

This is a recording for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Interview with Jaffa Munk conducted by Margaret Garrett on March 11, 1997 in Washington, D.C. Take one, side A.

Mrs. Monk, when we had the interview several months ago, we left off about the time that you and your sister, Esther, went to Prague for a day and then to Budapest. So can we pick up there? And could you tell what happened when you arrived in Budapest?

OK. First I want to go back for a minute to Prague. The main reason that we went to Prague-- A, it was on the way, but mainly because that was a center of information-- who, the people, survived? And there were charters already put up in the Jewish centers and in the temple there. And we looked if our father and brother survived. Somehow we knew that mother perished at the very beginning in Auschwitz. However, we didn't find their names and we still had a slight of hope.

We didn't want to spend any more time in Prague. We took the very first opportunity of train and we went to Budapest. As we arrived to Budapest, by the train station was big trucks waiting for the survivors, which one was organized by the Joint.

What? Organized by who?

By the Joint.

The Joint?

Joint is an organization that is from America, Jewish organization helping refugees. I really don't know exactly the details of the name, but it's a well-known organization. It's in existence until this day. And they do help out-- in the diaspora and many, many other countries-- people who are in need of help. And they greeted us. They took us to a headquarters that they established in a school for the refugees who came back and had no family.

As we were going through the streets of Budapest, suddenly I noticed that we are passing by the house where my aunt lived. And I started to scream, "This is [PLACE NAME]. This is the street where my aunt lives." However, they did not let anybody to get off because they were not sure that anybody survived in that address, that aunt really is alive.

So we continued and we went to that place that was established for the refugees. And after a day, somebody from the orphanage home visited the place. Her name is Esther Eckstein, who today is still alive and lives in Israel in the city of Bnei Brak. She was the head of that orphanage home. And she made every effort to collect as many Jewish girls who remained after the Holocaust and try to bring them to the orphanage home that she established in Budapest immediately after the liberation and to try to re-educate, again, those people who lost-- some of us a year, some more years of schooling.

So the orphanage home was located in Budapest. And she took us-- not only me and my sister, but a lot of girls who arrived with their transport-- back to Budapest. And we were put up in the orphanage home where we had regular schooling during the day. Teachers-- how she organized this? From where she got the money? And the energy?

Her herself, a survivor, who was for many years first hiding in Budapest. Then she was caught. And she was sent to a concentration camp in Theresienstadt. But upon her return, that was her aim and her dream that as many children that survived she wants to see them being educated again. And in that orphanage home, we had very meager but we had some food. And we had very simple headquarters for sleeping and resting.

And we had excellent teachers. In Budapest, a lot of professors and teachers from the gymnasium remained alive-- thanks to Wallenberg, or some of them just in the ghetto, some of them who were hiding or with false papers. And they also felt that this much what they can do to educate the generation that remained alive. So we were studying.

Now how did that feel to you to be in that situation?

Well in that situation, in a way, I was missing the home atmosphere.

Your home?

My home. Also, I have to tell you that two uncles and one aunt remained alive in Budapest. And I had been visiting them once in a while. They had free time that we could go visiting museums or going for books or to the library. And each time that we had that kind of period, I would jump over and go to visit my aunt.

And it was very traumatic to see that they lived in their own home. They had their own furniture. It was a family life. And here we had no family life whatsoever.

Did you wish that your aunt would invite you to live with her?

Not really. Because I think not being in the camps, she had not enough understanding what we went through. So in a way, I cherished that I am together with people who have the very same fate that we had, and had more understanding of our moods, our crying, or not being able to cope sometimes with the regular daily situation. Because we were together. We had all together that very same background, that very same kind of faith. And we helped each other to overcome.

And what were the moods and the crying and the difficulty coping like?

Well it was very difficult that we had no mommy with whom we could discuss. In a simple way, even our menstruation, our monthly period did not return back yet because of the starvation and the medication that we got in Germany. It would be lovely to talk over with the mommy and to hear from a mother that "don't worry" or "eventually it will happen," or that mommy would say, "let's go to a doctor." All we had to deal with-- little and big problems-- by ourselves, even though that we had teachers and we had the mother of the orphanage home. But it's not the same, like talking with your own mother.

So you were able to talk to these people?

We were able to.

But it was not as helpful as talking to your own mother.

It was not as easy. Maybe helpful, it was. Because they did seek out doctors to take us and have checkups here and there. But it wasn't the same like talking with your own mother. You are shy more. And there are certain things that you were just keeping to yourself and you wouldn't want to share even though they were trying and very warm. But nevertheless, it wasn't the same. So we were missing family very much so.

And in the light, that Budapest family life more or less returned to normality. Of course, the ones who remained there remained intact-- the families. And to see that was a contrast to the life that we maintained in an orphanage home. But really, I have to praise-- there were three teachers besides this Esther Eckstein, whose name today is Esther Weinberg.

There were two other teachers. She recruited them. Very knowledgeable girls. And they all are still alive, one of them in Brooklyn, New York. And the other one is also in Israel.

Do you have contact with them?

I do have contact with them. And in many fact, this past summer, I was in Israel. And Esther, who was the head teacher and the head of this whole organization of the orphanage home and looking after us-- she organized a get-together evening in honor of my visit to Israel. And it was very moving because some, very few, who remain still from that school, the orphanage home, came to greet me. And I am in very, very, very strong contact with Esther, mainly.

However, the other teacher, Rachel, she was also there. And the third one, Miriam Gross, she is less involved with the group, if it has to do with it that she moved away from the circle of the girls. The majority of the students from that orphanage home are living in Israel. But I visit very often these. So I am in touch with the teachers. And each time, a very interesting reminder of the era that we all went together after the war.

And is it partly upsetting for you to visit again with them?

Really not. In many fact, as the years are passing by, I am more and more admiring their mission, their undertaking, and all the effort and all the attention that they gave us. And for instance, I remember that Esther went to a sewing lady and ordered for all of us beautiful blouse and beautiful skirt for one celebration to give back to us the feeling of humanity, to feel good about ourselves and to look good, which was very important.

We had no clothing. We came back from the concentration camp-- in many fact, my winter coat was a German soldier's army coat that I shortened. And somebody helped me to change the buttons that I should feel a little bit better. And here was a woman-- and you have to understand at the time, the situation in Budapest was very difficult. I mean, I'm talking about time that it was still under a regime of the Russian army. And people were standing for bread in the street.

Clothing was a rarity. So we didn't feel that outcast with our poor clothing. And yet, she was driving and doing everything to get for us some dresses, some blouse, some skirt that we should be looking more decent.

Aside from standing in line, were you aware of any abuses from the Russian soldiers-- personal abuses?

I personally not. But on the train traveling here and there, I used to see them seeking out nice-looking girls and when the train stopped, stopping these girls of continuing their trip and just grabbing them and taking them down. And whatever they did with them-- that could be understood.

Were you frightened to travel by yourself on the train?

Very much so. And I very rarely traveled, if at all. I went on a trip I took once with my aunt to Onod because-- I don't know if I told you this, that my mother, before we left, she hid some of the family pictures and some silverware by a Gentile lady. And my aunt wanted very much that we should have some mementos from our parents.

So we traveled together. And my aunt was putting a babushka on me. I shouldn't look decent. I should look very frightened and very skinny, which one I was anyway, and very pale. But she was protecting me. And I don't think that ever I would travel by myself at all in those days.

And when you had time off from the orphanage, did you walk to your aunt's by yourself?

We would walk but never alone. Never alone. We would never walk alone and never in the evening. It was mainly in the daytime. And luckily, it wasn't too far from my Aunt. But if I visited my aunt, I would always watch my watch that if it's starting in winter a little bit to be dark, we would be already going heading back to the orphanage.

So you were very cautious?

Very cautious, yes.

And when you went back to Onod with your aunt to see if you could find the mementos, what happened?

When we went back to Onod to find the mementos, we came in-- and she was a neighbor of us-- and she greeted us very friendly. And when my aunt said, "You know my sister, who you loved and loved you, she left with you a few very important items. Would you be able to give it back? This is a child that survived."

My sister was in a sanatorium so she couldn't travel with us. She wasn't well yet. And she said, "Well, I am very sorry. I know she gave me a lot of things, and I was very happy to do that for her. But the Russian army passed by here, and

they came into the houses and they emptied everything. And they took."

Somehow, looking around it didn't seem like the house was robbed by the Russian army or anything was emptied from there. So my aunt told her, "We're very thirsty. Would you go out and fetch some water?" Because there were no faucets inside in those days yet. We are talking about 1945. And she went out to pump some water from the well.

While she was gone, my aunt went and opened up her drawer. And lo and behold, there it was. And then she came back, she was white. And she said, "Oh, gee! I really didn't know that the things remained."

So your aunt showed her that she had found the things in the drawer?

Yes. Yes. She found the things. And she said, "Oh, I am so happy that you did find it." OK. If it was really true that she didn't know that it wasn't emptied or the drawers or it wasn't at all. In any rate, we got it back. And that's how I have some pictures of my family.

How did that feel?

It was very, very moving. Very moving moment to see my parents again, even if it's not their life. But before I thought to myself, no cemetery and no anything to remind my parents at all. And here I am looking. And I am seeing my beautiful father and mother and my brother. It was a very great moment. And each time I'm taking out the picture, I feel like I am close to them.

How did it feel that the woman planned to deprive you of retrieving that?

Well at that moment, I felt a little bit angry at her. And I felt if she could keep the silverware-- but pictures? If she wanted to have the silverware because she needed money, wanting. But at least the pictures! And that, somehow, I couldn't grasp it-- that why would the Russian army take pictures?

I do know that they took usually watches or jewelry that they were looking for. But the picture somehow, I couldn't. But I think that she felt, if she's looking in the drawer for the pictures, maybe other things will come up. I really can't figure out exactly. I don't want to accuse.

I felt at that moment that the whole world changed, apparently. That the people who have been very friendly and very helpful-- not once they used to come and shovel our snow because the snow was so high they couldn't open our door. And we would go and help them in any kind of situation, especially my mother, who was the midwife of the town, so to say. Anywhere that the child was born, my mother was there. It didn't matter if Jewish or not Jewish, poor or rich. She would go and help. Warm water, bathe the baby. Cook a meal for the mother after the childbirth. And here we are coming back, and they are so cold, so to say.

And this was a woman that your mother had selected as someone that she could trust?

Yeah. Yeah. So it's hard to know. It puzzles me sometimes. But having the nature that I don't want to hate people or be angry at people, perhaps she wanted really to keep those things. It's possible. You never know.

So from that, then we went back to Budapest. And I remained in that orphanage home almost the whole year, from September 1945 to about May '46.

Now Esther was in a sanatorium all that time?

Most of the time. After about in January 1946, she was let out from the sanatorium. She got the OK from the doctors that she recuperated. And she joined us in that orphanage home. So I do have some pictures of celebration that we are together already in the orphanage home.

Now where were the Solomon sisters that you were with earlier?

The Solomon sisters, they went back to Onod. They did find their little home. And they were somehow not afraid of living in the home town. One of them who was married found her husband. He came back. So there was a man protecting them.

It was a very different kind of situation. They lived together, the husband and the wife and the sister. And eventually, after a very short time being in Onod, they moved into a bigger city called Miskolc, which one is the nearest city to Onod. And there were already many Jewish people who either came back and found someone of the family or they established again a family life.

Some people got married a couple of months after the Holocaust who were at the age of marriage and who wanted to have some kind of family life, a home life. So in Miskolc, there was already a fairly dynamic Jewish life again. They established school. They had the temple. They had a visiting rabbi coming.

I never participated in any of the activities there because I was in Budapest. But even until today, there are a few families who are in Miskolc who happen to be from Onod and survivors. And they still have a temple. I don't think that they have any Jewish schools now anymore there.

In the previous interview, you talked some about your faith. What was your religious life like at this point in Budapest?

In Budapest, this orphanage home was an orthodox religious home. We had been conducting the same type of life that I was brought up at home-- praying and blessing over the bread and dressed according to the code of the religion. It was more or less the very same one. And it's really amazing because a lot of people who survived they, so to say, turned away from God.

And as the head of Yeshiva University, Dr. Lamm-- once I had a very interesting discussion with him. And he said to me, "Jaffa, I am not surprised the ones who turned away after the Holocaust. To me, is the most surprising the ones who remain so faithful, such as you," he says to me. And many of them who really completely turned away eventually recovered from the traumatic kind of experience and slowly came back to the realization that even though this terrible thing happened, still there is God.

It could be for some kind of reason He turned away or He let things to happen in the world. But definitely there is a God. Unfortunately, a lot of people just can't cope with it, and they have so much anger and so much disappointment in God that they can't return back again. I feel very lucky and very fortunate that it did not affect me, and I remained the same faithful person that my parents brought me up. And I pity the ones who can't recognize the hand of God, because I think that it gives me a certain strength.

In my whole life, if it has to do with coping what I went through or our daily life today. To see the creation and not to believe that it was created by God. To see a beautiful day like today-- the sun is shining, the renewing of nature. How all this is taking place? Yeah, science has to do with it, but definitely, above all is God. And I pity the ones who can't see and recognize His presence.

And so how do you explain to yourself the Holocaust and how that could have happened?

You are asking me a very difficult question because I am all the time trying to ask that to myself-- this tremendous, puzzling question. Why it took place and why I had to lose my parents and why six million Jews and so many Gentiles and so many Gypsies, who were innocent. And mainly, the most hurting and most painful for me is whenever I think of that one and a half million children who were completely innocent.

Even if we want to blame or we want to put any kind of pressure on people or to say it came to them because they did something. But why the children? They were innocent. So that's the most puzzling.

And the only way that I can-- it's above my human understanding. Because there is no explanation for it. The greatest nation, the most culture, the most educated people were the Germans. The people of science, the people of so many

good things. Music. You name it. They really knew.

And that they could go there, to such a level and to be so cruel and so systematically and in so organized a way to kill out so many people-- it's behind my human understanding. And I feel that it's for me the best answer, that there are things-- and we have a great sage whose name is Rambam, one of our great scholars in Judaism, who said that you are allowed to search the ways of God. But when there is no answer, that means that it's above a human ability to understand.

And I can cope with that answer. I don't buy any kind of answer-- that they were mad or that they killed the Jews because the Jews were rich and all kinds of other explanations. They took away their jobs. There is no justification whatsoever to kill so many million people in such a cruel way. Except this is one of the things that we don't understand.

So your very strong faith continued throughout.

I think so, that that helped me all the time. Wherever I have been, I always felt the presence of God or the miracles that happened to me during the Holocaust and after. I feel that He was watching over me, for sure. We all survivors have that kind of question-- why me and not others? And it's not always the easiest thing to live with that kind. But you have to believe that there probably is a special reason why some of us and so few of us remained from the Holocaust.

Perhaps to tell the story. To teach people that we care for-- when you are angry, you have to calm down. It's a lesson. The Holocaust, if it's not really taken as a lesson for humanity-- to be careful and to know how to conduct yourself in daily life, too, with your neighbors, with your friends, with your family-- then the Holocaust was in vain. At least if you learn from it and we better our way of life and the whole humanity is learning from it, then at least it wasn't completely in vain. Otherwise, why so many people went?

So that's part of what we're doing today.

Yeah.

So you were in the orphanage until about May of '46?

Until about end of April, I think. It was very interesting. In many fact, I was already teaching a little bit, even though I was 14 years old. About what I learned, I was teaching to younger children.

Who were in the orphanage?

In the orphanage home, yes.

What subjects were you teaching?

All kind of subjects. Mainly math. From childhood, I was a very good student in math. I remember in my hometown, the mayor's daughter, who had difficulty in math, I used to teach her privately. I must have been maybe 10 years old. It just so happened that that was my best subject. So I was teaching to the younger group.

And then one evening, they gathered us in our social hall, and they said that there is an organized group that is going to Palestine. And who would like to join? And they told us that it's a difficult journey because it's not legal. British people don't want Jewish people to come to Palestine. But we are going to organize and there you will be put into schools and in orphanage home. And it was something that appealed very much to us.

You have to understand that wherever we turned, it reminded us-- the hostility and the abandonment and the coldness and the cruelty of people. How did they let all this to happen? Why didn't they try to hide us? Why didn't they try to go against the German regime? Why didn't they try to fight for us?

So we were not happy to be in Europe. We wanted to get away from there. It reminded us too much, wherever we

turned. I remember going in the street and suddenly crying. Why? Because I remember that the last time I was in Budapest, it was when my father and mother took me to the big zoo. For instance.

So in a way, we were happy because we had clothing. We had food. We had good friends. We have been in school. But everything reminded us of the tragedy that happened to our nation. And we were anxious to leave. So when this came, that we can go to Palestine, we were very happy.

And they organized and they prepared us that it won't be easy journey. We will have to go through borders from Hungary to Romania in the night. And we will have to hide. And they are going to try to get a boat from Costanta-- that's the port city of Romania-- and from there, to go to Israel. And we joined that.

Now who was organizing this group?

It was a Zionist group organizing this group.

Based where?

In Budapest.

The group was based in Budapest? And they wanted to help children get to--

Get to Palestine. They knew that, emotionally, it would be the best for the children to be away from all the environment that reminds them constantly of what took place. So to go to a new country where most of the year is spring or summer, that alone. Being more free.

And the group was going to be all children?

The group was mainly children or young people. The elderly people, they were sick. Very few remained except in Budapest. No elderly people came back from the concentration camp. So they organized this trip.

And I remember we were taking very few items with us-- we didn't have too much anyway, but because we had to be in a truck. They put some benches on a truck. They clothed the truck with blankets. And during the night, we went through the border.

I really don't know how they arranged this with the Romanian government that they closed their eyes, so to say, that these refugees are going through the border. And we were stranded then in Bucharest, which is the capital of Romania, for about six weeks, also in a Jewish organized home. Again, just girls together. And our teachers were with us.

We continued-- even on the truck, we were continuing learning. They were very much to that the kids should not suffer any lack of education, that all what has been deprived from us during the year or some who were longer in the camp that it should be now given back to them and to educate again. In a way, also, to be busy with knowledge instead of too much time of thinking.

We have to stop to turn the tape.

OK.

Jaffa Munk. March 11, 1997. Tape one, side B. You were talking about stopping in Bucharest for six weeks on that trip and how the lessons continued during the trip.

Yes. We have been stranded in Bucharest because dealing with the boat company, with the ship company, took a long time 'til they organized, 'til they purchased the boat, 'til they find a person who was ready to maintain the boat and take the group to Palestine.

How many were in the group?

We were 1,800. Half of it or the majority of it were girls. And the other group was boys. We joined together with the other orphanage home, which one was boys' home. And they were outskirts of Bucharest, in a little city put up. And after six weeks of living in Bucharest, where we constantly continue to learn and they all the time looked for it that life should be as normal as is possible for us, we were told one day that at last we are going to the port city, and we are going to board the ship.

I can't tell you how joyful it was for us. We were looking forward of leaving Europe. Not knowing where we really will be going and how good it will be or how bad it will be, how difficult or what is waiting for us.

Did you have some imaginings of what it might be like in Israel for you?

Very little. Except I had an uncle who lived in Jerusalem and who during the war, when we were still at home in Hungary, in Onod, he used to write to us. And he would describe the mountains of Jerusalem, the beauty of the country. So we had a little bit of desire. Also they were teaching us in the school songs about Israel. Or they would be telling us stories about the prophets that used to walk in the streets of Jerusalem or the temple that was in existence once upon a time and there is the remaining wall.

So a little bit of a taste or a little bit of understanding we had. However, I wouldn't say that we were very knowledgeable about what life is there. Nevertheless, we had understanding that the Jewish people who were present at that time in Palestine, which one is called today, is that they were seeking the Britons to leave the country. And that there is conflict there. Because I don't think that at that point we wanted to go to anywhere where life would be a conflict again or war again or hostility again.

What we wanted is to be just in nature and to see positive things, to see peacefulness among people and love. Mainly really, what we seeking for, it was to see that people love each other, because a lot of us lost that faith that people can still love and that people care for each other-- except the unitedness of our people, here and there, and help during or after the Holocaust.

That boat was waiting for us at that port. And 1,800 people in a big ship, which one actually wasn't a ship for transporting human beings. It was a ship transporting goods or animals. But we were delighted that we are heading to Israel, to Palestine. And the singing and the lectures on the boat.

And somehow just to go have a new life in a different place, it was connected with a lot of hope. We were hoping that we are going to establish a new type of life. We are on the boat. And water is coming into the ship. We were frightened that we are going to sink. They tried to fix the boat while we were in the boat.

And then one day after traveling, they said that all the young people should go on the deck of the boat. We are in contact by the Britons who don't want to let us into Palestine.

Now how long had you been on the boat?

About one week.

One week.

One week. And lots of us were sick. Seasick.

Were you seasick?

No. No. I am always the lucky one.

Was Esther seasick?

Esther, yes. Sure. Sure. She's very sensitive. She's very sensitive until this day. We went on the deck of the boat and we saw a huge military boat greeting us. And they were screaming to the head of our boat, to the organizers, that we should return back to Europe. So we started to cry.

We didn't want to go back anymore to Europe. Whatever is waiting for us, but just not back to Europe. So we were begging. Each one had the opportunity to speak in the loudspeaker and begging the Britons that please, we are refugees who lost everybody. We suffered so much. We have nobody. We want to come to this country. We want to start a new life. Please let us.

Oh, this went on for three, four hours. The quarrelling. Yes. No. Are you having a lot of men? The military people? Do you bring with you any kind of ammunition?

They were frightened that the Jewish people will be strong and they are going to try to oust the Britons from Palestine. After four hours-- about, maybe it was a little bit longer-- they agreed, that they let us into Palestine. And the boat came to the port of Haifa.

And just from the deck to see the beautiful mountains of Carmel, which one is a huge mountain in Haifa, was very moving, very emotional. The nature-- it was springtime, it was end of May-- is beautiful in Israel. All the flowers are blooming already. And as we came down from the boat, our people who already lived in Israel, they were greeting us. And they were throwing to us bags of all kinds of goodies. And the singing and the hugging. And some people found some relatives, some friends.

But the Britons did not allow us to go out to the city. We were put in a camp, which one was not a concentration camp. It's named Atlit. It was surrounded with a gate and a fence. It was a fenced-in camp with army barracks. And it was a very emotional kind of arrival to Israel, which one represents in our eye the freedom. That's what we were dreaming-- that now we are going to be free from soldiers and from being observed all the time. And here we are again in a closed camp situation.

And so what did that feel like to you?

It brought anger. It brought anger because we felt that the world still did not learn from the experience and from the tragedy. And we felt that we are people who actually, all of us, needed to be pampered. We needed to be loved. We needed, so to say, to be in a resort place and given all that could be given to us. And here we are again in a situation where we are closed in. We have no contact with the outside world again.

So again you had hoped, and again you had been disappointed.

In a way, yes. And still, it's not to compare-- because we know that eventually they are going to fight for our freedom. The people who organized this trip, it's called the Youth Aliyah. The youth going up to Israel. It's a lovely movement who wanted to save the children from remaining in Europe with the memories. They felt that that's the right thing to do for them.

So you had confidence that they would be able to help you?

Yes. We had confidence. Yes. And still, we could move in the premises back and forth. We couldn't leave the camp. But it's not to compare to the camps in Germany. We were given food. We had some people. Had visitors.

Did you and Esther have visitors?

We slowly contacted our uncle in Jerusalem, who sent his son-in-law. And he brought goodies for us. And he brought us my very first silk scarf. I got from my uncle who sent it to the camp to us. He wanted that we should feel human. We should feel as girls should feel-- that you beautify a little bit yourself. So he sent a scarf for me and for my sister.

And by nature, I cherish until this day every little new thing. I don't have to have big things. Every little thing, I can be very happy. And in those days, for sure, that scarf meant so much. I was trying to put it around my neck, on my hat, and on my face. All kind of different things.

What color was it?

It was blue with white and pink. I remember because I had one nice dress and it matched. And the dress was blue.

So we were in that situation but not too long, because then from the Jewish agency, which one has branches in America, too-- and it's subsidized, I think, the money from here, as well from Palestine. They came in and they demanded from the Britons that young children should be let out.

And after three weeks being in that camp, we were let out. And they gave us some tickets for a bus that would take us to Jerusalem. Because they asked, where is your destination? Where do you want to go?

And my uncle, who lived in Jerusalem, he corresponded with my uncle in Budapest. And prior to our trip to Palestine, the two of them made the decision, since we had no parents, that we should be attending a certain kind of religious school in Jerusalem. And that's what happened to have a dormitory.

And in that dormitory were the refugees, the survivors, the orphans. So it was a kind of orphanage dormitory. But still, you didn't feel that you are in a real orphanage home. It was more like a school dormitory.

How did you feel about that decision?

Well in a way, I felt that it was somebody who is making the decision. I didn't have to break my head where to head and what to do. Later on, I wished that they wouldn't make that decision for me. Perhaps I would have chosen a different school. This was a little bit more religious than I. It was a little bit too pious. You know what I mean?

No. I don't know.

It was a little bit too strict kind of a school. I wanted to go maybe to a lesser. It's like you go to a regular public school or you go to the church school. So this was more compared to a church school. Very restricted. Or there's a very restricted code of dressing, code of behavior.

What kinds of behavior and dress did they--

Very little freedom in the evening. You couldn't leave the premises. You had to be at home a certain time. In the school, you have to go with long sleeves and long skirts.

Were there boys in the school?

No. Only girls.

Only girls.

Only girls.

But you had to be very covered?

Very much so, yes. Yes. So I wouldn't have minded a little bit less strict kind of situation.

Was there more religious training and more religious services?

It was more, yes, than we have been exposed at home although I am coming from a rabbinical family. But this was a

little bit more to the right. But the learning was on a high level, so I can't complain, because educationally, I got what I wanted. I wanted very much to further my education. And at the beginning, we had difficulty with the language.

You and Esther?

Me and Esther, yes.

And the language was Hebrew?

Hebrew.

And were the other girls in the school survivors or were some of them not survivors?

No. A majority of the students were local, who were born and raised in Israel. Or at that time it was called Palestine. And the refugees were trained by private teachers in order that they can cope with the material that the rest of the group was learning. So they subsidized our learning sessions by taking us out for a certain time from the regular class and then privately teaching us.

However, in many things, such as science or math or geography, we were ahead of the Israelis. So apparently, the education in Europe was on a high level in certain areas. And religious education was much behind.

So we needed, mainly, language and religious studies, such as the Bible or the prophets. We needed a lot of help at the beginning. Or Jewish history. But in many other subjects, we were much ahead of the local people.

You had told me in the earlier interview that your father had arranged Hebrew lessons for you and your sister and your brother. Did that include spoken Hebrew?

That included spoken Hebrew, but that was so little. It was really not-- we knew certain expressions. But we were not able to converse in Hebrew.

So not only did you have trouble with the classes because of spoken Hebrew, but was it hard for you to make friends also because of the language?

It was. It was in a way, maybe. But it wasn't really because the girls were very outgoing. I remember very often being invited to several of my friends who were very outgoing to help us and to try to make us feel good. And being in homes sometimes, not always to be in the dormitory.

Oh, you mean you would be invited to be invited to their homes?

Invited to their homes, yes.

Were they day students or were they boarders who--

They were day students. Day students, yes. Only the refugees were the ones who lived in the dormitories. Only the orphans.

And it wasn't easy at the beginning. Certain subjects took us a long, long time to be able to join in with the rest of the group. But they made us feel good that in other subjects we were ahead, such as math or science. So they always used to say, we teach you Hebrew. We teach you prophets. And you teach us other things.

Did you have much contact with your family at that point? With your uncle?

With my uncle, we were most of the time on the Sabbath. Visiting here and there for a meal. We never slept over by my uncle for different reasons. This boarding school didn't like the idea that we are not back in the evenings. Also they lived

in a very poor condition.

Housing was very difficult in those days in Israel. So my uncle, who had three children, lived in a two-bedroom apartment. So it would mean that we would be living or sleeping in the living room, which one we didn't want to cause such a commotion in the house. But we went usually for a meal here and there.

And it was very refreshing. My aunt was a highly intelligent woman. My uncle was a rabbi in Frankfurt am Main And they always tried to tell us things that a parent would, guide us.

So before the Holocaust, your uncle had been a rabbi in Frankfurt--

In Frankfurt am Main.

And was he a refugee before the Holocaust, too?

He went in 1939. He got certificates from the Britons, which one meant that he was invited or allowed citizen to come to Palestine. They had certain quotas.

I remember that in this country also you had quotas-- how many people could come from Hungary, how many refugees can come from other countries. Now a lot of times, we hear other stories. But when I came to this country, I also came on a quota.

So my uncle went from Frankfurt am Main to Palestine in 1939, right after the-- how you call that night?

Kristallnacht?

Kristallnacht. Yeah. So they were also not too long in that country. A few years. But they established a nice kind of a life. And it was very refreshing to talk with my uncle. He would tell us beautiful stories about our parents. And be reminded those days when he used to come to visit.

So you had known him before?

Yes, we had known him, yes. And both of them very outstanding people. I remember that one day my uncle took me and my sister to a store in Jerusalem. And he bought a pocketbook for us. I mean, there were more important things, maybe. But he wanted so much to give us the feeling that we are girls, that we are human, that we have a pocketbook just like every other girl has.

So that was very important to you?

It was very. It was very. I have a picture standing by the store when we came out. And believe me, my uncle wasn't well-to-do to buy these kind of things. Yet, for him, it was very important to give as many things that he could in order to make us to feel that, yes, we live a normal life. And we are human beings. And we are just like all the other girls after the war. And we walked with that pocketbook so proud.

I wish to see that today teenagers would cherish something that they get as we cherished those pocketbooks. For years-- I think that a couple of years ago that I gave it away-- I kept that pocketbook, even though I wasn't using, but I just couldn't depart from it because it was so meaningful. So special. The scarf that he sent to the camp and then this pocketbook were the very first things that as a young teenager I had. And I wasn't different from others.

So where did you give such a special thing as the pocketbook?

Where I?

When you gave it away, such a special thing, where did you give it?

Oh, where I gave it? I gave it to a girl who was visiting me from Poland. Yeah. In many fact, now, we have also here a girl from-- but it was not on the tape. We have also now a girl who came here to study from Poland.

You have a girl?

I am in contact with a girl who, the parents were survivors and they went back to Poland to live. And this girl is a young girl. Parents not young people.

And she's here to study. And she's so determined. So it brings back to me so many memories. How determined, how much she wants to live a normal life.

Does it remind you of yourself?

A lot. A lot.

So this is important for the tape?

Yeah. OK. I don't know if I should put this story in.

Sure.

Yeah.

Did you know her parents? How did you and she find each other?

She was visiting the librarian from the school where I am teaching. She goes to a school in Silver Spring. And the daughter of the librarian of my school goes also to that school. And they invited her.

So then she said, "Jaffa, I think that for you, it would be a very meaningful experience to meet with this girl." And lo and behold, for sure, it was for me. Very important. And I want her to come for a weekend to visit me also. Yeah.

Had you wished that someone would do that for you when you had first arrived in Israel?

Very much so. Very much so.

So giving her the pocketbook was really very meaningful for you?

Very much so. Very much so. And I always wanted that somebody who would appreciate as much I appreciated. And it would be used by somebody that it would be meaningful for her.

So you found the right person for the pocketbook.

I think so. I think so. Back to Jerusalem.

Yes. Who paid for the school that you were going to?

It was paid by the Jewish Agency. It was paid. And I remember one thing that I wanted to tell. When we were let out from the camp, we were just given money to take the bus to Jerusalem. And there was no straight bus from the camp which one was situated next to Haifa to go to Jerusalem. We had to stop over in Tel Aviv.

And as we are standing, waiting for that connecting bus, a lady approaches us. She heard me talking to Esther Hungarian. And she approached us and she's saying, who are you? And we told her our story. We are the daughter of the rabbi from Onod. And, where are you going? We are going to Jerusalem.

And this was before a holiday. And she says, well I know your family from Europe. I am here in this country a few years. And do you need anything? We said, no. We don't need nothing. Well she ran and she bought for us some cake. And she bought for us some candy and chocolate. And she pushed into our pocket a very small amount of money. But that was the very first money that we had in our pocket.

And she hugged us. And she said, God bless you. Thank God that I see some young people who survived the concentration camps. And a million times, I wanted to find out who this lady was. What was she doing at the bus stop? She wasn't traveling.

Many times I repeated this story because I was very moved by it that somebody who specially found for her task to go to stations or bus or ships or wherever, maybe, maybe she will find some survivors. And she will be able to give them a few things to cheer them up. And once I told the story to a cousin of mine. And she said, you know who this was? This lady was a sister-in-law of my sister who died after the war in Budapest.

She didn't know that we are related. I mean, it's not real relation, that there is a contact or whatever. And many times, I learned from this. It's not "many times," but I learned from this that I also like to go places where I know that there is a need to cheer up people, if it's an old age home or if it's our orphanage home. Because I always will remember.

It was little. It was small. But it was very, very much on time. That little bit of package that she had given to us and a few pennies that she put in our pocket. So I hope that I will be able for many years to cheer up people and continue to do what I learned from that one experience.

Back to Jerusalem. I had difficulties of learning at the beginning. But slowly it got each time better thanks to lots of the girls who came and learned with us, who invited to their houses. It was not only the learning session, but being invited and being in normal homes and seeing that there are families, that not everything has been wiped away during the Holocaust, gave us a lot of strength.

And a good meal here and there sometimes-- because it was very poor time in Israel at the time. The food in the orphanage home was, again, fairly meager. But we ate. We ate bread. And latke here and that. Potatoes.

It very helpful to be again among people who were cheerful, who were happy. Seeing children, seeing babies. I remember that I was very moved when I saw that babies are so pretty. And that mommies are pushing carriages.

I thought that the whole world has been wiped away and only a few of us remained. But I saw that life was going on. And families were together. And they built homes. And they were working. And they were learning. And it was a normal kind of a life.

Unfortunately, I had to go through again a war in Israel in 1947. The Independence War of Israel when the British were ousted and the Arabs attacked us. I had been visiting a friend of mine in Jerusalem, and as I was returning back on the road, going back to the orphanage home, I see that somehow the street is empty.

And that was very unusual for a Saturday afternoon. People used to stroll in the street. That's the day off. And I hear, boom, boom, boom. And I don't see nobody. So I ran to a ditch by the road. And I was just hiding myself there, knowing this kind of things from the experience of the Holocaust. And then I hear from one window somebody screaming, come in! Come in!

So I came into a house, and they took me down to the basement, which one was like some kind of a shelter. And they told me that I can't continue to go. You can't go back now to your orphanage place, to the dormitory, because the Arabs attacked us.

So I went through a difficult time in Israel very shortly after our arrival. We arrived in '46, '47. Already started with the British, with the Arabs. And then the Independence War.

Jerusalem was sieged. There was no water. There was no way to get out from the city, to come back. And yet, I don't know. With all that suffering, I never gave up. And it wasn't so depressing because you were together with many people. You saw families. It wasn't that we had to be surrounded. It wasn't that we have been hearing the gas chamber or smelled the smoke of the gas.

Here, we were fighting for our own independence. It was a very different kind of feeling. It wasn't easy. It was not pleasant. But not to compare.

You didn't feel helpless as you had before?

No, no. Not helpless, not at all. We had faith in our soldiers. We had faith in HaShem. In God. But it was difficult. Food was very poor. And the main problem in Jerusalem was water. They used to give out a bucket of water per family. That's how difficult it was. And for the time being, school was closed.

Were you still living in the orphanage?

Still in the orphanage.

But you weren't having classes in school?

We had no classes because we were attacked. And they were afraid to have children walking in street in those days. Children walking to school, even on the bus, it was not safe. But after a while, they reopened back the school.

I left Jerusalem during that siege. With an armored car they took down some children to Tel Aviv because they felt that it is very dangerous to be in Jerusalem. And Esther, my sister, by that time was working in Tel Aviv. So I went there.

So she was not in the school with you?

She wasn't in the school with me. She was only for one year. And she learned to sew. She went to a vocational school. And I went to a regular gymnasium.

Oh. So Esther did not go to the same school in Jerusalem that you did?

No. Not to the same school. No.

But she was in Jerusalem?

She was. And she was in the same dormitory. But they established for girls who were unable to do spiritual kind of things or scholastic things, who were more broken from the war. And Esther was-- even though she's much brighter. And for her, learning is very easy, while I have to work on my studies all the time, all my life. Still she just couldn't go back to the books. And they found that it's the best thing for certain girls to be busy with their hands instead of being busy with their mind.

So you were separated from Esther again?

I was separated from Esther-- the first time separated after. Because in the camp, after the camp, she was in the sanatorium. But I was not really separated, because we were both in Budapest. Here, we were also not separated. We lived together in the dormitory.

But then we were separated because once she learned her profession, sewing, she got the job and she went to Tel Aviv. Also, you have to know that after a certain age, they didn't keep the girls in the dormitory.

We have to turn the tape.

OK.