

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009
RG-50.106*0177

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

MAGDALENA BERKOVICS

October 15, 2009

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Magdalena Farkas Berkovics**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on October 15, 2009, in **Rockville, Maryland**. This is tape number one, side **A**. Please tell me your whole name, your full name?

Answer: These – these **[indecipherable]**

Q: Your name.

A: My name? I am **Magdalena Berkovics**. That is what I am using **[indecipherable]**

Q: And what is the name that you were born with?

A: I was **Magdalena Farkas**.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Romania – Romania**.

Q: What city?

A: What city? **Cluj-Napoca**, or **Kolozsvár**, in Hungarian.

Q: Okay. And what ye – when were you born? The date.

A: In 1919.

Q: What – what day?

A: Hm?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: And what day were you born in 1919?

A: What?

Q: Date. Day.

A: Date? In the fifth of July.

Q: Okay, so let's talk a little bit about your family. Tell me about your parents.

What were their names?

A: **Yasmen(ph) Bell(ph) Farkas** was my father. And he had the Jewish name, and th-the other one was Hungarian. Everything was Hungarian because they lived in **Hungary** then, which has changed into **Romania** later, when I was born.

[**indecipherable**] People are mixing up these inheritances, and I don't understand why I was **Farkas**, and then I was – I was **Curtis(ph)** after the first husband. And then I was **Berkovics** after the second husband, you know? They were times when people died.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And how – and what was your mother's name?

A: My name?

Q: Mother – your mother's name.

A: **Berta – Berta** lan – the maiden name?

Q: Do you know what her maiden name was?

A: **Berta Landesman(ph)**.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Okay. And how – how long did the family live in **Cluj**? Many generations?

A: Yes. I don't know when they moved to **Cluj** precisely, because my – my father was from another community. But they lived – when I was born, they were in **Cluj-Napoca**.

Q: Do you know where your father came from?

A: My father? My father came from **Hungary. Hungary.**

Q: You don't know the city? Do you know the city?

A: No, no.

Q: No, okay.

A: In those days there was nothing written, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: **Hungary.**

Q: And –

A: And the – the mother tongue, excuse me, was Hungarian.

Q: Yeah.

A: I had two mother tongues, Hungarian and Romanian, because I had Romanian schools.

Q: Mm-hm. And, was your mother born in **Cluj**?

A: Yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Okay. Do you – did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had a brother, a doctor, who died, who was killed in the war, in '44, at the end of the war.

Q: And what was his name? His name?

A: His name is tiberi – what shall I tell? In Romanian, Hungarian, he has different names. **Farkas** was the family name, and his Hungarian name was tibe – **Tibor**(ph) in **Hungary**, and in Romanian, **Tiberiu**(ph)

Q: Okay. And so it was the two of you, the two children?

A: Only two. They had only two children –

Q: Yeah.

A: – me and my brother.

Q: Was he older, or younger?

A: He was six years older than me.

Q: Yeah. Tell me about your family. Were they religious?

A: My father yes, but my mother, not at all. She did not believe [**indecipherable**] something.

Q: So did you – when you were a child –

A: Yes?

Q: – did you observe any holidays?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, we observed, because my mother did everything which was necessary for a holiday, because of my father.

Q: And did you belong – did your family belong to a synagogue?

A: Yes, of course, to **Beth Avron**, which was in – you don't know the town. In the town was these three synagogues. In these **Beth Avron** was the more Conservative.

Q: And wer-were your – did you observe Shabbat every week?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And – and – and Passover? You had –

A: Everything, everything. Also my mother – my mother was not a believer, but she – she did everything because my father required it, yes.

Q: Wanted it, yeah. What kind of work did your father do?

A: He was, of course what **[indecipherable]** Jew do, tradesman.

Q: What kind? What did he –

A: They had first big house, which are inherited from grandfather. And then – I don't know whether the house was sold or not, I don't remember, but then he had started on his own, making trades, you know, in different towns.

Q: Yeah. But di – what did he trade in, do you know?

A: Article. All kinds of issues, articles, you know. Clothing and that kind.

Q: I see. I see.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: [indecipherable] Jews had this trade.

Q: And your grandparents, did you know your grandparents?

A: Yes. I knew they were very old, and then died in a few years. I don't know what did he do, but well, how could he afford such a big house? I have no idea. One story – or two story here, house with balcony, in the center of – of the town.

Q: Was the neighborhood a Jewish neighborhood? Did you have Jewish neighbors?

A: Yes, yes. It was the family were **Laib**(ph) who was [indecipherable] streets.

Very – they became very, very, very rich. The family **Laib**(ph) and **Rayger**(ph).

There were a few families are in there, it was a – the main street of the town. The town was the second town in **Romania**. It was a very famous – they had the history, because the Hungarians and the Romanians fought for their belonging. The one store that it belonged always to them, the other store that it belongs always to them. Now it wa – it was a great fight always, and even though I have heard that they have misunderstanding about who was the first.

Q: What was the name of the street that you lived –

A: I lived [indecipherable] that was the – one of the main streets, on the center of the town.

Q: Yeah. And what about – did you have aunts and uncles, and – and –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, I had, I had. I have a few, they all died. Nobody came back, only me. I am the only survivor, I told you.

Q: Yeah. But I – but when you were a little girl –

A: Yes.

Q: – you saw your aunts and your uncles?

A: Yes, we lived in the middle of the family, because the house was big, and everybody lived in the same house.

Q: Oh, cuty – cousins? Did you have cousins?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And they all lived in the house?

A: In the house.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: They were not yet married, because they were young. I married first.

Q: Yeah. Wha-What kind of school did you go to? Did you go to a –

A: I was in a German private school first. My mother wanted me to learn German, it was fashionable then, German, before **Hitler** came.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: And then I – I went to the Romanian high school, gymnasium, was called. And I was here til I was 18 years old. Then I graduated the bac-bac – **basho**(ph), or

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

baccalaureate, which was, we say, inherited from the French, the Romanian. I don't know whether you understand me. So I graduated this baccalaureate, which lasted eight years. I was 18 years old when I finished the – this school. And then, meanwhile, I was at the conservatory of music.

Q: And what did you study in – in the conservatory?

A: I played the piano. I was always, all my life a pianist.

Q: And you had a piano at home?

A: Yes, I have at home, and finally, I taught a lot of – I – I gained, with this teaching, yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And then I was teaching at the conservatory of [indecipherable] which was at the university grade, I was a university teacher.

Q: And were your fa – was your family Zionist? Did they talk about **Palestine**?

A: Ah, you know, it was my brother, who was a doctor, very, very, very talented, and he was an excellent violinist and everything. He was shot by the Germans, because he couldn't run enough fast. They told to run, you know, the Germans [indecipherable]. That was his fate. My only brother. That was for me such a loss, I cannot tell you. The greatest loss in my life.

Q: Yeah.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: A very handsome boy, I – I should have taken the photos. I have photos, a lot of photos.

Q: Did your family talk about **Palestine** at all?

A: No, they were not oriented towards this, enough that – that –

Q: Yeah. Did you – when you were a little girl –

A: Yes.

Q: – and a teenager.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What – can you tell me some of the things that happened?

A: You know, not very – the Romanian were not like the – the Hungarians. The Hungarians took the – deported the Jews, the Hungarian Jews.

Q: Yeah. I'm talking about before the war.

A: Before, no.

Q: No, before.

A: I was in the school. In the school I did not feel – a little, yes. For instance, one day in the class, there was a competition between the girls. We were about 15 years

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

old, who looks like a Jewish girl, or not. And they decided that I am the only one who doesn't look Jewish.

Q: Yeah. And did – what about the teachers? Did the teachers –

A: The teachers were not bad, the Romanians. Not – not too bad. One was. The music teacher. She never put me to play the piano, to show what I could. And it was not bad at this school, not bad. I felt the distance – the difference between my colleagues and me. There was no – how to say, con – connection between us, not at all. No connection. We did not fight, whereas it was not such a thing, but it was no connection, not at all.

Q: So what else did – you went to school.

A: Yes.

Q: You played – I'm talking about when you're young.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you played the piano.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you do anything else? Did you have anything else – did you like to read?

A: It was enough, because I had to practice the piano daily. I was preparing myself for a future job, for a future – for a future. And I became a teacher in music, I had two diplomas, music, and – and piano. They were of university grade, yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: So, did you like sports? Did you –

A: Yes, but not especially one sport. Swimming. I could swim well, I could skating well.

Q: I-Ice skating? Ice skating?

A: Yes. My mother was a good skater, just imagine.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And what did your family do in the summertime?

A: They were –

Q: Or what did you do in the summertime?

A: I practiced the piano always.

Q: Always.

A: And I went to – I had some boys who wooed me, and now you know. That is not important at all.

Q: So now you're 18, and you've gotten your degree. Y-You finished –

A: Yes, I have.

Q: – what – and then what ha – so it's 1937.

A: Yes, at 1937 was just about the war to break out.

Q: I know.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: That I gave private lessons. I had very many private students, or – of all kind of grade. Many, many private students. Then came the war.

Q: Okay, and what is your first memory of the war?

A: How?

Q: What was the first thing that happened?

A: The first thing that there was, that I lost my whole family, and so I was very, very, very shocked, you know?

Q: Well, how did that happen? What –

A: Th-They were deported, you know, deported the – deported to **Germany**.

Q: How did – how did that happen? Did – how did the family find out where to go?

A: They did not know, only when they were on the different cars. They were taken by cars, big cars –

Q: Yeah.

A: – which transported them.

Q: Yeah, but did somebody come to their house to tell them?

A: Yes, that – yes, to gather them.

Q: So everybody went?

A: Everybody, everybody, me too. Everybody was **[indecipherable]** deported.

Q: Okay, and – and –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And the house remained –

Q: Empty?

A: – empty.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they were – they put there, Christian. Christians instead of – that re –
replace us with Christians.

Q: And when was this? Do you know when – when – when did this happen? When
– what year you were deported?

A: In – in 1944, the Hungarian je – Jews were deported in 1944.

Q: Okay. Were you ever in a ghetto?

A: What house?

Q: Were you ever in a ghetto?

A: Yes, of course, if you were deported first, you were taken to the – you were in
the ghetto in the town where you were born.

Q: Okay, let's talk about that. Wh-When did you go into the ghetto?

A: Into where?

Q: The ghetto.

A: Into the ghetto? In 1944. I was – I – one year.

Q: So it was one year in the ghetto?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: And what was that like? You were living with your family?

A: Yes, in the ghetto, yes, but as soon as we were deported, we were separated.

Q: Okay, but let's – let's first talk about life in the ghetto.

A: In the ghetto, we were not allowed to do things that we do – we did, you know?

We were very – how to say?

Q: Crowded? Was it –

A: Crowded. Not only crowded, but it was very hard for us to buy things for us, to – you know, it was a very restrained life.

Q: Restricted. Restricted.

A: Restricted, yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So was it all the Jews of **Cluj** were put into this one ghetto?

A: Yes. Yes, but there were sections, you know, there were some who were living in their old house, there were some who were living –

Q: But you had to – did you have to move out of your old house, into the ghetto, or was your house in the ghetto?

A: Not til we were deported.

Q: So you stayed in your house?

A: Yes, until we were deported.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Until you – so your house was a part of the ghetto.

A: Yes.

Q: I see. Okay. And so what did you do during the day?

A: During the day, I taught the piano to small children, and even to – to Christians.

Q: Oh really? They would come to your house?

A: That – the children, yes.

Q: Oh, mm-hm.

A: Yes, and I went to their house.

Q: Did you get paid? Did they –

A: Yes, therefore we could leave because the – the men were all in a forced labor camp.

Q: Oh.

A: You know, meanwhile.

Q: They had taken the men away?

A: Yes.

Q: I mean, to do forced labor?

A: Yes. We were only women in the [indecipherable] Jewish women.

Q: Oh, only women, mm-hm.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And the men were taken, and then my husband and everything. I haven't seen him for years.

Q: Well now, your husband, when did you get married?

A: Very early. I don't know, very early, in 1940. [break]

Q: And when did you get married for the first time?

A: In 1939, exactly when the war broke out.

Q: And who – who – tell me about your first husband.

A: My first husband was my – wait a minute – was somebody whom I kn-knew by teaching him and accompanying him, because he was not only a clerk, he was a clerk at the great factory, but he was a singer. Had a beautiful voice, and he engaged me as a accompanist, you know? And then I accompanied him, and so it has become a love story.

Q: Oh, what was his name?

A: **Curtis Vilmos**(ph). **Curtis**.

Q: Yeah.

A: He was from **Mistreetsa**(ph), from a German, smaller town.

Q: Mm-hm. Was he Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me about your wedding.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: He spa – he talked a few languages, perfectly; German, Hungarian, Romanian.

And he was taken to the li – to the – this camp.

Q: The labor?

A: **[indecipherable]** you know **[indecipherable]** he was – died. He died.

Q: Tell me about your first wedding. Was it in your house?

A: Oh, it was long ago. I had, of course, a wedding gown, and my family was present, can't tell, nothing special. As the usual weddings. I was 20 years old.

Q: You were 20? And was it in your house, or –

A: Yes, in our house. It was a family house, you know, so that –

Q: Yeah, yeah. And you had a rabbi perform it?

A: Yes, of course. My father was religious. Yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Did you have a kosher home?

A: Yes.

Q: You did. All right, so now you're in the ghetto. You're married, but your husband was taken away.

A: Yes.

Q: Into labor camp, with the other men.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you're teaching music to – to others.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: And then what was the next – the next –

A: Step.

Q: – step.

A: The next step. Finally, in '44, the Hungarian Jews were all deported. The 400,000 Jews were all gathered together in ghetto, and were deported to – they thought to **Germany**, but it wasn't **Germany**, it was **Poland**.

Q: And how did you know – ho-how did you know what was happening? How – how –

A: I have – I realized. I was 20 years old, I could realize what is happening with us. Well, at first that – not. Then when we stood more –

Q: Yeah.

A: – we were more. Then we realize that we are in [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. But you got married in '39.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And you were taken away in '44.

A: Yes.

Q: So that's five years between 1939 –

A: Yes, I was alone.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: You were alone with your –

A: Alone with my mother, and with my step – not step-mother, how is called, the mother –

Q: Mother-in-law.

A: Mother-in-law, yes.

Q: And you were in your house, and you were teaching music.

A: Yes.

Q: And did you have enough food to eat?

A: What?

Q: Did you have enough food to eat, during those years?

A: Yes, we had food, because we – we bought it in – in – in a black –

Q: Market?

A: – market.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was very expensive.

Q: Yeah.

A: But as I gained money with the teaching, I –

Q: Right.

A: – could afford a decent food.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Did you get any letters? Any mail from your husband, or your brother, or your –

A: For very, very seldom. Very seldom. That was a tragedy, these [indecipherable] was a – a tragedy.

Q: And, you spoke German.

A: Yes, very good.

Q: So did – did – and – and you had a radio? Did you have a radio?

A: Yes, which was taken away later.

Q: Yeah. And you could hear speeches by **Hitler**? Could you hear speeches?

A: Yes, of course. I heard his speeches.

Q: And you could understand them –

A: Yes.

Q: – because you spoke German.

A: I had German school.

Q: Yeah. And what – do you remember what your thoughts –

A: Of course, I – first of all, against the Jews. That was his main problem.

Q: Right.

A: Why? Who knows, against the Jews. They say because he was – he was not allowed by the Jews to – to – he was – and he couldn't afford to be – to become an

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

artist. He wanted to be an – a painter, you know. And that is – that was his

[indecipherable], that the Jews didn't let him to be an artist.

Q: So, the cr – you said that you had Christian children coming to you for lessons.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So the Christians came into the ghetto?

A: Yes, they came. Not very many, but they came.

Q: Yeah. Did they bring you food, did they –

A: No, no, no, it was not about this.

Q: No. Yeah, yeah.

A: I taught in my way, and got some money for that.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: Yes. And we lived from my –

Q: Yeah, and wa – but you said you went to their house too sometimes. Did you –

A: Yes, I went.

Q: Well, so what was it like for you to go outside of the ghetto?

A: Yes, the beginning, yes. Later on, it was forbidden to walk away from home. But in the beginning, because the – the Germans came in '39, and the Hungarian became their ally, you know? So they did what the Germans dictated.

Q: What – how was your mother doing this time? Was she very –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Well, she was not an old woman, 54 –

Q: Yeah.

A: – or something. And –

Q: What was – how did she –

A: She was very worried about my mother – brother –

Q: Yes.

A: – because he was not at home, and [indecipherable] she was a very smart woman. She knew everything from the beginning. She predicted. She told that we'll be [indecipherable] that we'll be sold, that we'll be so – she was a very smart woman.

Q: And – and your father was not home. Was your fa –

A: No, he was traveling, doing his job, because he – he –

Q: So he wasn't – he was not taken away with the other men?

A: No. For a while. And then later on, when the Jewish – when the Hungarian Jews were –

Q: Rounded up.

A: – maltreated, then of course that they went to – they were taken to ghetto.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was in '44.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right.

A: Later than the other Jews, because when I met other Jews, Polish Jews in the ghetto, they reproached us. You were lucky, you were not far – four years or five years in the – in the ghetto, like us. Because the Polish Jews were – you know what happened to them.

Q: Yeah.

A: I read so many good books about this.

Q: Right, right. So when you were in the ghetto –

A: Yes.

Q: – before you were taken away.

A: Yes.

Q: Were there Jews from other countries that were brought in, or not?

A: No.

Q: No. It was just **Cluj**, the Jews of **Cluj**.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so now you're told to report to – to – what, go to the train station? What did they tell you? How did you know you were to leave your house?

A: What?

Q: How did you know that you had to leave your house?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: We did not know. They thought – for instance, I'll tell you, an example. One day, we were gathered at the marketplace, and a middle-aged gentleman – gentleman, who was a colonel, you know what a colonel was? Was a – of a high grade officer, made us a speech telling that, don't worry gentlemen, and don't worry at all, because you – you will be taken to a place where the old men will work for you, and the younger will – I don't know what work will they do, and the children will play. That was what he told us. I'll never forget his [indecipherable] he might have been about 50 years.

Q: Was he German?

A: Yes – no, no, no, no, wait a minute. He was Hungarian.

Q: He was Hungarian.

A: Hungarian, older Hungarian [indecipherable] all very well. Just was a – and you'll believe, my mother was close to me, and thought, a Hungarian officer will – will not never lie. My mother believed the old conception of the Hungarian regime system. Now?

Q: Yeah.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Magdalena Farkas Berkovics**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And you were talking about being – when it was time to leave, and this – you were at the market, and they told you you would be going away, everybody would be leaving **Cluj**?

A: **Cluj**, yes, we were in **Cluj** til 1944.

Q: Okay.

A: The Hungarian Jews were lucky, because they were taken late.

Q: Yes.

A: The Polish Jews were taken in '39. Just imagine what the difference.

Q: Right.

A: They always reproached us.

Q: I know, yeah.

A: And –

Q: So when you – when you went away, what did you take with you?

A: They told us we had to take only a certain size **[indecipherable]** them, you know

–

Q: Yeah.

A: – I don't know, 70 kilograms or something. I don't remember correctly, I –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yeah.

A: The most important thing is clothing. For instance, I took with me two clothing, two gowns – not gowns, winter clothes. Yeah, it was so heavy, and it was – we were in – in June, at the end of June, just imagine. Everybody took what she – what – what he can, and she can, no?

Q: Did you take food with you?

A: Yeah, some food. I remember that I took with me a jar of very good, how to say that, it's sweet, not from –

Q: Jel-Jelly?

A: Jelly. Very, very good. Special. And after a while, it was so hot. This is – means that I couldn't carry. And I told my mother, Mother, I cannot carry further. And I put the jar down. Some others were happy to find it, probably.

Q: Yeah. And then, you were all together at – what, at a train station?

A: We were together the day we started.

Q: Okay.

A: You understand.

Q: But did you leave from a railroad station?

A: Yes, it was a railway station with a – with a car – with cars for [indecipherable]

Q: And – and so you were all crowded into a car?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, into a car, 70 people in one car. And that was the beginning of the terror, of the – you know, old people, so many died, meanwhile. And there was not enough food, because just what we carried with us.

Q: Yeah.

A: What shall I tell? This event was terrible, this – the beginning of the war thing.

Q: Yeah. And do you remember how long the trip took? Did it take several –

A: Yes, three or four days.

Q: And did you have enough water? Did they give you water, or –

A: They gave when they opened the doors, and people started to cry, water, water, water, it was awful.

Q: Yeah. And then where did you go to first? Your – where did it stop?

A: It stopped, I don't know which. In **Poland**, of course.

Q: Yes.

A: We were in different countries, and different towns. More towns and villages, in **Poland**. Then the first day, I si – if I remember well, it has stopped at the railway station of **Auschwitz**, which was a town, **Auschwitz**.

Q: How di – had you – did you know anything about **Auschwitz** –

A: Never heard.

Q: You never heard –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Nobody heard about that. Maybe some people from the **Judenrat** have heard.

You have heard about the **Judenrat**?

Q: Yes, mm-hm. Was there a **Judenrat** in **Cluj**?

A: Yes, in **Cluj**, partly. I think it was in another town, too, I don't know. Here was the main **Judenrat**.

Q: Did you know – did you know any of the people who were in the **Judenrat**?

Were they friends?

A: I knew – I knew. You know, it happened to me once at – in the ghetto, that one of my so-called friends told something about the ghetto, that we will be well, I don't know what. And after then, I didn't find him any longer among us. He went with the **svaj**(ph) with the Swiss ges – group. And that I couldn't forget, never. I told him, why did you told m-me? Didn't you tell me the truth? He didn't tell. That was that. And they escaped with the Swiss group.

Q: Did a lot of people escape, or just a few?

A: No, they were – not too many, but when I came home and heard that, you can't imagine what I felt.

Q: Yeah. I mean, he was on the **Judenrat** – he was in the **Judenrat**, this man?

A: No, no, he was with his family and other relatives.

Q: Oh yeah.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: I – I don't want to speak about that, because –

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: – it's not –

Q: So you – the train arrives in the town of **Auschwitz**.

A: Yes.

Q: And what happened then? Did you get out of the –

A: We were unloaded, yes.

Q: You unloaded.

A: And – and unloaded. And it was hot this day, something. I had carried with me jars of – of – of jellies and things. I put everything down on the floor, and we went as they told us went. My mother was with me, and my mother-in-law. Then, at the certain moment, we were told to stop. And there we met **Mengele**. He was a young doctor, I remember him. A dark doctor, dark face. Not blonde at all. And he stopped us, and told that we will be okay, don't worry, th-the usual story. And then he started to separate people. The younger one, and what he liked, that he can, that they can work, were placed there to one side. The other ones, who he found old, not enough good to work, and so then we were separated. I was separated from my family. **[ringing]** It is my phone call. **[break]**

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: So you were talking about you had gotten to **Auschwitz**, and you were told that – they separated the people.

A: Yes, they separated. We didn't know why, just we saw that the youngest were separated, yes. And I didn't had no idea what is happening, because I did not take leave from my mother. She was on my side, my father was with the men. You know, they were two big groups. So I did not know, I did not even tell, see you later, or something. Nothing. We did not know noth – anything. So, they separated us. And then we came out of there.

Q: You came out?

A: [**indecipherable**] I – I don't know what kind of word is that, what – what language.

Q: San – but where did you go? So you – were you by yourself, or did you have a –

A: I was with the others. We were in – in –

Q: No, but you were – were you with any family?

A: No.

Q: Just you. You were the only –

A: Me and my cousin was with me, my first cousin. She wanted to be with me.

Q: Okay.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And there was a – an aunt there, and there were again some, but they were members of the family, younger. [indecipherable] that is –

Q: So you're two – you're 25 years old now.

A: Something like that.

Q: Yeah. And then, so where did you all go? What happened next?

A: Next? They took, as I told, to **Auschwitz**.

Q: No, no, no, but you got to **Auschwitz**, and they separated you, and then you – the young women, where did they take the young women? Where did you –

A: Oh, to different labor camps, where we worked.

Q: Okay. But you stay – did you stay in **Auschwitz**, did you get a uniform?

A: We stayed about how much, I don't remember well.

Q: Okay.

A: One year or so.

Q: You stay – okay, where did you sleep in **Auschwitz**?

A: There were barracks, I don't know how to tell.

Q: Okay.

A: A barrack is a big –

Q: Yeah.

A: – out of wood.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yes, uh-huh.

A: A big edifice.

Q: And wha – did you wear a uniform? Did they give you anything to wear?

A: In the beginning, not. We had such – you know, the – the – everything was taken in the bath – bathroom.

Q: Oh, you first went to the bath?

A: Yes, of course, to bath, they bathed us, and took away everything.

Q: Okay.

A: I remember, I thought, that is mine, and I got a – a –

Q: A hit?

A: Yes, a slap.

Q: Slap.

A: Yeah. So that –

Q: Did they take off your hair? Did they remove your hair?

A: Yes, of course, I forgot. I was completely – how to – barren.

Q: Bald, yeah

A: Bald.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: And did they put a number?

A: Me don't. I didn't get numbers. There were many who got.

Q: Yes, yes. And so you – did you get a uniform? Something to wear?

A: Yes, we had – first not, first they gave us what they had gotten from the bath.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: They changed everything. I had – remember, I had a dress so – short dress, til here, it was not mine.

Q: And were you able to stay with your family, your cousins? Wha – could you –

A: With the cousins, yes, the younger who have separated from us.

Q: Yeah, with you.

A: Yes.

Q: And did you – and so did you work in **Auschwitz** itself? Did you do anything?

A: In **Auschwitz**, I don't – no, we did not work. We just were waiting for our future.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was very hard, I remember we s – you know that I never spoke about this.

Q: No, I didn't know.

A: To anybody. I didn't want – they called me several times.

Q: Really?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And I refused. I was – I was very – not only sick, but I – a few years ago, two or three years ago, I fell down. And since then **[indecipherable]** is that I cannot walk or – or –

Q: Yeah, mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: I am not well, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Did – did you – so did – you didn't do any work, you said, in **Auschwitz**. What kind of food did they give you?

A: Oh, they were always the same usual foo-food. It was a certain kind of soup, very thin, made out of – of vegetable, but I don't know what vegetable.

Q: Potatoes, or –

A: No, I haven't seen the potatoes. They were – there was a strange kind of –

Q: Turnips? Maybe turnips, or –

A: Yes, turnip, yes, I had turnip.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And so you stayed there, and what did you – what did you and your cousins think was happening? Did you know, or –

A: The new cousin – these – the relatives, one of them, a young girl than me, six years younger, wanted to come with me, to associate, to accompany me. The others, my aunt was – how much? Sorry, I don't know how much. The other cousin was

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

taken with the child, away. So the one part of the group was taken away who had children.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the others who didn't have children, and were young enough to fulfill the German's requirements.

Q: So you stayed in **Auschwitz** for – how many months did you –

A: In **Auschwitz**, I don't remember precisely, because – because we were taken cul – to different camps, and –

Q: Camps, okay. Do you remember the names of any of the camps?

A: I remember, but now I don't know.

Q: Okay. And what kind of –

A: **Stutthof**.

Q: **Stutthof**.

A: That was the second death camp, after **Auschwitz**. **Stutthof**, it was as famous as

–

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: You have heard of **Ausch** –

Q: Yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: [indecipherable] **Stutthof** I was – I don't, I think have a – but from here that was a center, which took us to different labor camps.

Q: I see. And what did you do in **Stutthof**, did you work in st –

A: No, in **Stutthof** for a while, for a few months, we were waiting for our – and then they took us to different camps.

Q: Camps, yeah.

A: Where we – it was in **Poland**, in – in **Poland**, in – **Stutthof** was in **Poland**, and **Grobensk**(ph). They were very famous neighbor camps then.

Q: Yes, mm-hm.

A: It is written something about that.

Q: Yes, and **Steinort** was the –

A: **Steinort**, yeah. The first thing was **Steinort**.

Q: Yeah. So did you ever do any work in these camps?

A: Yes, we d – we did, you know –

Q: What – what kind of work?

A: They told us to dig. To dig.

Q: Dig holes, to dig ditches?

A: To dig [indecipherable] how to say?

Q: The ground, dig in the ground?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, to dig the ground, with the necessary tools.

Q: Shovel, and –

A: Yes, yes, yes. We did this.

Q: Yeah. All day long?

A: You know, when do we start – when did we start? At two o'clock at night, we started, and then we stopped work at four in the afternoon. Not four, five.

Q: And how was your health? How were your health at the time? How were you feeling?

A: Not – it was not very bad, but I had with – always with my – with my –

Q: Stomach?

A: Stomach. Always. Diarrhea, and always with my stomach.

Q: Yeah.

A: And starving, of course.

Q: Right.

A: Never had enough to eat.

Q: Yeah.

A: Then we found some potato in the ground. Not for – I did not – we did – didn't have occasion to cook.

Q: Right.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Of course, we ate them as – as we got. That is another story.

Q: You ate them raw?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And you were just getting soup during the day, is that what you were getting?

A: We got a soup for noon, it was a very thin, water-like soup, with a few potatoes in it.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Ah, you cannot imagine like this.

Q: So what did you and the other people, the other women, talk about?

A: When will we get free. About freedom, always about freedom, and what they cooked at home. Cooking was the main subject. Not for me, because I wasn't cooking, I didn't cook. My mother cooked all my – whatever what is. I was teaching, because I was the only one, when we were still free, who earned money.

Q: Money. Yeah, yeah. So you talked about what you – freedom, yeah.

A: Yeah, always about freedom, and what do we like the most to cook. The older women who cooked, who have no jobs.

Q: Did you talk about your music at all?

A: Oh yes. I brought music of course. I knew [indecipherable]

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Did you sing at all?

A: Yeah, they sang. I didn't have a voice.

Q: No, but in the camp, I meant, in the camp.

A: Yes, they sang.

Q: The – the women sang in the camp?

A: Yeah, they sang, because it was nothing to do, else to do.

Q: What – what kind of songs?

A: Hungarian, because we were under Hungarians a few years.

Q: Yeah. Right, right. Do you remember any of the songs?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you sing one for a little bit? Any song, or even part of a song. A little melody?

A: **[sings]** No, I have no voice. I was operated, I have a surgery **[indecipherable]** and I have no voice.

Q: Oh, yeah. What was the name of this song, do you know?

A: I don't know, I don't remember.

Q: Okay, okay. So you then – you were working in those different camps.

A: Yes, yes, yes, different camps.

Q: And then it comes towards the end in – in what, 40 – early '45?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. An-And wh-where did you go, where did you –

A: There were people, young people, waiting for the – for those who were returning. You know, the railway stations were full with them, who were waiting there, so that they will find among them – among us, somebody.

Q: Yeah.

A: I had nobody to wait for me.

Q: Yeah.

A: Not a soul to wait for me.

Q: Yeah.

A: The others had.

Q: Did you go on any kind of a march? Did they take you on any kind of a march towards the end of the war, to leave the camp? Did the Germans – the Germans did not take you on a – on a march?

A: No, it was for them too late. They escaped.

Q: They –

A: They ran away.

Q: How did you know it was the end of –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: You know what, was one afternoon. It was about five or four o'clock, they realized that nobody is taking care of them. The guards disappeared

[**indecipherable**] you know? And then started to shout, to scream, we are free, we are free, the – the – the guards are running away. And then everybody went to – to – to see, where we were. There was a church nearby, and many people went to the church. I thought – I was with my cousin, with my younger cousin. I don't go any time, I won't go again, to find the Germans. I will go in an opposite side, not where the – the – the people went. And I went to the s – the left side, the most of the people went to the right side. In the right side, there were no – no Germans, but we could hide, and we hid for a few days. And so, we escaped. That was my brain. I don't want to be again among them. You know, that is a more tragic, and a more, you know, I say – I didn't tell you very good.

Q: Well, so di – did you – so where did you leave from? **Stutthof**? Is that where you left from? What – where were you when – when the guards ran away? Were – was that stu –

A: We were left in – on the route –

Q: No, was it

A: – on the – on the way.

Q: In **Stutthof**, or you were already walking?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: You – you s – many of them walked to the right side. I thought, I don't want to go where many people –

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: I – I – I had a brains.

Q: Very smart.

A: And that – very smart, and I went to that left side.

Q: Yeah. And then where did you go, after a few days?

A: I don't know, we went. It – it was a Polish country, you know?

Q: Yeah, mm-hm.

A: We went, and we asked for – for a shelter.

Q: Yeah, and did –

A: We got shelter for nights – for a few days.

Q: Ti –

A: The last day we went, was a – a beautiful house where the **Bürgermeister** lived.

The **Bürgermeister**, you know, who is – he lived there, and he later on come and told us to move in another part. So we escaped here.

Q: And how many people were you with then?

A: Only a few.

Q: A few, okay.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Among my group.

Q: Yes.

A: There were other groups, they – who escaped in another –

Q: Direction, yeah.

A: – way.

Q: And then where did you go? So you –

A: We remained in the house of the **Bürgermeister** –

Q: Yeah.

A: – for a while. Then came the authorities, and told us can't be to live in the house of such a authority. And they moved us in a other place. A big, big kitchen, it was.

And we were ga – glad that we had with what to live. There were potatoes in the ground, and they – what they left, you know.

Q: And then what happened?

A: We were here [**indecipherable**] the Polish brought us what they could, and it's another story.

Q: And – and – and then where did you go after that?

A: There were people who were volunteers to take us home.

Q: So you wanted to go back to **Cluj**?

A: Yes, by all means. Where should I go, and to whom?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: So how did – how did you get back to **Cluj**?

A: With the – with the help of these people, of the volunteers, who were all young men.

Q: Were they Jewish young men?

A: Jewish. Only Jewish, who became volunteer – who wanted to be volunteers to help these people to come back.

Q: Okay. D-Do you know where – what group they were from? Were they from an organization?

A: Yes, they had an organization, sa – sa mar – **Satu Mare**, where was a – a guy called **Sharkein**(ph), I remember him, a very handsome guy, who took [indecipherable] groups. And that was **Sigetti**(ph) **Pauli**(ph), who was my friend, and those how – in their house I was born. And there were a few volunteers.

Q: So they took you back to **Cluj**?

A: Yes.

Q: So now you're in **Cluj**, and what do you do there, what do you find? What do you do?

A: We found my house, my big **storied** house, I found full of Christians. What shall I tell you?

Q: And did you –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: They knew that I come back. They were waiting me, they knew.

Q: What did they say to you?

A: Nothing. They did not dare to say anything.

Q: And what did you say to them?

A: Nothing. I cannot recall things which – you know, and then I met my husband, who was my cousin, who took everything over, you know, who started to arrange things, with the authorities and everything.

Q: So you knew that your first husband was not alive any more?

A: No, no. He was shot.

Q: You knew that?

A: I did not know, only when I came home after a year or so, because his friends hid the fact. And when I married, after a year or two – two, they reproached me.

Q: Because?

A: Because I married so soon.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: It was not so soon.

Q: Right.

A: Two years after. But I met somebody who I knew very well. I didn't want to lose the occasion.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yes.

A: It was the somebody – was my cousin.

Q: Your cousin.

A: My second cousin. My – our mothers were cousins, first cousins.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was a love story, and a very interesting story.

Q: Oh, uh-huh. So you got married, what year?

A: Later, yes, maybe. In '46, we married.

Q: Okay. And then – and what –

A: Then was born my son in '46.

Q: Yeah. And so, you stayed in **Cluj**?

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of work did he do?

A: Oh, my husband worked – had a very good work. He was a specialist in sweets.

Q: Okay. In candy, you mean, in sweets.

A: In every kinds of candies, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And did he – did you ever talk about going to **Palestine**, or to –

A: N-No, no. We were very tired, very, very worn out, you know.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yes, yes. And where had – where had your cousin wer – your – your husband been during the war?

A: Where did he work?

Q: During the war, was he taken away?

A: He was in labor camps.

Q: He was in labor camp, yeah.

A: Yes, all that time, in the **Ukraine**.

Q: Oh, okay. And his name?

A: His name?

Q: Yes.

A: **Berkovics, Zoltan**.

Q: **Zoltan**.

A: **Zoltan**. It's a Hungarian name. The mothers gave Hungarian names, like my brother was **Tibor**(ph).

Q: Right, right.

A: And I was **Magdar**(ph), **Magdush**(ph).

Q: So you stayed in **Cluj**?

A: Yes.

Q: And you raised your son.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: Did many Jews come back to **Cluj**? Were there – did many of the Jewish people come back –

A: Yes.

Q: – to **Cluj**.

A: Because they were volunteers who took us.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. So – and then you – did you work at all, while you were in –

A: Not immediately. I couldn't. I have not job, I have first to finish some graduations. And when I have the graduations, I have two diplomas.

Q: Right.

A: Professor in music, and professor in teaching the piano. Then I got first to the – I was named **lector universitar**. That means – i-it was a grade.

Q: Yeah, a degree, it was a degree. And so you stayed in **Romania** until when?

A: Always.

Q: Always. And did you ever want to leave? I mean, it was commu –

A: We may not.

Q: You wanted to –

A: Because I had a very good job, which I always expected to have. I was teacher in – in the – in the univer – the university.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: University, uh-huh.

A: A good job.

Q: Yeah. And did you talk about the war at all?

A: Always.

Q: You did?

A: Always.

Q: And did people ask you about the war?

A: Yes.

Q: They did.

A: Not – the Christians were not very curious.

Q: Oh, really?

A: No, no, no, talked about themselves, ourselves.

Q: So it was just the other Romanian – just the Jews in **Cluj** who talked about –

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: – who talked about the war.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Magdalena Berkovics**. We have been talking before about your wartime experience, and then you were liberated, and then you met your husband, you got married, and you had your son.

A: Yes.

Q: So, your son was born in what year?

A: He was born in 14 fif –

Q: Nineteen –

A: – quarter –

Q: 1946?

A: Forty-six, yes.

Q: Oh, okay. And what is his name?

A: His name is now **John Sylvanis**. He changed his name.

Q: And wha-what did you name him when he was born?

A: He was born **Tiberius Berkovics**.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: That was his father's name, but he has changed.

Q: Yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Because he had very bad experiences in – in **Europe**, and in **Romania**, because of his Jewish name.

Q: Oh.

A: And then he decided to change his name.

Q: I see. Well, we'll talk about those – those times. So now it's 1946.

A: Yes.

Q: And you're a new mother, and – and what did you do? Did you work, or –

A: First, I didn't have –

Q: You s – you were – you were in **Cluj**, in **Romania**.

A: Yes, in **Cluj**, in my native town.

Q: In your native town, okay.

A: Yes, I found my house. I became the owner of this house, but it lasted – the joy lasted only three years, because the government, which tended to be a communist regime, you know –

Q: Yes.

A: – took away the house. They nationalized. It was nationalized, this house, three times, just imagine. Finally, I – I lost the – the house. I lost it. I – I didn't have any income. I decided to return to my job, to my – not job, to my profession.

Q: Were you able, at least to stay in the house, and not own it? You – you –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, I was able to stay.

Q: – stay in the house.

A: Yes, but tha – in those times, the fee of the house – not fee, how to –

Q: The rental? The rental? To rent it?

A: Yes, I had to rent, but it was a small rent, because everybody had a small, it was the communist regime.

Q: Right. So you decided, you said, to go back to your profession.

A: Yes [**indecipherable**] it was not easy, because I have nobody to help me, you know. It was not easy. And besides, I had to learn a new system. It was a new system, according to the new era.

Q: The communist era, is that what you –

A: Yes, I ha – I was – and I learned a new system that in hunger – in **Hungary** – not **Hungary**, in –

Q: **Romania**?

A: In hung – that i – no, in **Cluj**.

Q: Yeah.

A: In Hungarian.

Q: Oh.

A: In Hungarian.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: In Hungarian, yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. And your husband was working?

A: My husband then was working. He had – he was working in a factory of sweets.

Q: Yes, mm-hm.

A: Yes.

Q: So the two of –

A: He was the manager of the factory.

Q: Okay.

A: He was a party member then.

Q: Really?

A: I di – I never re – was.

Q: Why didn't you join the party?

A: Because, I tell you, I didn't – I told that I was the owner of a very big house, and then they suddenly [**indecipherable**] there is not a kesh – question of joining the party.

Q: Cause you were a capitalist, right?

A: Yes, exactly. I was a – a capitalist. So I have a – to abandon the whole thing.

Q: Yeah.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Then I started to re – re – how to say, remember what I did before, and to do things which led me to my old profession.

Q: Which was music, teaching music.

A: Teaching music, and especially the piano. I was a piano teacher –

Q: Right.

A: – you know, but it lasted a few years until I get a – I was just a volunteer, without salary –

Q: Oh.

A: – in the beginning. It lasted a few years, until I got a job, you know? And then I was teaching.

Q: Were you volunteering in a school?

A: In – yes. It was the Conservatory of **Tul**(ph).

Q: Oh.

A: Immediately a higher level, because I had two diplomas, you know. I don't know whether it is important, or you remember.

Q: Oh, that is important, yeah.

A: Yes. I had two diplomas, and therefore they took me to the – to a higher level.

But without salary for the time, like a few years. And then, slowly, I started from the beginning with a small salary. I was an assistant, and teaching voluntarily. And

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

then slowly, I became a salary. I remember I earned 700 **leis**, that was more, you know. And then slowly, I raise, you know?

Q: And your son, was he –

A: He was born in '46.

Q: Six, and then so did he go to a nursery school, or regular –

A: He went to – not nurse – maybe it is called –

Q: Or a day – a daycare – a daycare center?

A: Yes, yes, yes, daycare center. A Romanian one. It was a Romanian. So, it no longer was **Hungary**, the place, which I – made me very happy. I was immediately very full of joy that I was not again in Hungarian possession, you know?

Q: Why?

A: Because they – they – the dif – they took me to **Auschwitz**, the Hungarians. I was very angry of that.

Q: Okay.

A: You know? And my family perished, the whole –

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: – I am the only sur – I was the only survivor. Then I found out that nobody remained. Meanwhile, this future husband of mine, who was my cousin, second cousin – our mothers were first cousins – started to help me, because it was – we

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

had – the house to be in possession [**indecipherable**]. But the house was no longer mine. In a few years I lost the house and everything I had. Meanwhile, I decide – I did not care, because meanwhile I decided to return to my profession. That was my aim, to be a teacher.

Q: Wonderful. Right.

A: That was my profession, or my life. And I managed slowly, in a few years, to be – to teach in the conservatory of the town.

Q: Right, right.

A: And there I raise slowly, from a low salary, higher, higher, and became a good teacher, and here I was teaching my whole life, 30 years.

Q: Now, did you experience any anti-Semitism once you – when you were teaching? Was there any anti-Semitism –

A: No, never in the conservatory. No, no, no, it was –

Q: Nobody ever made any comments?

A: No, no, no.

Q: What about in your neighborhood?

A: In the neighborhood was always anti-Semitism, if not loudly, you know, but hidden.

Q: Okay, can you give – give me some examples, what did people say at that time?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Some people said that the Holocaust did not exist at all. It was just a – the – how to say the – the remem – not remember, the –

Q: The dream, or –

A: The invention.

Q: An invention, yeah.

A: The invention of those who remained in that country, because many remained.

Many people came in our house, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: They lived in the house, and they – I never was able to talk to them. Just imagine to live in the same house with people who – I know that they came immediately after my parents' disappearance. They lived there. And so, I lived in this house.

Q: Yeah. So you said you – you experienced anti-Semitism, that when people said they – the Holocaust never really happened.

A: Not everybody.

Q: Not every – some people. Some people.

A: They were afraid, you know, very afraid that we will do something –

Q: Yeah.

A: – wrong for them, yeah.

Q: And – but you said, not in the conservatory, and –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: No, they were taken care not to mention things.

Q: Yeah.

A: And not to do something –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – in my – you know.

Q: Now, when you – a-and – okay, so this is the 1940s, 1950s?

A: Yes, I was – all the time –

Q: And you s –

A: – in – at the conservatory, til my pension.

Q: Which was – and that came in –

A: That was in 19 – I don't remember where –

Q: Okay.

A: But I taught there more than 30 years.

Q: Yeah, oh, all right. Okay. And so, during that 30 year time, what can you say about living under communist rule as a Jewish woman?

A: That was nothing, as a Jewish woman, no, no. They were lenient, you know, and knew about my – my deportation, yes. And they were taking care not to hurt my feelings, not to hurt my feelings, you know –

Q: Why? Because of your history?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Because they were afraid not to hurt my feelings. It was a communist country, where it was democracy, you know, and that was that.

Q: And the neighbors were pleasant to you most of the –

A: The neighbors, of course, they were afraid not to –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because they were all the old neighbors before I came home from the Holocaust, you understand?

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: They were the – almost, how to say, they –

Q: Now, what about your son? He then got a little older?

A: Oh, my son was born in '46.

Q: Yeah, and when he started to go to school, and the other chi –

A: Yes, he went to Romanian school.

Q: Okay, and what – did he experience any anti-semitism – anti-Semitism as –

A: Not yet, because he – he was a small child.

Q: Okay.

A: As a child, not.

Q: No.

A: Later, he had Romanian friends. It was not the Hungarian regime no longer.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yes.

A: It has changed into Romanian regime, which was more lenient.

Q: More lenient, yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. So you did – you felt okay, you felt – you didn't feel under threat, or any –

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: No. And your husband was – was working and moving up in his factory.

A: He was moving up in his profession. He was a manager of the sweets factory.

Q: Factory, uh-huh.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. And so now it's the 1950s, and do you remember when the state of **Israel** was formed in 1948?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: What – do you have any memories of – of hearing about that, or how you felt?

A: No, they were not very much enchanted about th-the Israeli problem, you know that –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you shouldn't tell, because in the communism that was different, and **Stalin** was not a friend of – of **Israel**.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right.

A: And were – we were under **Stalin's** regimes.

Q: **Stalin**, yeah, yeah.

A: Not under his regime, but under his influence.

Q: Under communist, yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: You understand?

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Did you feel very Jewish during those erl – those years after the war, in the 40s and 50s?

A: No, no.

Q: Yeah.

A: No, because –

Q: And did you practice any religion?

A: – you know, it was the fear of [**indecipherable**] which retained them from being, you know, very harsh. You understand? They were the [**indecipherable**] because they all were, in a way guilty, because they felt this guilt inside.

Q: Mm-hm, they felt guilty about what happened.

A: Inside, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they were taken there to handle us a little –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right.

A: – lenient, you know.

Q: Cause they were afraid of what you might do back to them? Is that what you mean?

A: Yes, they were afraid in the beginning, a few, yeah. Then they accustomed with the new –

Q: Yeah, yeah. Now, did you practice any religion in the 40s and 50s, with your son, or di – any –

A: I was not religious at the – no.

Q: You were not religious. Did he have a Bar Mitzvah, in let's see, 1946 – 1959.

A: I had the apartment, which I inherited from the parents.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I lost everything, I told you.

Q: No, no, no. Did he – did your son have a Bar Mitzvah?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: In 1959?

A: Yes, yes, yes, of course.

Q: Can you tell me about that a little bit?

A: Oh no, no. It was a – like any usual Bar Mitzvah. It didn't have relatives.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yeah.

A: Just –

Q: Just a small –

A: – among ourselves.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Among ourselves.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Now, were most of your friends Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: They were?

A: Yes. Positive. But I had a few Hungarian and Romanian friends.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yes.

Q: And – and so then it's the 1950s, you're working, your husband's working, your son is in school.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Then comes the 1960s.

A: Yes, the same.

Q: The same.

A: Until I went to pension.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yeah. And there was the 1967 War on **Israel**, do y – I don't know if you remember

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you hear about, did you know about it?

A: Yes, I know, but you know, the atmosphere was like ice.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's like against **Israel**. They did not understand this whole problem of **Israel**.

Q: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh.

A: They only condemn **Israel**, you know.

Q: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: Not in a – in a harsh way, but [**indecipherable**] you know, holding speeches, and – against **Israel**, and so –

Q: Okay, and so – so life goes on.

A: Yes.

Q: And 1960s, and now it's the 1970s.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember anything special about that? Your pension – yeah, go on.

A: Nothing – nothing happened, because in **Romania** was no – no revolution and something like that, like in **Hungary**.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right, yeah. Right.

A: In **Hungary** there was, meanwhile, a revolution. You – you know, maybe.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes, '56.

A: They are – the Hungarians, a revolting people, you know. They are a very –

Q: Well, there was the 1956, I remember the 1956.

A: Yes, you remember.

Q: Yeah, the Hungarian revolution.

A: In **Romania** there wasn't like that.

Q: There was not, yeah.

A: There was always anti-Semitism, and I have heard now what anti-Semitism is. I have heard. Our friends who were visiting **Romania** had told us, yes.

Q: Mm, terrible. So you worked until your pension, is that the 1970s?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Now, your son is still living in – in **Romania** then?

A: No, no, he is here.

Q: Oh, when did he –

A: He fled the country.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in si – in '76.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Okay, and –

A: He left the – he – he came as visitor and remained here. Fled the country.

Q: Oh, and how did you feel about that, you and your husband?

A: We were glad, because he went to the **United States**. I had a st – a newspaperman – cousin there in the **United States**, and he helped him. It was the newspaper, rom – Hungarian language newspaper, which he owned, my cousin. It was called the “**Szabadság**.” That was liberty, the – the –

Q: Yeah. You were speaking Romanian all this time?

A: We spoke Romanian, Hungarian, because our mother tongue is in fact Hungarian.

Q: Did you know – did you know Yiddish at all?

A: No.

Q: No, you did not. Okay. So, did you and your husband try to get to the **United States**?

A: We tried several times, but we were refused. They did not let us. Finally, at the end of the – the 70s, they were more lenient, you know, and they let us go as visitors here, to come as visitors.

Q: Oh.

A: Yes.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: So did you – did you come to visit?

A: Yes, my son was here.

Q: Oh.

A: As he fled the country, you know.

Q: Yes, yeah.

A: He was here, and after six years, I had to wait six years –

Q: To see him?

A: – you can't imagine, until I saw him again. Then I came as visitor, and returned.

Q: Went back, yeah.

A: Yeah, returned.

Q: And what was your impression of the **United States** when you first came?

A: Oh, you can't imagine what an impression I had after this. I compared – I didn't have to compare, it was not competition.

Q: Where was your son living at that time, in **Washington**?

A: In **Cleveland, Ohio**, where the relatives were.

Q: I see. So you went to **Cleveland**.

A: Yes, I told you that this newspa –

Q: Right, right.

A: – he was a newspaperman, a Hungarian language newspaperman.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right. Yeah. And then you went back, and did – and tried to –

A: To come again.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I co – received a visa after seven years, I think. And then I was called by the Romanian security, telling me that either I go for good to –

Q: **United States**.

A: – the **United States**, or I call him back.

Q: Your son back?

A: Yes.

Q: So?

A: So, I didn't call him back, of course, but I decided to leave the country. But I didn't –

Q: Is this you and your husband?

A: Me – yes, with my husband.

Q: Now, had your husband wanted to come as much as you did, to the **United States**?

A: What?

Q: Did your husband want to come to the **United States** as much as you did?

A: Yes, of course, or more, even.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: More?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because I was an – a homely woman, you know, but he was very much – he wanted to come by all means, by all means, yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And his business was successful up – at that time?

A: Yes, it was good in **Romania**.

Q: Yeah.

A: He was a – I told you –

Q: In the sweets.

A: – dealing with sweets. And then, as he come here, he was too old.

Q: Oh.

A: He was –

Q: So when did you co – so then you decided to come?

A: Yes.

Q: And when was that? When did you come here?

A: Oh, we decided very early, but we came very late. We came at – I don't know, he –

Q: 1980s?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: – was 79.

Q: Oh, okay. So it was in the 1980s?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And you went to **Cleveland**, to be with your son?

A: To **Cleveland**? No, I don't know –

Q: No.

A: No, no.

Q: Wh-Where did you settle when you came to the **United States**?

A: [indecipherable] I think, as I remember, well, in **Cleveland, Ohio**.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: And then the relatives helped me in a way, but just in a way.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then we went – I don't remember, really.

Q: Okay. But you – you – then your son started working in this – in the **Washington** area?

A: He – he learned in the university again. And then he started to work, and he worked.

Q: So you always were living in the same place where your son was living?

A: Yes, yes, in the same place.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Okay, right. And now, of course, you've been living in the **Washington** area?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: Of course. He's living in **Virginia** now.

Q: And what does he do?

A: He is teaching.

Q: What does he teach?

A: What he can. What he is –

Q: Yeah, but he – he is a musician also?

A: Yes, but he doesn't teach music.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: He teaches everything.

Q: But he inherited your musical talent?

A: Oh more, more.

Q: More.

A: He is very, very talented.

Q: Yeah.

A: But he did not succeed in – you know, for a musician, is very difficult.

Q: Yeah, it's hard, right, right.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Very, very difficult.

Q: And you had – you said in the beginning that he experienced some anti-Semitism, so he changed his name. Was that in – in **Romania** he –

A: Yes, he – he have – he was very unpleasant with the whole system in **Romania**.

Q: So he changed it in **Romania**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: No, no, in **Romania**, that was very curious. You couldn't change your name.

Q: Oh.

A: It was forbidden to change your name.

Q: Okay.

A: Therefore, he couldn't succeed. He was a conductor of mu – of classical music, and he couldn't conduct –

Q: Conduct.

A: – because – because of his name, **Tiberiu Berkovics**, that was an – you know.

Q: It's too Jewish a name, you mean?

A: Yeah, Jewish name. And therefore he decided to change – in **Romania** it was not allowed to change the name.

Q: So he didn't change it until he came to the **United States**?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: I see. And he chose what name? Sil –

A: **John Sylvanis**.

Q: Was there a meaning to that? Was there a reason why he chose **Sylvanis**?

A: No, there is not, it's an Italian name, **John Sylvanis**.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: Not a Jewish name.

Q: Yeah. Cause he thought he would have trouble here, in –

A: Yes.

Q: – in the **United States**, so he changed it, yeah. Let's talk a little bit now, just about your thoughts. Do you think about your wartime experience often?

A: No, not often –

Q: Yeah.

A: – but I think, of course.

Q: Yeah.

A: With all that – it's in me.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: It's in me.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right, right. Did you – when **John** was growing up, when your son was growing up, and he was a little boy, and then in elementary school –

A: Yes, he –

Q: – did you talk about what you went through?

A: I told everything in details.

Q: When he was young?

A: Yes. He knew everything, everything –

Q: Yeah.

A: – everything about the Holocaust.

Q: Yeah.

A: He – he lost his – his grandparents, which he longed for –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because he had no family at all but me. So he always thought, if I had a family, if I had my grandparents, and so forth.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: You understand.

Q: Yes, yeah. Did he have friends?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Jewish and non-Jewish friends?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes.

Q: In **Romania**?

A: In **Romania**, orma – always Romanian friends, not Hungarian, Hungarian not so much.

Q: Did the Jewish friends parents go through similar experience that you did? Were his friends, the friends that he had, did their parents go through what you had to go through?

A: Whose parents?

Q: **John's** friends' parents.

A: The Jewish friends?

Q: Yeah, his Jewish friends.

A: Yes, some of them yes. But many of them came from **Romania**

[**indecipherable**] and – and established in **Cluj**, you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: And they don't have this experience in **Romania**, many of his friends. But mostly, they were Hungarian who – with whom he had this experience, not Romanian.

Q: Uh-huh. What are your thoughts about **Israel** today? What do you – do you think about **Israel** at all?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, of course, everything –

Q: What does it mean –

A: – the Jewish people are thinking. That – that **Israel** should live in order that the Jewish people should have a home.

Q: Yeah. Had – did you ever think, after the war was over and you decided to leave, that you would go to **Israel** instead of the **United States**? Did you ever, you and your husband, talk about moving to **Israel**?

A: No. You know why? The reason is simple. Because I had with the thyroid gland, which was not operated then, it was big like an apple. And I was waiting until I got to the **United States**, and then they – I had [indecipherable]

Q: So you di – you didn't want to go –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – and it would be too hard to live in **Israel** with that problem.

A: Yes. I couldn't. It was impossible.

Q: Are you very angry about what you had to live through? The terrible, terrible times that you – are you angry about that?

A: Well, of course. That was a very bad experience, and I don't ha – you know what, when I went to **Israel** as a visitors, and my friends asked to me, how did you **beared** it? Why didn't you raise some –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Resistance?

A: – some – no –

Q: Resistance?

A: No, why didn't you have weapons.

Q: Yeah.

A: Took weapons and – and act –

Q: Fight back.

A: Yes. I thought, how to get the weapons –

Q: Right.

A: – in this regime? It was a totalitarian regime, how to get weapons?

Q: Right, right.

A: You understand, of cou –

Q: Yes, of cour – of course.

A: I wonder, because the a **[indecipherable]** the hung – the palestin – the **Israeli** young people are very warriors.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: They warriors.

Q: Yeah.

A: And th-they did not understand why –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Right.

A: – we didn't raise –

Q: Right.

A: – weapons.

Q: Right.

A: I told, it was impossible in a regime like that –

Q: Right.

A: – totalitarian regime, to raise weapons.

Q: Are there any sights today, or sounds, or smells that remind you of some of your war –

A: Yes.

Q: – wartime experiences?

A: Yes, sometimes I – I am dreaming. And one day I had a very terrible dream.

Q: You still have dreams –

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: – about what you experienced?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: I have dreams. Not often.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yeah.

A: But I – I am sincere. I have dreams.

Q: Yes. And do you talk about it with somebody, or –

A: No, no, no. It is long ago, it was long ago, I don't tell.

Q: Really? Do you still have them, or that was just after the war? Do you still have the dreams?

A: Yes.

Q: Still.

A: Still dream, but not very often.

Q: Yeah, good.

A: Because I have other preoccupations.

Q: Right. Yeah. But are there any – when you're awake, are there any sounds that you hear sometimes, or something that you see that reminds you of –

A: Yes, sometimes I tell my son, see, that was during the war, this sound. It was during –

Q: Yeah, like what? Like an air **[indecipherable]**

A: A sound of weapons, or sound of – I don't know –

Q: Like an airplane, or something like –

A: Yes, yes, did you hear? I have heard them.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: And that reminds you?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Everything strange reminds me.

Q: Yeah.

A: It did not remain un – unfelt, you know?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Everything reminds me of that.

Q: Do you think going through the terrible things that you went through –

A: Yes.

Q: – do you think that affected you, how you raised your son?

A: Yes, because –

Q: Were you more –

A: – I told too –

Q: Yeah.

A: – too much about that. I told him all that [indecipherable] and later on I regretted it, because he knew everything. It was – the whole childhood was spent amidst these remembrances.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: It was a very big mistake, what I did. Because it was in me, and he asked always, almost, about his grandparents. And I should tell not lies, but the – the truth.

Q: Right. Were you very protective of him? Were you – did you let him go out and do things, or did you always want him nearby?

A: I don't understand that.

Q: Did – wh-when he was a – a – a youngster, a young boy.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you always want to know where he was, were you very protective –

A: Yes.

Q: – of him, or did you let him just go –

A: No, no, no, no, no –

Q: – and be in-independ –

A: – he knew everything precisely, and he was a good boy, and understood these things, and always was terrible excited about why his grandparents died before he knew them.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Do you think that you would have been a different person today, if you hadn't gone through the war, that –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yeah. I don't know, because he did not know me before, you know, but sh – he knew – he told me, Mother, you are talking too much about – about the war, and about what you experienced.

Q: You mean now, or – or –

A: No, then, he – when he was a young man.

Q: Yeah, yeah. No, but what I was asking was, do you think you're a different person today, today –

A: Yes.

Q: – because of your wartime experience.

A: No, he ask, but it's a long time since then.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's a long time, but I was later on, after this experience, I was completely different. More sensitive, more very nervous, you know. It affected me deeply.

Q: Th-This is – y-you became more nervous after the war? Is that what you're staying?

A: After this, after this experience –

Q: Yeah, yes.

A: – I – I – I was terribly nervous.

Q: Yeah. In other words, before the war, you were more relaxed, or whatever.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Yes, yes, it is something different, you know –

Q: Yes, of course.

A: – to live always in stress. We lived in stress.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know.

Q: Do you feel – how would you describe yourself? Are you Romanian, are you American, are you Jewish? How would you describe yourself?

A: I am a Jewish, first of all.

Q: Okay.

A: I am a Romanian Jewish.

Q: Romanian Jewish.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Do you feel American?

A: I start to feel, yes. I feel my son is –

Q: Totally?

A: – totally American. I am – I like the – the country, of course –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I like it very much.

Q: Yeah.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And I admire everything which was realized, you know. And I felt, slowly, attached to this country, because I see that he did only good to the Jewish people.

Q: Yeah.

A: And to my son too, and therefore I am very – we are very grateful.

Q: Do you have Romanian friends here, in the **United States**?

A: Who came like me, who fled the country, but I don't have Romanian friends in –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – in the country.

Q: Yeah.

A: No never, I never, I ne – I was never within the country again.

Q: I was just going to ask you, have you been back to –

A: No, no, never.

Q: Would you like to?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: No, I have not so good experiences to go, why to go?

Q: Okay.

A: If I am no longer attached – I am attached to this new country –

Q: Okay.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: – who did more good in a shorter time than they did in my whole life. You understand?

Q: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

A: That is obvious.

Q: Do you get any reparations? Do you get any payment?

A: From the Germans only.

Q: You do?

A: I da – I did in the beginning, but newly I didn't get, and I – we gave a request for I don't know how many – 3,000 dollars, but we didn't receive answer, yes.

Q: Do you think you're more comfortable around people who lived through the war like you did?

A: Yes.

Q: Bec – as a – in contrast to someone who didn't. Like I grew up in the **United States**, so I didn't live through what you lived through, obviously.

A: Yes.

Q: So are you – you are more comfortable with people who were in **Europe**, who lived through the war? If you met –

A: No, I did not – I did not meet people.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Yeah. I mean, you know, here in the **United States**, when you would meet people from –

A: Oh, we would hug ourselves, we remember everything –

Q: Yeah.

A: – but not like a good unforgotten remembrance, you understand?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: From the – the old country.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just that we were young, yeah. I have a friend who is coming, who is calling me from **Peru**.

Q: Oh.

A: Yes, she is calling me very often. And we speak about the – the good old days, when we were visiting each other, but we didn't have –

Q: This was before the war, you mean, or af – you were visiting her before the war, or –

A: No.

Q: – no, after the war?

A: No, after.

Q: Oh.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: But she – but we don't have good remembrances about the old country. That is everything different, I don't know whether you understand that. It's everything different. This is a – here I felt the liberty what they gave us. Then we didn't have to – to speak loudly, you know, sometimes. Or in the – during the war. It was terrible, they took the radio away.

Q: Right.

A: And things like that, they were – you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: That you shouldn't forget, never.

Q: No, no, no.

A: And, an experience to tell you. We were ghettoed in 1944 in April, in the three of April. And one time they called us out in the courtyard to – and the general, the great general there, who was leading the – this area, held a speech. And he told people, don't be afraid. The old people will work from now on. The younger people will taken care of children and work. And the – the old women will taken care of children and children. That is what he told us, and after a while, after a week or so, we were taken to **Auschwitz**. You know? So that you have an image about how they behaved. Just lies, and – and what was the result? That our people was condemned.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum?

A: No, because I – I know everything, why to go?

Q: Right.

A: Maybe I didn't have time, or I didn't have – I wasn't curious. I saw everything, what shall I – I – I see?

Q: Mm-hm. Are you any more religious because of the war?

A: No, I was not even before the war –

Q: Before –

A: – not after.

Q: – and not after, yeah, yeah. So you feel American now?

A: Yes. I cannot say this oh, you know, because I did not worked here. That is – I did not work here, and hal – I have – I feel guilty therefore, to – to tell that I am an American, if I did not work. But I feel very good. Le – how the – I feel the liberty, what I was getting.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Are you still playing the piano?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, because I am too old to that. Nobody plays at this age. No. I cannot. I am dizzy when I am playing.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: Really?

A: I tried two years ago, but neither the fingers –

Q: Yeah.

A: – nor the mind is – contributes.

Q: When did your husband pass away?

A: About 12 years.

Q: Oh, okay. And he – did he feel American, when he –

A: Oh, he was very devoted already.

Q: Was he?

A: But he was too old to work.

Q: So he did not work here.

A: He couldn't. He was 79 when we came.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And he couldn't, but he was very devoted always, to **America**. He dreamt to come here, but he did not succeed.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Very. He thought that he – here, they realize the real democracy, what he was waiting for.

Q: And then the fall of communism in 19 what – '89?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: Uh-huh.

Q: What were your thoughts then?

A: [indecipherable]

Q: You were already here. You were here in the **United States**.

A: We were here in '89.

Q: Yeah, so what were your thoughts when you heard about that?

A: We were terribly astonished. How can – could that be – become, because the **Soviet Union** fell at the same time.

Q: Right, right.

A: How? Because we saw that he was the most powerful country. We were taught all our life that th-the **Soviet Union** cannot fa-fail, and we were terribly astonished that he still failed. **Gorbachev** was the man who contributed to this. You know, it was terribly astonishing. We were here already, and watched on the **TV** what was happening. Otherwise, we couldn't watch.

Q: Did you celebrate, did you –

A: We were – you can see – you can understand what we felt.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: But still, we were thinking, so much blood for this system, which was, you know, so much – so much war, and so much revolution and everything for the

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

system, and finally, just fell. We thought that it will never happen, because of the propaganda, which was always that it is the most power – powerful country, and it will always persist. No. See? The **Soviet Union** fell. Who thought about that? We were so astonished that we couldn't believe.

Q: Well, you're wonderful to have done this interview. What made you be willing to do the interview?

A: With you?

Q: Yeah. What made you?

A: To – to discharge my – my feelings, so to – to tell everything I went through.

You are satisfied with how I told?

Q: Very much, and it's so important that you did this, and it's –

A: Yes?

Q: – going to be in the archives of the museum for years and years and years, for people to learn from your story.

A: Yes.

Q: Is there a lesson that people should learn? Do you – if you were giving advice to a young person, would you ins –

A: I didn't me-meet young persons. Who to meet here?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: No, but I meant if you were today talking to a young person, would you give – after all that you lived through –

A: Yes, of course, I would tell them.

Q: – would you – would you s – give them any advice?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What would you say to a young person today?

A: To a young person, to take care of with whom you are friends. To take care not to be befriended with anybody. To take care, and to – to be together only with people who you can advise what to do wrong, and what to do good, you know, because we went through terrible things.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And what would you say to them about the **United States**?

A: O-Only good thing. What can I tell? That it is the most advanced country in the world, yes? And it is a – how to say, it's a wonderful country.

Q: Yeah.

A: With everything we dreamt for. Yes, you love living here, you know about that.

Q: Yes, I appreciate it very much.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: That's all –

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: And we were received as visitors, very nicely. We receive for two years, or how much, I don't remember well, green card, a few years as a [indecipherable]. And then we had to look for some existence, but –

Q: So how did you support yourself?

A: My son worked.

Q: Yeah. So your son helped you.

A: My son worked, and we got from – as a – from the green card, some support, you know.

Q: Are you a citizen of the **United States**?

A: Oh, for long.

Q: Tell – tell me about what that was like. Were you and your husband –

A: Oh, that was very nice. They – we got the praise. We were tell – told that we answered very good, and our English was already like now, and we – praised us. Told that you were very good.

Q: So the day that – the day that you beca – you and your husband became citizens on the same day?

A: Yes, the same day.

Q: Was this in – in **Cleveland**, or where was it?

A: In **Cleveland**, I remember.

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

Q: And what did it take you, five years, or – do you remember how many –

A: Yeah, how long? I think it lasted a few years.

Q: Yeah, before – yeah.

A: Because we got first a green card.

Q: Right.

A: And after, we got – we have to apply for the citizenship.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And we learned a lot, woy-oy-oy-oy, and the rules and regulations, the – the country. I learned so much.

Q: Do you remember anything you learned?

A: Yes. And we were very good, because we were told that we were very good, we gave very good and precise answers.

Q: What did you have to learn? Do you remember what you had to learn?

A: The rules and regulations which ruled the country, you know?

Q: Well, I guess you're very glad you passed the test?

A: Oh yes, of course I was. We were very, very, very –

Q: Yeah. Well, is there anything you wanted to add before we finish? Anything you wanted to say?

Interview with Magdalena Berkovics
October 15, 2009

A: No. I have nothing. I am too small to raise with questions at the – at the citizen of the **United States**, and all the cities in all the **United States**. I – I am just telling that you must be very happy that you are how – for how long are you citizen?

Q: I was born in the –

A: You were born –

Q: – born in the **United States**.

A: How can you compare our life with yours? When we had bad times, you know, ah, you cannot be compared with this. Cannot be. We lived very hard times in **Europe**, very, very hard. Always under stress, that is.

Q: Well, thank you so much for sharing your experiences, it's very important.

A: Oh, I was not convincing, was I?

Q: No, we appreciate your – your sharing.

A: Yes?

Q: Yeah, yeah. And if there's nothing more that you wanted to say – is there anything else you want – wanted to say? Okay, well thank you again. This concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Magdalena Berkovics**.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview