in those tents. For a while. Only **mabara, mabara** [ph] they call it.

Q: When did she arrive in Israel? Was it still Palestine?

A: No, no, no.

Q: She went there legally?

A: Legally, but –

Q: She went there from where?

A: From Bratislava.

Q: So she stayed in Bratislava for a few years after the war.

A: Well I guess, yes. Of course, like three maybe. 49 she came and then she and her husband in those tents. You know they make those camps everywhere, like they do for Syrians now. And they waited til they get from the agency a place where she can live. And they specifically wanted to live with the religious ones. **Bnai Barach** is a place where the religious people live.

Q: So if I understand correctly she got to Israel after you did.

A: Oh yeah. Three years after.

Q: And how did she find you? Had you been in touch with her during those years?

A: Oh yeah because she put us on the bus from Bratislava to go to **Barbizon** through the religious, like they found out. Like she found out the one who speaks Hebrew. This was from the **Bet Yaakov**. The place. She knew where we were but we didn't necessarily keep in touch with her.

Q: So this is a great point go back chronologically to where we were when we left off yesterday.

A: Ok.

Q: So I think the last thing we discussed was that you and both of your siblings were going back to Bratislava to see if you could find anyone.

A: Exactly and I lived with her for a few weeks. But then she wasn't very tolerant for us that we survived. Near my brother lived with her. My sister lived with my mother's sister. Who was in a bunker as I told you. And she says my son didn't come back. I says well I'm clearing out. I don't want to stay here. I go with the orphans. I feel better there. I am one of everybody and not under her pressure.

Q: Can you tell me more about that? How did she pressure you?

A: In everything, every way. You know we had a muff and then I see it was winter.

Q: So this was something to warm your hands.

A: Exactly and it had a zipper. But she could give me a little money, ok, if I need something. But she was very careful on her side. So I walked in the street. Bratislava I knew. And I see a big line and they said here is a line. I said what is this line for. They said from the refugee people who come and they need help. So I went there. So I told them my parents didn't come yet back. Maybe eventually they will. But I would like to have a few cents in my pocket in case I can buy something. You know. I come home. She sees I have, she opens my muff. Where is this money from? I says I went to the Joint and they gave me a few pennies. You know a few Kronen. She wasn't pleased. You know the first thing she did. She went to the Jewish agency to sign us up on the first transport end of 45. Everything was in rubble and moving through Germany. And everywhere the people. You know it was still snow coming out from the houses where they bombarded or something.

Q: Can you tell me more about why she wasn't pleased? What was she --

A: Because we didn't keep the religion the way she wanted.

Q: That was her issue.



A: And she was mean. Mean in that she was broken that her son didn't come back and we came back. So I says why would I want to be hounded. I rather we get out and do something.

Q: What was her son's name?

A: I. I forgot so help me God. **Bubbi. Bubbi.**

Q: How old was he during the war?

A: He was older than I. Maybe ten years, like my brother maybe. But he died in the, when they were shipping him yet. He died in the wagons because he was dehydrated and sick maybe.

Q: How did you know that?

A: She told us.

Q: Do you know how she knew that?

A: She was in the wagon too. She was in Auschwitz and she came back. You see she was bitter.

Q: Did she know what had happened to your parents?

A: Oh sure. After she came back she knew. But she didn't want to have anything to do with us. She didn't care. To be truthful, not too many people have the nerves for extra luggage.

Q: Did she go through the same route with your parents or was she deported at another time?

A: No she was in **Ujpest**. From there she was deported. She was the shorter time , but the machinery was much more fast and crueller when she came.

Q: So she and her boy were deported from **Ujpest**.

A: From **Keleti Állomás, én nem tudom, melyik vonat ment- Eastern Station, I don't know, on which train they went]**

Q: Do you know when she learned about your parents' fate?

A: When she came back. Not before. She didn't know. She told me did they come back?

Q: Do you know who brought the news? Who were the people who knew?

A: Who came back, who came back.

Q: Do you know who those people were?

A: I didn't know because I not the names. I wouldn't know nothing.

Q: So basically she immediately decided to send you and your siblings.

A: To the religious, to Palestine. Get rid of the kids.

Q: So she wanted to send you to Palestine?

A: Yes. With the religious folks. This is the group picture where we had that was a religious place in **Barbizon**. They, **Bet Yaakov** –

Q: What was the organization's name?

A: **Bet Yaakov**.

Q: and she signed up the three of you?

A: Yes, but –

Q: The three of you were not staying with her?

A: No the two of us and my sister didn't want to stay with my aunt either. There were four other kids there but she, they survived in the bunker, little ones.

Q: So you said you were relieved to go?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What about your siblings. What did they think about this being sent away again?

A: Oh they didn't want to stay with family anymore. No, no, no.

Q: So you get on the train and this is a train

A: No train, bus.

Q: A bus. From Bratislava.

A: We're going from Bratislava first night Prague. Stopover in a hotel. With food and everything and that was paid by some **UNRRA**, or the Jewish agency. I really don't know because you ask where are the pictures from. People came took pictures of us. Actually in Barbizon I was going to be adopted or to Switzerland or to Sweden. My sister says we don't go anyplace. We go together to Palestine to live between Jews. No more.

Q: What did your brother think?

A: He hates it til today.

Q: He hates what?

A: Being in Israel. Because there is no peace and since he was there he had to learn to shoot everything from the British yet. And he heard all the language what they used against the Jews anywhere. He says give a Jew a gun and they will kill each other. So he knew a little bit German English you know. But he was in so many wars. He regrets the day he stepped and he never, each conversation I have with him he talks to me from Skype cause it's cheap. I just talk. I don't want to see. He's so miserable. He says I never forgive your sister. I say she is gone 20 years. What do you want from her. Pretty soon you're going to be there all of us, so what do you want. Supposingly. Lay off he says.

Q: So he holds her responsible for his life in Israel.

A: It's true yes, because he was in every war since that. Never peace and quiet.

Q: Was your sister the headstrong one. Did she decide ---

A: That's the one yes. For me to she was very headstrong. She wanted me to become a teacher in the religious school. So I says I don't want to go. She gave me **a pofon (slapped me in the face). On both sides.** You know what.

Q: She slapped your face.

A: Yes. So I told her you know what you want to be a teacher, you be a teacher. I want to do something else. How about that? I went to learn bookbinding. I liked it better.

Q: What did you like about it.

A: I loved it. It was artistic and with the books. I always liked to be with the books, I really did.

Q: So let's get back to your continent wide trip to Barbizon. So you're in Prague and then what happens.

A: Then we stopped of Strasbourg. Next day. All the way through Germany. Long --

Q: What did you see in Germany?

A: Hell. Hell broke loose. Like Budapest was bombarded. It was hell but not everywhere you know. Over there, everything on that route it was bombarded and they put us into elegant hotel.

Q: What was the hotel's name?

A: I don't remember but it's, the SS used to be there. The headquarters.

Q: This was the hotel in Strasbourg?

A: One stairs up, the other in the architects and it was intact. And they took us to the restaurant there to eat. We thought we are in heaven. We were (skinned?) like this.

Q: By that time you didn't have problems digesting food?

A: No, no, no.

Q: It was only that first time?

A: Because it was too heavy. If your stomach is empty. A lot of survivors died as a result. They started eating and the cramps and the gonorrhea, excuse me and everything. It killed them.

Q: How long were you in Strasbourg?

A: Just a night. And then Paris. We stayed in Paris and you know this was not so elegant but you know we had a community.

Q: Do you know where you stayed?

A: No but close to the opera house. It was the Jewish quarter someplace, whatever previously was the Jewish, I don't know exactly and I don't remember.

Q: You said there was a community so local Jews took you in?

A: No, no, no. Not in France. We went to a hotel like it wasn't elegant. But we had a toilet in the you know one for every –

Q: In the hall.

A: Yeah. Til we moved after a few days to Barbizon. It called **Hotel De la Forêt**. In Barbizon. On the edge, the rail to Fontainebleau. By woods where there were big fightings with the Germans. And in our ground we had two German guys still in uniform, working for the grounds. You think you can hear it?

Q: No, no. I'm just checking the tech. No worried. Two German guys in uniform were working on the grounds.

A: Still working on the grounds there. Under the French. Supervision because it was a lot of left over bombs and shells. And everything. 1945. It was end of 45.

Q: Were they being held there against their will? Or?

A: Oh they were how do you call like from the war.

Q: Prisoners.

A: Exactly. There was somebody watching over them.

Q: Can you describe the grounds to me a little? What was the place.

A: I have the pictures but she took them.

Q: But the person listening to the interview doesn't see the pictures so can you describe it to me.

A: It was a nice little hotel. Hotel, it's still maybe there unless they made it fancy. It was the road to Fontainebleau.

Q: What was the name of the hotel?

A: **Hotel de la Forêt**. And it was a little artistic village inside. It's in Barbizon you know and you could get sometimes some change to go to buy ice cream. We learned a few words in French. We had movies. We played cards.

Q: What movies did you see?

A: What movies. Shirley Temple and just you know. They brought something like this.

Q: Had you had ice cream before?

A: Oh yeah told we had. I told you my dad had but not lately.

Q: So at the candy store there was ice cream?

A: Next to it. **[Slovak-?]**

You know in Slovakia they call it yeah, ice cream on a cone.

Q: And so your two other siblings were there at the hotel De la Foret.

A: Oh yeah together we were boys separate and girls separate. Always because it was a religious kind.

Q: How were you sleeping? Was it one room with many children.

A: Oh yeah. They made big halls. Few kids in one room and for the boys they did the same. And then they went to the hall for breakfast in the morning and mostly we got every day a lot of bread. Du pain avec du **beurre**. Bread with butter yeah and the marmalade and then for supper **chaufleur** avec **fromage** and spinach and the best food. I am living in seventh heaven.

Q: How did your days pass?

A: Oh we played around. They just let us away because they did a lot of research on our condition. Like I said people were sick. The teeth were moving. They brought a dentist with

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equipment to give us like ultraviolet lights on the gums so it won't fall everything out. To prep us up for the journey.

Q: What other things did they do to get you in –

A: Oh x-rays. I had a hole in my lung. And they say it's going to heal. They give us good nutrients and medication. But I didn't know what I was taking.

Q: Were the health care workers all –

A: Oh there was a nurse there. She was –

Q: What was her name?

A: I don't know. It's in the picture.

Q: Were they all French these people who were health care workers?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you communicate with them?

A: Oh they communicated with translators. Some people came and speak French there you know. We, from the organization supervisor. There was a French supervisor.

Q: And they would speak in what language to you?

A: If you didn't understand of course French we didn't understand. It was all in German or Hungarian. They were translators.

Q: Was there any schooling?

A: Not really schooling just a little French. You know to learn some vocabulary.

Q: Aside from eating good food and resting were there other things that they were doing.

A: We played around and we could go to the walk in the woods. And walk to the museum of Napoleon and everything but then they moved us because we recovered after a while. To Chateau de Hanoville which is a, found me on the computer there. And there we started already study. Hebrew, the ABC, the alphabet and speaking Hebrew and working on the land. We worked a vegetable garden.

Q: Is that the first time you worked on the land?

A: Yeah.

Q: You had never had to –

A: I, no but I was familiar from **Gúta**. My grandparents had a lot of land there. You know with trees and tomatoes we picked and everything so.

Q: How long were you at the Hotel de la **Foret**.

A: Hotel de la **Foret**, not too long. I don't know the date exactly when they moved us but they moved us and that was a gathering place. It was a headquarter for the Germans too. A huge place outside from a city on the map I cannot show it.

Q: I should have asked you this earlier but when did you leave Bratislava.

A: When did I leave. In 1942 in this –

Q: No, no once you went back to Aunt Berta, when she puts you on this bus.

A: Oh. 45. End of 45. I think it was December. December. It was white snow a lot. And raining and it was cold.

Q: So you were at this **Hotel de la Forêt** in December and January.

A: For sure, and February too maybe. And then come early spring, because we had first Passover in Hanoville.

Q: So you were already at this new location for Passover.

A: Chateau de Hanoville, beginning of 46. We were there because we got some matzo and we got a lot of butter to eat. They put more --

Q: They put butter on matzo.

A: Butter on matzo. Thick like this so we, and the rooms were huge. All the women slept in one room. You know from our group and the boys in another group. And so on.

Q: What were the ages of these children?

A: You could see that this. it wasn't too old. I can tell you from the, oh this is where I had from the b, from our boat the number. The oldest the age is, all this gang was on there. They were in Hanoville. Came to Marseille together with us, on those big trucks. When I seen the first time like the British trucks with the soldiers going, or the German trucks. You know army trucks. And it was dark so nobody could see when the –

Q: Where were these trucks?

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A: From where. They brought them –

Q: No, where did you see the trucks?

A: We were on them to go. We were on them to go down to Marseille, a whole caravan from Chateau de Hanoville. All of these people who gathered here on the boat.

Q: Ok how did you know they were British trucks?

A: Oh I don't know if it was British or Germany. As far as I am concerned, or maybe French. It looked like the war trucks who liberated French. The British, no.

Q: Did you see any soldiers or any people around were not French?

A: Maybe but I wasn't not familiar if it was French or British. I didn't even pay attention. It wasn't German I knew because we were all on the trucks. Maybe it was from the Jewish agency. As far as I am concerned. They fought in Italy and they were dressed like the rest of the British soldiers. They were dressed.

Q: How long were you in Hanoville. Hanoville, is that how you pronounce it?

A: Chateau de Hanoville. Maybe oh, maybe a month or two.

Q: So let's say you got there around March.

A: After Passover. And after the Passover it was probably May when we went down because we were stayed a while in Marseille. They waited for a boat to acquire and to get the more people.

Q: So during this time that you spent first at the **Hotel de la Forêt** and then at Chateau Hanoville, did you have friends there that –

A: Oh we had to go in group for our friends.

Q: Do you remember any of them?

A: I sure do and most of them dead.

Q: But can you tell me about anyone who was on that trip?

A: I have the names but I didn't' keep in touch. After I left Israel in 1960 those guys. Everybody went their own way but the best of the bunch whom I knew closely they passed away. Some of them –

Q: Can you tell me about them?



A: Oh yeah. One of them was older than I, five years and she was from Slovakia too but she was in the camp. She was liberated. She was –

Q: From where? Where was she liberated?

A: In the camp. I don't know which camp she was in but she went to Belgium after the war because her brother had some, and she had a relative who was in the diamond business there.

Q: Do you know her name?

A: She's dead. **Elu Fader** (?), her name was, married name. I forgot her maiden name.

Q: But her first name is.

A: Elu.

Q: **Elu**.

A: Again but she was from Slovakia. You know Hungary, Slovakia. And so on. She was like a mother to us, to me and to my sister. Only five years older but she was already dating boys and everything and she knew how to cook and everything. And we lived together in Jaffa then with her. Because we had to you know you got a place to live like five families to one kitchen. And we got one room because my brother was a soldier and for soldiers and families they gave a quota for the family to stay there for the Arabs who run away.

Q: Can you tell me about anyone else who was with you during this time, during the time of **Hotel de la Forêt** and the time of Hanoville.

A: A lot of kids on the picture. That's why I would love to see the picture so I can say but the names. There was one woman, **Sári**. I will show you the picture but I don't have it.

Q: What can you tell me about **Sári**.

A: Yes, she married a guy. She was in love with another guy but then she married another guy.

Q: Why?

A: Because she came to **Bnai Barach** and the relatives told her to marry somebody else who is already established and you can have an easier life than with a refugee for instance. And my sister had actually with this guy whom I'm sitting there on the boat that she has the picture.

Q: So she's sitting on the boat in the picture with this other guy that she would have married.

A: No, the guy sits with me and he was in love with my sister. And he says I'm going to the war but please wait for me when the liberation will be over. I come back and I marry you.

Q: He said to Cecelia.

A: To my sister **Lici**. Guess what. He died. In the war of independence. Most of my friends.

Q: What was his name?

A: Kilsen. I have to see it honey. Otherwise I don't know.

Q: Which boat was he sitting on?

A: Beria. They all came with the Beria. The whole gang. You seen a lot of kids there. They all came with us. But I have it written down in Hebrew. And if I see it.

Q: During this first half of 1946 when you're –

A: See the ages. See you can see just by the age.

Q: Can you say it for the recording because no one is going to see it when they are listening to the recording. What were the ages.

A: The ages. There was one 12 year old, one 13, only they put 14 because I was only 13 and a half. The rest were all 16, 17, 21, 24, one was 45 mind you. 39, 27, 20, 30, 21. 20, 30, 23, 25, and that was the age. The boat they didn't take anybody on an illegal boat who wasn't more fit.

Q: It sounds like there's a few adults there.

A: That's what I said.

Q: But those adults were not with you when you were at Hotel de la **Foret**.

A: No, no, no but they gathered them in Marseille. There was a camp for the army. We were in barracks. Getting ready. And then they drilled us how to get up quietly.

Q: So the list that you were reading to me was a manifest from the ship.

A: Yeah, that's it.

Q: And the ship was called Beria.

A: Beria.

Q: Do you remember anyone talking about politics during your time in France? Did they talk about –

A: What politics. Just give me a clue.

Q: They were talking about going to Palestine.

A: Yeah.

Q: And were they talking about Zionism, what that means. Did you a concept of what that means?

A: For us it was just a this is the god given Jewish land from the Bible yet. Because Bet Yaakov was not Zionist. But there were a lot of Zionist. This is our place. We will have a kibbutz to live on. Or in farm house, and we will live all together. And we will, nobody will persecute us there. We will be free.

Q: So if I understand correctly Bet Yaakov was the organization that was transporting you through Europe. Right? It was a religious organization?

A: Thank you.

Q: But are you saying that it was not a Zionist organization.

A: No definitely not. The very religious like how shall I say you know Amish maybe. Long sleeve, no boys. Just study. Boys study. The women in the kitchen and you marry and you have kids.

Q: So when you would hear about Zionist ideas where would you hear them from?

A: I learned later on about Theodore Herzl and all this, but it didn't mean at the time too much for me. I wanted the broad education.

Q: But you didn't hear about it while you were still a refugee in Europe or were you already hearing about it?

A: Not me. I didn't. No I didn't. In fact my father went to his rabbi to ask. Do you think I should go to Palestine. He said the rabbi you stay put and you go with everybody else, like everybody else. Because in Palestine those are not the religious people who follow the Bible. They went by the Bible, religious and we had to follow because his father was very strict. If he would have gone to Palestine, he would have been –

Q: Disowned like his brother –

A: Exactly. Who was a physician.

Q: What was his brother's name?

A: **Brichta**. But I don't know his second, I don't know.

Q: But he lived in Budapest.

A: In Budapest he was a physician.

Q: Did he survive the war?

A: No, nobody survived the war from the **Brichta** family. Only this one who went 44. Berta. Of all the people she had to survive. Excuse me. That's not nice to say but she wasn't nice to us, she wasn't nice. It's painful still. It hurts. Why, what did I do?

Q: Tell me about leaving Hanoville.

A: Hanoville, on the truck.

Q: It was on the truck. How many people were on the truck.

A: You know the rows, as much as they could fit in.

Q: How many trucks?

A: there were quite a few because they got some gatherings there already and maybe they stopped someplace else and they combined everybody to that one camp. And –

Q: What was the camp called?

A: Marseille. We were the first time I've seen such a big sea. I was scared.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: I thought oh my god, I never get there.

Q: You'll never get to Palestine?

A: Yeah because the big sea scared me. I was a little girl. You know never seen, all you could see was just sea, no houses, no anything. But you know what I see, whatever happens with the rest, that what going to be.

Q: Who showed you the sea?

A: Oh we've seen it because the, how do you call, not a curtain, how do you call this thing. **Ponyva, ki lehet látni a ponyván. Mi ültünk, elől vezettek, láttuk, hogy hegyen voltunk, előttünk meg a nagy víz (Canvas, you can see out of the canvas. We were sitting, saw that we were on a mountain, and, in front of us was the big water.)**

Q: So this was during your transit down to –

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A: To Marseille.

Q: And you could see out the windows.

A: That's right. I didn't see anything then but I was scared.

Q: Were you on the same truck as your siblings?

A: No, just my sister. The girls separate.

Q: The boys were on another truck.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you get to this camp, a refugee camp in Marseille but you don't remember the name.

A: No, no but there must be a name where the Beria left from.

Q: Can you tell me about life in this town? How big was it?

A: Oh, oh it was huge and they made drills for every barrack separately at night time. How to get up in a hurry.

Q: Tell me about the drill. What did you have to do?

A: Get up, get dressed, get your rucksack. Everybody one rucksack had with the junk, whatever we had left. And get out and stand in line like soldiers.

Q: When would they do the drills?

A: Two o'clock in the morning, twelve o'clock in night time. Dark. Pitch dark and not a word. They told us, get up, get dressed. Let's go.

Q: How did you know that a drill was starting?

A: When they came to tell us. Wake up.

Q: A person came to tell you?

A: Oh yeah in our room, woman. **Gyorsan, felkelni (get up, fast)** But they didn't not in Hungarian.

Q: In what language?

A: Oh Slovak or German. **Aufstehen, schnell (get up, fast)**

Q: How much time did you have between being woken up and needing to be –

A: Oh fast. No.

Q: How long?

A: I cannot. Fast you know what. I still wear three layers in one piece. I really do the underwear because I'm cold always. A little shirt, another little shirt, and another. And leave it overnight in three piece. Just in bed, I wear it in the morning.

Q: You mean you put it on as one. To save time.

A: Exactly, yeah exactly in a hurry and always have the shoe already in case I have to do something. Still.

Q: Good life skills.

A: Oh yeah for earthquake too. It's a good drill honey. I have everything ready. Let's go.

Q: Tell me more about the camp. How many people were sleeping in one area with you?

A: I wouldn't know A from B but we learned to study Hebrew. I remember that and I was glad that I can practice something so I learned ABC, sentences and what it meant and then straight go.

Q: They gave your paper

A: What?

Q: You had paper?

A: Paper? Yeah paper and a pencil sure. And a person was teaching, probably from Israel. I would imagine.

Q: Were you living in a tent?

A: Not there. But when they arrived to Palestine, we lived in tents for two months.

Q: What were you living in, in the refugee camp, what structure?

A: In a barrack, a barrack. I told you. This long soldiers quarters.

Q: What kind of food did you have there?

A: You kid me. I don't remember. Some rations, you know everybody with a little thing.

Q: Were you still together with your sister in one –

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Next to her slept you know one with each other.

Q: Do you remember anyone else from the camp?

A: Not then because you know everybody they put them maybe in a different, but we were always together. With people we know already.

Q: You knew them from your time in France?

A: Yes.

Q: From the other locations.

A: Right, right. They all came with the boat.

Q: But there were already adults there too. And –

A: That's right. Some of them who didn't go with the boat stayed in Hanoville so they go someplace else. They were adopted or something. Some were adopted. Not all of them came with us to Palestine.

Q: Once you were in the refugee camp you and your fellow children were mixing with adults.

A: Exactly.

Q: Were the adults in the barracks?

A: yes, but not adults. I told you the age.

Q: Well you said some of them were in their 20s.

A: Yeah even 49 and 44. Yeah right.

Q: So are they around you at this point.

A: Oh yeah but they wouldn't talk to us too much. Only teach us maybe.

Q: How long were you at this location?

A: I wouldn't know because I arrived June 15 I think. To Palestine and the route took us maybe a week and a half or two because we were holed up in the middle with the Brits and you know.

Q: When do you get news that it's time to leave to Palestine from Marseille?

A: When they had the boat.

Q: But how did the news come to you? How was it?

A: They told us tomorrow be ready, we going. They gave us a night.

Q: So at that point you board the ship. And the ship is named Beria.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where does the ship sail?

A: To Palestine.

Q: But you get stuck?

A: We get its charge in there's Brits in the route. They came with the war ship. Stop us. Then the planes came around, circled us and more boats came and couldn't go anyplace. And then they brought two like fishing ships, more so, the little ship already to put us on and get us off here. You know to transfer.

Q: To transfer onto what?

A: To the little boats, I mean to the smaller ship.

Q: The British authorities are transferring you to little boats.

A: Oh yeah they were there with the guns on us.

Q: And then where are the little boats going at this point?

A: To Palestine to Haifa from Turkey, which is not so far.

Q: I'm sorry. How do you get to Turkey cause so far you're on –

A: With the good boat, but the Brits intervened.

Q: So they intervene on the sea.

A: On the sea.

Q: And they escort you to Turkey?

A: By Turkey. It was close to Turkey already.



Q: Are we talking about Cyprus?

A: Not Cyprus. We didn't go to, they thought we going to go to Cyprus but they diverted us to Haifa.

Q: So you never reached land before reaching Haifa?

A: Never.

Q: Ok so the British forces intercept you and the escort you on the water all the way to Haifa.

A: Exactly.

Q: But in the meantime they make you disembark from the large boat. Onto the small fishing boats.

A: Yeah in the or the confiscate that or they did something else with the better boat.

Q: Are you on the same small boat as your sister?

A: Well it wasn't like just like fishing boat, just yeah of course and my brother too.

Q: Your brother too. You're all together on the same boat.

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: When the British apprehend you what are you thinking, what do you understand?

A: Nothing. You know what. This is what I seen. Guns and that's it. I say if you go down you go down. If not it's not, nothing. They caught us. We were caught. Illegal boat. That much I knew. I was taken off the train remember. Illegal person. So I was an illegal person. It does something to you crazy. Let me tell you.

Q: Tell me more about that.

A: I tell you. I rather pay more and everything just to have peace in mind if I make a mistake. I don't confront nobody or nothing. Let me just be and that's it. I wouldn't confront anybody. But now the end of my life I see somebody comes and puts a gun to my head. I want your money. I said shoot me and take everything.

Q: Also take everything and not shoot you.

A: Let them. I don't care anymore. I'll be honest. You get tired of being

Q: Cautious.

A: Yeah. Cautious is the right word. None of my neighbors knew before that we were Holocaust survivors.

Q: You mean in America?

A: Here, where I live. I lived 47 years in the same place. None of them. The refugees, immigrants then go.

Q: So we're on the ship in boats. How long does it take to get to Haifa, to get ashore?

A: Maybe two days but they wouldn't let us off the boat. They made big strikes. In Haifa on the land. Free those people. They are beaten up and you know just like a strike for something.

Q: They were protesting.

A: Protest against that.

Q: Could you see them?

A: Yes.

Q: You could see them.

A: And wave to them too. But what did they see.

Q: These are pretty small boats but you were –

A: Not I mean like a fishing boat but not like plastic or something you know.

Q: SO you're stuck on them for two days. Is there enough food and water on them?

A: No. Something. Water maybe enough. But food we were always hungry. I know that.

Q: Who was in charge of rationing? Who decided?

A: Who, what do I know, there was not too much anybody of anything there. But you know what they took us off the boat and shipped us to **Atlete**.

Q: This is June 1946. Am I right?

A: Yes.

Q: So you're for two days stuck on water in June. Is there any place to be in shelter or is the sun beating down on you?

## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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A: Oh yeah they had a roof over that. You know like canvas.

Q: And it was large enough to accommodate all the people on the ---

A: Oh we were like sardines.

Q: You were squeezing in?

A: Of course. That's right, so what. That's how it was.

Q: It wasn't upsetting to you at that time?

A: Because everybody around me was the same. Why should I be more upset than the next person.

Q: Were the other people not upset.

A: Some. The grownups were very upset. Oh.

Q: Can you tell me some memories of that. What were they doing?

A: They were praying some. **Elohanu**, hell pass. Let us get off here. We just came from hell already. Our **Elohanu** was on vacation.

Q: Were there any arguments or any --

A: Sometimes, yeah the older people didn't have patience for the youngsters. We were running around. We had energy still.

Q: On the boat?

A: Everywhere. On top of the one of the other, making jokes and fun. You know. we are not together yet at that age.

Q: Were the adults fighting with each other?

A: Not in a bad way. I couldn't say. I didn't see it personally but in **Atlete** they were already the nerves shot and there we heard a lot of discord between people. Women separate, men separate. You know they are behind barbed wire. For two months. And some of the older ones were already too upset after the camps you know. For us so we are on the floor you know scorpions came. Ah. It hurts.

Q: Can I ask a personal question about the fishing boats? How did you go to the bathroom?

A: Don't ask. Some had to, behind somebody. Relieve themselves.

Q: In the boat?

A: Yes in the boat. Some wasn't so ashamed. Guys have a easier task than women.

Q: So men were exposing themselves.

A: No I couldn't see anybody. It was you know there were more not so free as now. Now you can go in the street, on the bus, some people. Put the towel around them and they relieve themselves in San Francisco. I swear to God.

Q: How did you know that you're being led onto shore when the two days pass?

A: oh because we were close to the shore. We could swim there. We were –

Q: Did you swim off the boat?

A: I didn't swim but you could.

Q: Tell me about when you learned that you can get off the boat?

A: There was always a British, the Brits were still they're watching us with the gun.

Q: But how did you know that now you are safe to get to shore. Did someone tell you?

A: Of course they say now you get your rucksack and move.

Q: Who was saying that.

A: An adult. I don't –

Q: From the boat

A: From the boat, who had the he was in charge probably. They told him to come and tell it to us.

Q: So the boat actually docked on the beach.

A: Close, with very short you know like where the boats dock, that's where.

Q: Ok so everyone gets off the boat and what happens?

A: The trucks take us. Again the soldier trucks take us to **Atlete** which is a camp for the British army, but already left that camp empty. And we moved in. We moved.

Q: Were you under armed guard?

A: Oh yes, barbed wire. And in the middle the guys with the gun and they had only one meeting. Like my brother used to come at noon time. Everybody comes. We will be by the gate and watch over. It was you know behind barbed wires with the machine gun.

Q: Tell me again the name of the camp?

A: **Atlete**. Next to Haifa, it's a very known, it's still there. there is a museum there now.

Q: How long were you detained there?

A: Two months.

Q: With your siblings the whole time?

A: Sure.

Q: Men and women had to stay in separate places.

A: Separate. Separate.

Q: How did your days pass at **Atlete**.

A: Learned Hebrew. Learned Hebrew, learned the language. And got more food and even books. To study in what to read and write and that was fun for me, to be honest.

Q: What were your siblings doing? Were they also studying?

A: My sister very much but my brother I couldn't ask. He was separate. I'm sure he had to learn. I still have an ID from Palestine. I do, at home. When I arrived with my name on it to Palestine.

Q: What name did you give?

A: Marta **Brichta**.

Q: You were still Marta?

A: Yep.

Q: When did you become Miriam?

A: I think Miriam or not. I have to look it up but I have it at home with my picture on it.

Q: And how do you leave the camp? What happens?

A: They came from, the religious ones came because –

Q: What organization?

A: Bet Yaakov, again. They took us first to Petah Tikva.

Q: All three of you?

A: No. My brother went immediately separate to go to Hulan to study shooting with the Brits. They had a –

Q: They were drafting him?

A: Yes. And he wear those hats like Australian not they call it, you know those hats. They had different hats. The Australian army. They were the pre Army. So they took him there with the boys.

Q: And you and your sister are together and they take you to –

A: First to Petah Tikva for a week to get a place where we can go and then we went to Jerusalem.

Q: To get a place, you mean a residence?

A: Yeah, no for girls school. We went, a little place for temporary til they find a bigger place where we can go to school.

Q: So Petah Tikva is only one week?

A: For less even.

Q: And then you were sent to Jerusalem with your sister.

A: Right, for two years I was in school.

Q: What part of Jerusalem?

A: It was the Bukharan. You know Bukhara from Russia there. it was that area and it was to the mountains close on the edge there. There was a place with big rooms and you know the, how they call those things on the windows to be careful so people cannot come in.

Q: Bars.

A: Bars, yeah because when it was curfew the Brits were standing in front of our place with the guns. Sometimes they peak in. They didn't know the Brits are coming. They peaked in how we were going into our pajamas.

Q: They peaked in?

A: Yes. And we were hollering because there were no curtains. And we were maybe eight girls in one room.

Q: So they were peeping?

A: Yeah peaking in the window up there to us. And we slept you know like bed, everything opens up at night time, pull out.

Q: Like a Murphy bed?

A: Yeah but not a, it was **vaságy, amit kihuzol, mint egy matrac (an iron bed that you pull out and it is like a mattress)** In a room like this we slept eight girls.

Q: So this is a small room.

A: Oh yeah, pull out at night and we stepped on each other when we had to go outside in the yard to the restroom.

Q: And you were here two years?

A: I was there two years.

Q: So you said this was a part of a city with Bukhara.

A: Yeah but we went to school to another part. We walked to school.

Q: What was your impression of the Bukhara Jews?

A: Not too much because I went to school honey. I didn't have time to check out the Bukhara women. That's the truth. See we were working. And when I wasn't working they said when you are bigger you can learn a little trade. I learned book bindery.

Q: Working you mean working in school. You were at school.

A: I was still but to learn a trade.

Q: And that's when, you chose book binding?

A: Yeah I wanted to go and she was a German lady. Her husband was professor. Who did the books for the university. The old torn books to mend them. and make new covers. She knew artificially how to do it from the **lindeva** [? –**which language** ph]. They were already in beginning of 30s. He was a big lawyer.

Q: They were Jewish refugees from Berlin.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember their name?

A: I have it written down at home.

Q: So she taught you book binding.

A: She did and she wanted me even to go when the fighting was on to Mount Olive to the university to deliver the books. Because they were all surrounded for the war of independence. And they wanted the books to be in the university.

Q: As a safekeeping?

A: Exactly. They had places.

Q: And why did she send you?

A: She wanted to send me when it was still the war going on in 1948. And she got a notice from somebody. I was already on my way on the bus. Caravan goes up with nurses and doctors to help the a lot of people who were injured in the war. We were surrounded for six months in Jerusalem. No food, no nothing. The caravan was blown up. All the buses up. In fire. I would have been there. With my books. She pulled me back.

Q: She pulled you back. Why?

A: I was already on the end of the street to catch the bus. And somebody came from the workers. It's just, the Mrs. Weiner was her name.

Q: This was her name, the bookbinder.

A: Weiner, **könyvkötő**, book binder. Weiner. Now it came to me. Mrs. Weiner told you come back.

Q: Why did she change her mind?

A: Because she heard something on the radio. She had a radio. There is a lot of fighting going on. Don't go with that bus. Maybe another day. And they were really hungry. You know what we picked. **Papsajt (mallow)**. You know, the you know we ate it. You know what this is. I never forget the name. Those little plants like grass and it grows and you pick it up and you can eat it. They were hungry like dogs. Their eyes popped out. She wanted to adopt me actually. She didn't have kids. I said I'm not adopted. I have to go with my brother and sister.

Q: And you were 16 by then.



## Interview with Miriam Ofer

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A: Yeah, I didn't want to be adopted.

Q: This is the same year you met your husband again.

A: Sixteen and a half. He wanted to marry me then. Then the Jaffa. You know the war stopped.

Q: So you were in Jerusalem during the war of independence.

A: Exactly and a lot of girls passed away from our boat and boys too.

Q: You mean in the war.

A: Yes. We were running. We wanted **cherta** and the bullets came and whomever it got. They survived the camps and they never made it.

Q: Did you see fighting?

A: Heard. I didn't see it because we were always running or hiding. But I didn't see it but when we ran and the bullets came somebody were running dark and not running.

(end)