

ID Project Interview with Maria Brieger
March 29, 1992
Brooklyn, New York

Q: Today is March 29, 1992. I'm Anthony DiIorio and I'm at the home of Mrs. Maria Brieger in Brooklyn, New York. I'm here on behalf of the United States Memorial Museum to interview Mrs. Brieger about her experiences during the Holocaust. Good afternoon Mrs. Brieger.

A: Good afternoon.

Q: What was your name when you were growing up in Hungary?

A: My name was Maria Brieger. I mean Deutsch, excuse me.

Q: So you were born Maria Deutsch?

A: Maria Deutsch, yes, in Budapest.

Q: In what year?

A: 1931, December the 19th.

Q: Were you an only child?

A: No, I have two brothers. They're both alive, one is in Israel and the other is in Budapest.

Q: They're younger brothers?

A: They are younger. I was the oldest one.

Q: And what were their names?

A: Who is in Israel is George, now he calls himself Ashed and the other one is Gabor, but we call him Gaby. And he's married

Q: Tell us about your parents.

A: My father had a store in the city, Budapest. My mother was a housewife and in 1944 they took my father to a forced labor camp to Germany and he did not come back. He died in Mauthausen. And my mother, they took her to the Budapest in a -- first she walked over there, it was a very long walk from the house. They took her from the house, the Germans. The name of the brick factory was Kishok and they took her over there and from there they took them forced march on the road

to Germany but she escaped. She went to a peasant's house and in the morning the peasant gave her up to the Germans and then they took her to the prison in Szeged and from the prison they took her to Germany and she was in Ravensbruck and in Ravensbruck she was liberated but she died in Fleck with typhus. In Ravensbruck -- so she did not come back, she did not come home. And we the children we were in the Red Cross and we went there on the sixteenth of November. We were about 160 children in a quite large apartment and they promised my mother that she will be the cook and she did not show up so I was the head for the cook in the kitchen and every evening I brought out some food for my brothers there.

Q: Perhaps you could tell us something about your family when you were growing up in Budapest.

A: I went to the Orthodox school in Dob Street for eight years and from there I went to Abonyi utcai gymnasium and I was maturing over there and then I get married. I met Mr. Jenő Brieger who lived in Nyiregyhaza so we lived in Nyiregyhaza for 25 years and then I get a daughter and a son and my daughter married an American young man and she came to America in '72 and in '77 we came after her and since this time we are here in America.

Q: Now when you were a little girl you went to a Jewish school, what language did you speak at home?

A: I had an English -- and German-speaking nurse. We spoke German, my grandmother did not know too much Hungarian, we speak German at home, and my father was speaking Yiddish and we were studying English in school and of course Hungarian. The school was Hungarian.

Q: But at home you spoke...

A: Rather German.

Q: German. Now you said you were living with your grandmother?

A: After the war, yes. The Russian army liberated us in Budapest in 1945, January the 18th and my grandfather and my aunt were still in the ghetto and we had to remain in the orphanage home because the food supply was very little and we had to stay there for a long time and the house, part of it was bombardiered and it was a big hole in the wall, we couldn't live in the apartment till they reconstructed it and for a few months we were there, and then we moved back to my parent's apartment, and my grandmother and my grandmother's sister was taking care of us. And then my two brothers went to orphanage home and I went also for a little while to an orphanage home, and then one of my brothers went -- the Zionist organization took him to Israel and the other brother was in an orphanage home, and then in '51 I get married.

- Q: You said you were with a grandmother. Which grandmother was...?
- A: My mother's mother.
- Q: Your mother's mother. So she survived the Holocaust?
- A: She survived, yeah. She survived in the ghetto.
- Q: Now when you were a little girl growing up, going to school, did you experience any anti-Semitism before the war from the Hungarians?
- A: Yes, there was anti-Semitism in Hungary.
- Q: Did you recall any specific examples or instances of that?
- A: No, I can't think of any. They found my mother's cousin on the railroad without the yellow star and they took her in the camp in Germany.
- Q: Did you have non-Jewish neighbors?
- A: Yes, we had a lot and one of them was very kind because when they took my mother, she was the one who took us to the Red Cross.
- Q: You had a large family.
- A: My mother had a sister who lived in Kiskunfelegyhaza not too very far from Budapest. She had two children, one was Judith and the other was Feri. Judith was almost the same age like me and she was very talented and she writes every week in a child's newspaper.
- Q: What were her parents' names?
- A: The mother was Anna and the father was Laszlo Schwed.
- Q: What did they do for a living?
- A: He had a goose sale business. He provided the merchants in Budapest with goose meat.
- Q: And the mother?
- A: The mother was a housewife.
- Q: And they lived outside of Budapest in this town until they were deported?

A: Yes.

Q: And the little girl, was she deported with the parents?

A: Yes with the parents.

Q: Did you know her well?

A: Yes, she was a very kind girl. I really liked her very much.

Q: How was she like?

A: She was blond and curly hair and blue eyes and very nice girl.

Q: Was she a good student?

A: Very good student.

Q: Did she have hobbies?

A: The writing was her hobby.

Q: Did she play a musical instrument?

A: No.

Q: Did you?

A: No.

Q: What did you do in your spare time? Were you a good student?

A: I was not a bad student, no. I like reading and I like also languages very much.

Q: So you were studying languages when you were a girl?

A: Yes.

Q: Which languages?

A: Hebrew and English, this is the main, and German but not so much because we were speaking at home German, but English.

Q: You mentioned that your family had a store in Budapest. Who ran the store, who owned the store?

- A: My father and my father's brother, they were partners in the store.
- Q: And what did they sell?
- A: They sell matches in wholesale. They provided the whole Hungary with matches. It was of Swedish origin. The Swedish gentleman's name with whom they was dealing business was Waldemar Langlet.
- Q: So they imported matches and they distributed them in Hungary? How was the business, were they doing well?
- A: It was not a bad business.
- Q: And your father and your uncle were equal partners?
- A: Almost.
- Q: The older?
- A: The older was the owner. My father was the hard work. kingpin.
- Q: Your father was the younger?
- A: The younger and the hardworking.
- Q: During the 1930's and the early 1940's there were a lot of political changes in Europe and then there was the war. Did you pay any attention to politics when you were growing up as a little girl?
- A: We were watching all the newspapers every day and listening to the English radio. But particularly I was not interested in politics.
- Q: Did you ever overhear conversations about the danger of war, changes in Hungary?
- A: We were always hoping that they will not touch the Jews in Budapest. I don't know why but that's what our feeling was. I don't know why but that was our feeling but it was really not true. At least in the end they began and they almost killed us in that orphanage home because one day we get word that the Arrow Cross is coming because they took a few orphanage home to the Danube River to kill them. And we heard that the next day they're coming to kill us. Then all the leaders disappeared from us and then the owner of the house sent down his chauffeur and when they came and they selected us who was all that they put in a separate room and they was hiding including me. I was hiding in a room. Just the small children remained in that apartment. And then when they came and he said that those children are from Transylvania because it is out bombardiered.

- Q: Refugees?
- A: Yeah, they are Catholic refugees. And then he asked them to come with us and go in the bar and let us drink something and so on and so on and he was talking to them to go down to the street with him. So we escaped.
- Q: Who were coming? Were these Germans or were these Arrow Cross?
- A: Arrow Cross. Armed troopers came.
- Q: Did they take any of the children?
- A: Nobody.
- Q: Before this time were there any changes in Hungary, any laws which affected the family business?
- A: Yes, Jewish people cannot have businesses so my uncle took somebody who took over the business from us. This person was the new owner. He was a so-called straw man. He did not pay for the business; he gave just his name.
- Q: Hungarian, a non-Jewish Hungarian?
- A: He was a very well-known family in Budapest and he was the new owner of the store. The Hungarian minister, President Miklos Kallay's brother, Di Kallay Tamas.
- Q: Did your father and your uncle continue to work?
- A: No, they agreed that at least my mother will be in the store. But when my mother went over, then the wife sent her home telling her that we have too many people and there is too little work and we don't need you here.
- Q: So the wife of the new owner sent your mother away?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Now where was your father and your uncle?
- A: My father was in the labor camp and they sent my uncle to Minsk, to Byelorussia to a forced labor camp.
- Q: So your uncle Pal, this was your uncle Pal was sent to Minsk to a forced labor camp?

- A: Yes. To make sure Pal will not be in their way, he and his two brothers-in-law get drafted and when the three men were sitting on the train, an officer came and shout among them. But he misplaced it.
- Q: Your father, what was he sent to? A similar camp?
- A: No, he was in Budapest. He was working in a beer factory, Kobanya, in Budapest.
- Q: Was he at anytime drafted into the Munkaszolgalat?
- A: Yes, he was many times. In 1940 he was many times. But sometimes he came home and the main time from 1940 he was always in the camp.
- Q: So he was no longer involved in the business?
- A: No.
- Q: And your mother, what was she doing during these years?
- A: She was a housewife.
- Q: Housewife, taking care of you and your brothers.
- A: All the children.
- Q: Do you remember any other ways in which there were changes going on in Hungary?
- A: When we had to move together in '44 because there was houses with the yellow star and our area where we lived it was in the yellow star area. And then my grandmother and my grandmother's sister moved in with us in our apartment.
- Q: This was your mother's mother?
- A: My mother's mother and my mother's aunt. And my grandfather died. From the big excitement, he died.
- Q: This is your mother's father?
- A: My mother's father and then he was not moving with us because he died and nobody could go to the service because it was impossible to go.
- Q: What was his name?
- A: Gyula Mahrer.

Q: How old was he when he died?

A: I don't know exactly; maybe he was seventy years old.

Q: But he died of natural causes?

A: Natural, yes, and everybody was envy him that he died, you know, from natural cause. All the neighbors came. Ah Mr. Mahrer I would like to change with you.

Q: The people that you knew, were they afraid of dying of unnatural causes?

A: Yes, everybody was afraid.

Q: When did he die, do you remember?

A: Who?

Q: Your grandfather.

A: 1944 in summer when we had to move.

Q: So after the German occupation?

A: Yes, because the German occupation was in March. March the 19th they came into Budapest.

Q: And what happened when the Germans came into Budapest?

A: Accidentally I was in the movies seeing a Russian film. And I came out and it was the main street and we saw that German army men in the black suit with the motorcycles and we saw that they are here. And then I went home and father and he said yes they occupied Hungary.

Q: And what happened after they...?

A: After that they come every day with a new rule.

Q: What kind of rules?

A: What kind of rules that the Jew may not do that, the Jew may not go to the street, just at certain times and we had to use the yellow star.

Q: So you wore a yellow star?

A: Yes.

Q: Everybody in your family?

A: Everybody in my family, we had to use. It had to be sewn so tight that you cannot stuck anything within the sewing, not even a needle. It has to be sewn so tight on your coat.

Q: Who did the sewing in your family?

A: My mother did all the sewing.

Q: Were there other family members in Budapest at this time?

A: Just my parents, my brothers because everybody lives outskirts Budapest. My father's family lived in Maramaros, District in Felsoviso, my mother's family lived in Kiskunfelebyhaza. No, nobody else.

Q: What was happening in those towns?

A: In those towns ...

Q: Were you in touch, were your parents in touch...?

A: Everybody perished. Everybody was killed, all my grandparents, my aunts, my cousins, everybody was killed.

Q: Were you or your family in touch with those people before they were killed?

A: Yes, we were in connection with the family.

Q: Did you ever visit?

A: Yes, I visited them. I was in Maramaros. I was in Kiskunfelegyhaza. I visited them.

Q: What do you remember there, the way they lived? What kinds of homes did they live in?

A: My aunt had a very nice home.

Q: This is which aunt now?

A: This is Aunt Anna; she had a very nice house and they lived very comfortable and my grandparents lived in a small little village house. The area is very nice with mountains and the air is good but they were poor people. They had just a little

small house and a little....In my time I remember when my grandfather had a little street store, some little things he sold at home over there.

Q: So he had a business?

A: A little business, yeah. My aunt was under very good condition, Frank's parents. They had a nice store.

Q: Where was this?

A: In the same area, Felosviso.

Q: Did you ever stay with them?

A: No, I just visited them. When they went we rent a very good apartment and we was there.

Q: Now they lived in the part of Romania that was taken over by Hungary?

A: That's right.

Q: How did they feel about the Hungarians and the Romanians, do you remember anything about that?

A: The Romanians were much better than the Hungarians this I know because the Romanians did not deport the Jews but the Hungarians did.

Q: Your people, did they expect the Hungarians to deport them or did they expect them to be better than the Romanians? I mean afterwards we know what happened but before it happened -- did they feel more Hungarian or more Romanian?

A: I think the Hungarian people are very dutiful people and if they get an order they do it a hundred percent, better than the Germans. Yes, they obey much better than a real German, they do it in a hundred percent.

Q: Your grandparents, for example, they grew up when this area was Hungarian. I remember looking at some of your photos and some of your family members served in the Hungarian army.

A: That's right, my grandfather Mahrer.

Q: How did he feel regarding the Hungarians? Was he more Hungarian than Romanian?

A: He felt himself Hungarian.

- Q: Was he glad when the Hungarians came back into his town?
- A: This I don't know about. They felt that they're Hungarian.
- Q: And yet it was the Hungarians who deported them.
- A: Yes, unfortunately yes
- Q: Now you wouldn't know whether he was getting a military pension from serving in the army?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: You were still a little girl growing up.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Now when you traveled with your family did you go by train?
- A: Yes, in Romania, yes.
- Q: And you go there for vacations?
- A: For a vacation we went. Summertime, yes, the whole family went.
- Q: It was nicer there?
- A: Yes it was a very nice area over there.
- Q: Did you ever go there in the winter?
- A: No, I just was once over there.
- Q: If you had the choice of growing up in Budapest or growing up...?
- A: In Buda, I would like rather in Budapest.
- Q: Budapest you preferred and thus you were privileged. You were growing up in a big city. Did you have a lot of friends?
- A: I had a lot of friends.
- Q: Jewish or non-Jewish?
- A: Mostly Jewish, my schoolmates.

Q: Did they have the same kind of experiences that you had when the Germans came in?

A: Everybody escaped -- somebody has false papers, somebody went to the country, somebody went...wherever they could escape, everybody was escaping while they could.

Q: Now you went to a Jewish school. Did some of your friends go to public school?

A: No.

Q: Everybody went to a Jewish school. Was there a particular reason for that? That they preferred going to a Jewish school?

A: My father was a religious man.

Q: So your father was religious, orthodox?

A: Orthodox, yeah, and he preferred an orthodox school for us.

Q: What about the other members of your family, were they equally religious?

A: My mother's side, they were just status quo, not so very religious but my father's side was very religious.

Q: What about the grandparents, your mother's parents?

A: They were really modern people. Grandfather Mahrer, he was in the army and he was very modern and my grandmother too, and my mother too. When she was a girl she was a bookkeeper in a big soap factory, Hutter & Level. She was an intelligent lady.

Q: In Budapest, did you live in an apartment building?

A: In an apartment house, yes. We lived there more than fifty years. My brother is living still in the same apartment, my parents' apartment. So everybody knows us in the neighborhood.

Q: You described earlier how the Germans and the Arrow Cross were rounding up people. Briefly you mentioned how your parents disappeared. Would you describe exactly what happened, first with your father and what happened to him in 1944?

A: My father was working in that beer factory and he got word when they will take the people to Germany for the Schutzpass but he, one, two, three, came home.

And my mother was very excited that he came home because every night they came searching the houses and in the spot they could kill him.

Q: Who was searching the houses?

A: The Germans, every night. We may not open the window but we opened it slowly and we saw people what they were taking to the Danube River, many people they put together and took to the river. We were very afraid that they will kill him. It was a very bad step, I know that, he went back.

Q: He came home.

A: He came home. He was home for two days and then he went back with the Schutzpass and a cousin was watching him and he get hit by the officer and the officer tear up the Schutzpass and throw him in the next transport and they took him to Mauthausen and he died over there because a neighbor came back and said that my father was there in Mauthausrn.

Q: So he was deported to Mauthausen. Do you remember when he was deported?

A: He was -- in November -- October 31 they took him.

Q: Why did he come home?

A: He did not know where to go or where to hide.

Q: How did he get the Schutzpass?

A: It was raid. My mother was at the Hold Street Market, shopping and it was a raid and they put together everybody and then she went up to the director of the market and she rang the bell and the servant girl opened the door and the detective asked was this woman living here and the servant girl said yes, and she let her in. The servant's girl's fiance was a policeman and he gets for us the Schutzpass. She, the servant girl took my mother home in the evening. She hide her for the whole day.

Q: So you had more than one Schutzpass?

A: We had this one Schutzpass and this we gave for my father and that was it, we had no more.

Q: And that was torn up?

A: Yes.

Q: And you had no other?

- A: No other.
- Q: What was the last time that you heard from your father? I remember you were showing me a letter?
- A: Yeah, that my mother according serial number should go to the Swiss Embassy and ask another Schutzpass but it was impossible because my mother was not home anymore and we went to the orphanage home.
- Q: So your father wrote a letter to your mother asking her to try to get another Schutzpass and yet when the postcard arrived, your mother was not there?
- A: Not there anymore.
- Q: And what had happened to your mother?
- A: In the meantime she gets a job. She was sitting on the steps on the Swiss Consulate because this was a little safe place. Sitting because this was not Hungarian, this was Swiss. And then so they promised her that she will be a cook in an orphanage home, in a Red Cross home. And then she came home having lunch and she asked the superintendent to take off her name from the list, what was on the door when we come into the house. And she said, until you are in this house, your name has to be on the list. Later the Germans came and they took her, my mother. Not just my mother but many people until forty years of age. They said they are taking them to work.
- Q: So they took people that were on the list?
- A: On the list, a lot of women, maybe forty women in this house and they took them.
- Q: And where did they take them?
- A: They take in a brick factory.
- Q: In Budapest?
- A: In Budapest. The name of the factory was Kishok Palya. It was a big, big place where she was.
- Q: And then as you explained she was sent to Ravensbruck.
- A: Yes.
- Q: You wouldn't know when that happened?

- A: When she died?
- Q: No, When she was sent to Ravensbruck.
- A: No, I don't know when because she went through a lot because she went to prison, she was in the prison forever.
- Q: Before you were taken away you mentioned that you were living in a house, before you went to the orphanage, what kind of house was this? Was this a Jewish house?
- A: A Jewish house; many Jewish tenants, maybe one or two gentile and the superintendent was gentile. Mainly Jewish people were living in this house.
- Q: Could you explain to us what that meant, the Jewish house, did you have a special sign or marking in front?
- A: Yes and the young armed Arrow Cross guard was standing in the door all the time, day and night. So you cannot just go out to the street and the very least just at certain times you can go out.
- Q: So everybody knew that Jews lived in that house?
- A: That's right.
- Q: And only Jews lived in the house?
- A: No, there were a few gentiles.
- Q: Did all of the Jews in Budapest live in Jewish houses or were there other...
- A: They were forced, in the end. In the end everybody was forced to live together as many people...For instance in Nyiregyhaza my husband's parents had a house and they were living a hundred people in this small house. How many they were able to put, they put together.
- Q: And this all began when?
- A: When the Germans occupied Budapest -- Hungary I mean.
- Q: In the spring?
- A: In the spring and in the summer it begins the deportation.
- Q: Were there any deportations to Germany from Budapest?

- A: Yes, there were a few. I mean not from the real city but the outskirts, Budapest and the other, it began.
- Q: You lived in the Pest part.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Near the Danube or farther...
- A: Not too far from the Danube.
- Q: In your opinion who was the greatest danger to you? Was it the Germans and the SS or the Arrow Cross?
- A: The Arrow Cross; they were very biased and very sadistic people. The Arrow Cross -- they wanted fulfill the Germans a hundred percent.
- Q: Did they deport Jews?
- A: Rather they killed.
- Q: Oh, they killed right there.
- A: Yah, on the spot.
- Q: Did you see any of these killings?
- A: I saw a few because my father had a friend. His name was Teller and they had a fish store and lately they had no place where to be and they sit on a bench in a circle in a nice area. They came and they asked the papers. They had no papers. They were sitting on the bench and they killed them right away.
- Q: Right there on the bench?
- A: Yah.
- Q: With guns?
- A: With guns, right away.
- Q: Earlier you mentioned your future husband's families; you hadn't married yet; I imagine you hadn't met your husband at this point.
- A: Yes, in '50 I met him.

- Q: Could you tell us about what happened to his family and what happened to your husband during these years?
- A: Okay, my husband was from a very huge family. There were six brothers and one sister and the parents, grandparents. Nobody came back from the war. Just he alone, my husband. And he was in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen and Dora and Buna and different places. The English army liberated him in Bergen-Belsen and he was together with his only brother whose name was Joseph, Eliyahu in Hebrew but in Hungarian he was Gyuszi, and everybody called him in this name.
- Q: His only brother in the camp?
- A: No, he had several brothers but the others were half-brothers but this was his brother.
- Q: So his mother died when he was young?
- A: When he was three years old his mother died in childbirth and my husband had a brother Joseph and they were liberated and Joseph was very weak and they have no food, just lard and he got the diarrhea and my husband asked him eat, whatever remains eat, but he didn't want to eat and a few days after the liberation he died. And my husband was out of his mind because he knew that nobody was left from his family.
- Q: Everybody from the Brieger family was deported from this town. Where was this town, in eastern Hungary?
- A: In eastern Hungary near...it was very interesting because it was fifty kilometers from Russian, fifty kilometers from Czechoslovakia, from Poland, from Romania -- everything is very close to this...
- Q: Except Budapest.
- A: Except Budapest, yes.
- Q: Was it near mountains?
- A: In Nyiregyhaza there's not too many mountains, no.
- Q: How would you describe the countryside near there? It wasn't as pretty as Felsoviso?
- A: No, this is something else because it is a flat area with spas, very good baths are there and businesslike it was a very good place.
- Q: So it was a resort area?

- A: Yes, very good spas are there. You can take a bath sosto thermal over there.
- Q: What did your husband's father do?
- A: They had a hundred year old hardware store over there. It was a very good store and my husband inherited this store.
- Q: After the war?
- A: After the war. After the war they took him to Sweden for two years, my husband, and then he came home and he opened the store and then I get married and I was in the store, till '52. In '52 the government took the store.
- Q: The Communist government.
- A: The Communist government.
- Q: Your family lost the store twice?
- A: That's right, and then my husband gets arrested because they find six dollars in his pocket.
- Q: Six dollars, and that's a crime?
- A: Yes it was a crime because it was a -- do you know what is an agent provocateur? That's what they did with him. You know, somebody set him then...
- Q: He was set up.
- A: Yes, and then... he was not even home when the detectives came because they were interested in what we have at home and they took from us.
- Q: Now in all the families, you have such a large family, did any members leave Hungary and emigrate either to Israel or to America or to some other country?
- A: My brother went to Israel in '49 or '48 and my husband's cousins, everybody lives in America, Israel, and, Canada. They are spread.
- Q: How about before the war when you were growing up, when you were a little girl, were there any relatives that had gone?
- A: Yes, in the turn of the century my grandmother's brother and sisters went to America, so I had in America, third, fourth cousins.
- Q: On which side of the family?

- A: My mother's side.
- Q: Your mother's mother's sister...
- A: Sister and brother.
- Q: This was the Schlesinger family?
- A: Yes, Schlesinger family.
- Q: Did anyone leave or try to leave Hungary during the 1930's or during the war?
- A: My grandmother had a brother in Timisoara (Temesvar in Hungarian) in Romania, Transylvania and they left to Chile. They are still living in Chile, the daughter, the sons,, everybody lives in Chile till this time.
- Q: So they left before the Holocaust?
- A: Yes, about in '39. It was a good time.
- Q: So they're the only ones who managed to emigrate before?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Did your parents or anybody that you knew ever consider leaving? I know your family was trying to get a Schutzpass '44. Were there ever attempts...?
- A: In '44 my brother who lives in Israel is a very talented young man, now he's not so young anymore, but he's very good in music and he's very talented in music and football and everything and he writes Slomo Grosberg and then somebody came over and offered to take him to Switzerland because it was a movement that I don't know about three hundred children they will escape. My father did not allow it. He said that we have to stay together and did not let him to go. This was the only thing.
- Q: The family has to stay together?
- A: Yes, that was his opinion.
- Q: Your father wanted to stay in Budapest?
- A: Yes, he was convinced that nothing will happen with us.
- Q: Because you were in Budapest?

- A: Not just because we are...because we did not hurt anybody and we will survive, that's what he meant. Yeah, and my grandmother came from the ghetto. She came without the yellow star.
- Q: This is which grandmother, Vilma?
- A: She came to the orphanage home without a star. She put her pocketbook over here and she came and she brought a present for the lady over there about two soaps and a few matches because this was very valuable over there and then she kneeled to her asking her to take care of us, my grandmother. And then another lady, a gentile lady, sent in some bread for us and some jars of fruit preservatives so I cannot tell that everybody was worse or bad because that is not true, because many people helped. Who could help, they helped.
- Q: Now you said this was a Red Cross house. Which Red Cross?
- A: This was not an official Red Cross. One day we had on the street on the house the name that is a Red Cross orphanage. The next day somebody said why do you have this just disappear because it is not good, they will find the children. You know, they take off.
- Q: Well who ran this fake Red Cross?
- A: I think Wallenberg was who organized those orphanage homes. It was a few in Budapest, not just one. He was the one who organized this, the Swedish people.
- Q: Did he ever come to visit?
- A: No, I think once I see him in a raincoat coming in but not to me, to the leaders.
- Q: Did anyone come to visit your Red Cross house?
- A: My grandmother came and she brought a few matches and two soaps and she gave it to the lady leader and she kneeled and she asked to take care of us.
- Q: Where was the real Red Cross at this time?
- A: The real Red Cross, later on they told to the Red Cross that we are there and they came to visit us before Christmas, the real Red Cross, the International Red Cross.
- Q: The International Red Cross, not the Swedish?
- A: This I don't know and then we were studying all the chorales and all the songs for Christmas. And we had a nice Christmas tree and we celebrated it when they came showing that we are not Jewish people because they did not know that we are Jewish children.

- Q: So you were masquerading as Christians and you had to pretend to be Christian even with the Red Cross?
- A: Yes.
- Q: These people, which country did they come from?
- A: I think they were Hungarians.
- Q: So you couldn't trust them.
- A: No, in this time you cannot trust anybody.
- Q: What was it like living in here? You were all children?
- A: Yes.
- Q: People that you knew?
- A: Where, in the orphanage, no.
- Q: You didn't know any of the children?
- A: I had to take care for two children plus the kitchen because I was older. I was thirteen almost. I took care of a sick girl. her name was Regina; she had no shoes. I took care of my two brothers and we get better. It is a sickness what you get from dirt. We had three kinds of lice because there was no hot water, we cannot take a bath. It was always the air raid because or the Americans came or the Russians came or the English people came and it was a rebuttal, it was a fight and unfortunately a German tank was standing in front of the house with German soldiers and they were firing like crazy for the airplanes. It was impossible to go out on the street, mainly for a Jewish. But the water was on the other side of the street. There was water. And then my brother dressed in my coat and in my hat because he said if somebody has to be alive then I am the one that has to be alive because I have to take care of my younger brother. And he went to the other side and he brought the water in a big pail.
- Q: So you were in this Red Cross home when the battle for Budapest was...?
- A: Budapest and the battle was on.
- Q: And was there fighting right near the house?
- A: Yes, near the house. And then one German, a young German died and we brought his body in and the other German asked us he want to escape in our

building. But we were very afraid of him because the leader said that so many guns he had that he can kill all of us because we was hiding then in the coal, in the cellar. And then we did not let him in.

Q: Did you see Russian troops?

A: Many, many, many, they came in.

Q: When did they come in?

A: We was liberated January the 18th in '45.

Q: You remember the day well.

A: Yeah, we were very happy when they came in.

Q: Did you leave the building?

A: We did not leave the building because we did not know where to go. But my brother dressed again in my clothing because for a boy it was not so good to go. He dressed like a girl and he stumbled on dead bodies and stones. There were many dead horses on the street and people were eating the horse meat on the street. And my brother went to the ghetto to visit my grandmother and my aunt and they were alive. They were very thin, they looked like two girls, they were so thin. But they were alive. But they couldn't take us home because the house was bombardiered, the part of it of the apartment, and it was winter. It was very cold, so we had to stay in the orphanage longer time for a few other months. Then my two brothers went to the orphanage home and just me, I went home with my grandmother. But for a while I went also to the home.

Q: Were you near the Danube?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see any of the massacres along the river front?

A: Really the massacres I did not see. I see the blood in Danube. I saw the shoes. I saw the dresses floating in the river, that I saw. Long time after the war till it was red.

Q: Did they kill people along the river?

A: Yes, to the shore because they was very angry. They was wild in the last part.

Q: These were the Arrow Cross?

- A: Yes, yes, they was wild.
- Q: And then it's only at the end of the war that you find out what had happened to your parents?
- A: We was waiting there years and years and we went to all the organizations; we did not know what happened with them for many years and we were always waiting. When I saw a lady sitting on the bench then I -- maybe this is my mother, maybe she forgets where she lives or something. But then I get a letter -- my mother gets a postcard from a hospital in Budapest and the lady was together with my mother. She saw her. And then a neighbor in my grandmother's house, she saw her dying.
- Q: And your grandmother, this is...?
- A: Vilma Mahrer, and this lady, Mrs. Pollack, she was dying and when she was dying she said she was together -- she did not want to tell us. But then when she was dying she told us what happened.
- Q: This is which..?
- A: My mother,
- Q: Your mother, this woman told you what happened?
- A: Yes, my grandmother's neighbor was with her.
- Q: In Ravensbruck?
- A: Yeah, Ravensbruck.
- Q: What about your family of your future husband? Do you remember anything about what your husband's experience was like at the end of the war? You mentioned that he was sent to different camps.
- A: Yeah, different camps, yes. He was 28 kilo and was very sick, tuberculosis, diarrhea, etc. etc. They put him in the hospital.
- Q: And then he was sent to Sweden. Was he sent to Sweden from Hungary or from Germany?
- A: No, the English army liberated him in Bergen-Belsen. Their job was to carry the dead bodies to a big, big grave. That's what they were supposed to do, by the wrist, you know. And then he was so weak he couldn't do it anymore and he lay down among the dead bodies. Then when the English army came in, the soldiers take his pulse and he said in English because he knew a few words in English,

don't leave me here I am alive, he says in English for the soldier, don't leave me here, take me in the barracks because I am alive, 6631 is my number and my brother's number is 6630. Take a look where he is, find my brother and bring him to me. And accidentally my son was born in 1966 April the thirtieth, the same number what this Gyussi had and therefore he is named Gyussi.

Q: Now your husband, he went to Sweden, was he sent to Sweden by the British or was it the Swedish Red Cross?

A: The king himself was very much moved when they saw the pictures. They gave a ship and I think the Red Cross, I don't know, they took them to Sweden.

Q: So your future husband went from Bergen-Belsen to Sweden?

A: Maybe first he was in the hospital but yes, he was very sick.

Q: So he went to Sweden and then he came back to Hungary after...?

A: He was there two years.

Q: And then they reopened their store and then sometime later you met him there.

A: Yes, I was vacationing over there. I met him. He had nobody and I had nobody and we got married.

Q: And then the family grew.

A: Yes.

Q: When you think about all of these events in the Holocaust, what comes to mind above all else?

A: I think it was a big injustice what happened because we were really ordinary innocent people who did not hurt anybody. We did not take nothing from anybody and we did not hurt anybody and really it was a big injustice.

Q: What do you say to those who claim that it never happened?

A: We have to read them all the stories what people are telling them and if they listen to the stories they will believe it. One person can lie, two persons can lie, but so many people cannot lie.

Q: Do you have any other reflections?

A: Yes, I say that not everybody is a bad person and you have to look in everybody, the nice and the good, and in myself, in my person, I don't hate anybody.

- Q: How did people survive? What was the difference between surviving and not surviving?
- A: In my case, in Budapest, the only thing that I was lucky because I could die or from the bombardiering or from the hiding, every day I was in danger, and I get sick of it. I get thyroid problem and I'm on psychiatric care.
- Q: Your sense of this time, did you and family members, was there a determination to survive?
- A: Everybody wanted to survive, yes. That's what it is -- determination. It doesn't matter how and why and where but we have to survive.
- Q: And what were you thinking of the future? Was there any discussion about the future whether this would come to an end? Was there any feeling that perhaps the Nazis would lose?
- A: There was a feeling that they would lose, yes..
- Q: From the beginning?
- A: From the beginning, yes. We had a feeling that they would lose.
- Q: Did your parents, for example, did they think that this was a temporary disaster?
- A: Yes, that what they were thinking. Maybe they were wrong but they were thinking that we just...
- Q: A storm, a passing storm?
- A: Yes, and it will pass.
- Q: When did you realize, again you were a young girl, that the war was almost over and that the suffering might soon come to an end?
- A: I'll tell you something, when my mother was still at home in November, we put our ears on the pillow, and we heard the guns and the fighting. It was not too far from Budapest, already, the Russians were very close. They were really close, we could hear them. Unfortunately they were not close enough and it took time then to come.
- Q: The irony is that your parents who did survive so long were taken away just before the final liberation.
- A: Yes, almost to the end.

Q: Well, on behalf of the Holocaust Museum I would like to thank you for your time and your help.

A: Okay, anytime.