

OK, we're speaking with Mrs. Elizabeth Lubell of Peekskill, New York. Mrs. Lubell, would you like to start by telling us a little bit about your childhood, and where were you born, the date of birth? What was your life like?

I was born in 1920, December the 9th. I lived in Budapest with my parents. We had, I would say, middle class. I would say my father was a hard-working man. He was a traveling salesman. He went with a bicycle from store to store, from town to town. Sometimes he took me with us.

I would say I had a happy childhood. And carefree, happy life. Schools were very good. I went to elementary school and then went to regular Gymnasium. And then I went to a [GERMAN], how do you say it? Commerce school. And everything went well until Hitler came to power.

Could be jump back a little?

OK.

Is that all right?

Jump back. Jump back any time.

What were you like as a child? And did you have some interests?

As a child?

Yes.

Movie stars. I had interest-- as a little child, I was always theatrically interested. All the school plays in school, I was always present. And my parents were proudly sitting there listening to me. And as I grew bigger and more serious on that line, I went more into the theatrical aspect of school plays and stuff like that.

And it was very uneventful, but it abruptly changed. So abruptly that I had a diary, for instance, which I by coincidence found it. Because not so many documents I found from my life.

And as I was reading the diary, today I was in love with this boy, tomorrow I'm with that boy. So I lived, really, like any teenagers. And all suddenly, when Hitler came to power, and it started to come the news, I personally immediately took it to my head.

And it always went-- the thought always was in my head what will be if something happens to my parents? I was very much attached to them. And I was very much Papa's girl, Papa's little girl.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had my brother, who lives in America right now. Almost met. And when Hitler came to power, it abruptly changed my whole lifestyle. When I was reading in my diaries, from that little girl, you can see that there was no [GERMAN]. How do you say that it was-- it went from one year to another.

Continuity?

It immediately became serious. There, it was a childish little girl telling all kinds of little stories. And then all suddenly, I heard this one on the radio, I heard that one on the radio what will happen. Because in 1938, it started, the whole problem. And then of course, when my brother left for America, that changed a lot in our lives and our life.

Why did he leave? Did he know?

Because in 1938, it was the first political change in Austria, with Schuschnigg. You know, there was the-- how did you-- what was it Austria what happened, how do you call that?

The Anschluss.

The Anschluss, thank you. So with the Anschluss, it was already everybody knew that things will happen. And my brother had the foresight that he asked our relatives-- my mother had a brother in America, in Kingston-- and he asked for the affidavit.

He got married in Poland. And they came to Hungary. And as a matter of fact, I remember the last time when she, my sister-in-law, called up her mother and said goodbye because they are leaving tomorrow for America.

In that time, we didn't-- in 1938, you know, it was the same story what was with the Germans. They said it can never happen to us. It was something entirely new in our life. Would think what would happen? But when that happened in 1938, my brother left.

And with that, it started the decline in every way how we felt. And there was always even so that we still had our normal life. But as the weeks and months went by, more and more, it came the news from Germany. And a little bit here, a little bit there. And we more and more realized that we are looking forward for a sad time.

Can we stay in the prewar period for a minute? And can I ask you about your family, the Jewish aspect of your family? Were they religious or assimilated?

We were conservative, we kept every holiday. Every significant and non-significant holiday. We did keep a kosher home. We were very much Jewish-oriented. I had mostly, I would say 90%, Jewish friends. And no Gentile boyfriend. And we kept the holidays, we went to shul. So I would say I had my confirmation in Budapest, which I had very nice memories from.

And I would say we kept a nice Jewish home. We were not Orthodox, but we were rather conservative. What else do you want to know about that? That is what we care-- I went to Hebrew-- I mean, it's not Hebrew school. Because at that time in Hungary, it was not like here. You have to take separate Jewish lessons if you went to school. And that's what I did.

And we had our own group. And we had our own hall where we went. We kept, you know, socially and in the artistic field, we kept up with the Jewish place. And as the years went by, 1938, 1939, more and more, we had our own little Zionist groups, you know. And talked a lot about Palestine. And young people got together. But we didn't realize the real tragedy what was facing us that time.

So in that case, where were you at this point, then? You were in business, studying at the business school?

Yes, after I finished my business school, I got a job with a lawyer. And I, the whole years, all the way on-- as a matter of fact, all the way until the Germans came to Budapest, I was a secretary with a lawyer.

A Gentile lawyer?

All of them were all Gentiles. But the interesting part of it was that, toward the end in Budapest, we had-- before they made the ghetto, we had to wear the Jewish star. And the lawyer where I worked was not in the Jewish section. And when I went there, I took my star off so I could cross that part to go to work.

And that lawyer where I heard was a very, very well-known lawyer. Not only because he had higher connections, but also he was in the religious field with nuns and priests. He was a very religious man.

And one day, as I was working there, and somebody rang the bell, and I opened the bell, and I saw two of these so-called Hungarian Nazis, who were worse sometimes than the Germans one. And I thought, well, that's it. They will take

me.

But they came and they took my boss. Because he was in the religious. You know, they didn't like very religious people, either. And they took him to a concentration camp. And I, as a secretary, Jewish secretary whom they didn't know stayed there. So that was a rather almost humorous aspect of that case.

So I stayed there for a couple of months without him. And then things got to be very dangerous. Then I knew the safe number of that lawyer. That was right before things got very serious. Then I opened up the safe and took out his lawyer's daughter's papers, knowing if I have to run away, I will run away with these papers. Which I did. Which I used, but that happened later on.

Do you want to tell me how?

Well, first of all, I have to tell you that we were-- my father and mother was Polish origin. And in 1941, when the Germans were not occupying Hungary yet, they came out-- they gave the order to the Hungarians to deport all the non-Hungarian citizens.

And my father, in spite of that, that he was as a Hungarian officer in the Hungarian Army, and he had the Iron Cross, and all that things, when the order came out to deport-- you know, there was a time in 1941 when all the non-Hungarian citizens were deported from Hungary and from Budapest. And unfortunately, we were among them.

And unfortunately, we were among them the very first day when the deportations started, when we didn't know yet what's going on. Then they came to our house and they said, pack your bag, we will take you to your own country. And you will work there. And you will survive after the war. And that was in June, 1941.

And they came to our house, and they said, well, pack your bag and go. And how do you pack your bag when you lived there a lifetime? So we cried, and my mother cried, and I cried, and my fiance was there.

So the guy who-- he was new on the job. And he had a certain human caring and sympathy to us. So he said, you know what, I will take your father. So I'm sure you stay here, and you'll have one day to pack your bag and do whatever you want. And that's what he did.

And in that one day, I had a choice, and some people, some relatives told me, well, you are young, go and hide before they take you. But my father wrote a letter that the family have to stay together. And please come. And whatever will be, we will survive it together. So we packed our bag and we went outside.

We lived in a house, four floors. And all the tenants were looking and saying goodbye to us. Some of them cheering, some of them jeering. And that's how we were deported to Poland that time. I say deported to Poland, which is, again, it's easy to say.

But how we were, and what happened, and how we went there, and how we walked, or whatever happened in between, a lot of Hungarian so-called Polish Hungarian origin got killed in Kamieniec Podolski. That was a famous town where they-- you heard about Kamieniec Podolski. So most of them who got killed there, 40,000, they were all Hungarian origins.

But knowing my parents knew Polish, they also hired a private buggy. And we had relatives in Kolomea. And we stayed-- we hid back from the transport. Because we knew that the transport is going to Kamieniec Podolski. And a lot of other people escaped, too, but we went with that buggy to Kolomea. And that's where we stayed.

In Kolomea, that was that time yet more or less normal life because the ghetto was not instated. But of course, after a year being in the ghetto and losing people-- it was over 20,000 people in Kolomea-- and by the time I escaped with a smuggler, there was only a couple of hundred left.

So that's when it was that I said goodbye to my parents. And of course, I never saw them again. And I started on the

road going back to Hungary, which was a road to talk about a lot.

Do you want to talk any more about the ghetto, though, before?

The ghetto we lived. And it was a whole year. Before the ghetto, we lived in Kolomea yet. And when the ghetto came, of course, like everybody else, we had to move in the ghetto. And we also had-- they said on the tape that three, four families lived in the ghetto. Well, where we went, it was rather five, six families living in the ghetto.

In a one-room place?

In a one-room place, right. And then of course, some of them got killed during the time. So it got less and less. And that's when I decided, after a year being in Kolomea and about half a year in the ghetto that it's time to go.

Was there anything while you were there that struck you and made-- that stands out in your mind?

Well, that was day was what struck me because I was a young person with a rather careless, a careful living. And all suddenly, you were thrust into a situation. We went to work in the morning because my father, being a military person, and the Germans also gave him a job as a supervisor. And the other Jews didn't like him because he was a supervisor. And they didn't like nobody who supervised over other Jews.

And so we worked there for a time. As a matter of fact, I worked in a kitchen preparing dinner for German officers. And my job was with three other girls peeling potatoes. And in that time, hunger was already a big, big aspect of ghetto life. Because you know that people just died of hunger. So what we did, we got permission for the peels to take home. And we had the peels for whatever meal they made.

You cooked them, I assume?

We cooked the peels, right. But in order to have something on the peels, we peeled the potatoes in the kitchen take. And then we went home and we peeled the peels. We made it so that the peels were take. But then the Germans came to eat and they said whoever will peel like that take will have a punishment. So we couldn't do that. So from then on, we had to eat the peels and not peel the peels.

The other one what I remember from the ghetto when we went out to work and through work, we got to know some other workers. Because this was German families who moved into Jewish houses. And they renovated it, redecorated it. And we worked on it to keep it clean until their wife and children came.

And we saw the mementos of a life, you know, Jewish life. Sometimes we came into a house where we saw the pots and pans yet as they carried them out. And we just had to close our eyes and see what happened there. And we had to clean up and make it ready for the German officers.

And I was working there once washing the floors with a pail, you know, a big pail of water. Because you were asking me to tell you some mementos from the ghetto. And until that time, you know, I knew that I was in danger and everything. But I didn't had any personal contact with any physical punishment. Excuse me.

Cleaning the floor and almost finished it. He came in and he took the pail and he kicked the pail. And he said, this is not clean enough, to clean it again. So that was my first encounter with a German officer.

And as it happened to be the German officer's wife who came back, she acted rather humanely to the Jewish girls. It happens to be that-- I don't know whether I should mention it, everything. But she had some tendencies about liking girls. And the question was whether to use this situation to your advantage or not to use it to your advantage.

But sometimes, you came to a point. You told me an incident before about bread. That sometimes you came to a point when the only thing was in your mind was-- you are 20 years old and somewhere along in the sky when you looked up, there is a life yet for people. And let's do whatever it's possible, but let's survive. And it happens to be that that woman

helped me a lot to get easier job, to get more food, until her husband came to the picture.

And then I lost my job. And then we had to go to a factory where he worked. Some kind of-- if I remember correctly, I don't even know, I think something with an iron work or something. And the first day when I went there, we were rather abused that time there.

And then what I decided that this is a good place maybe to run away or something, or make connections. And that's what I heard the first time, that there is somewhere a smuggler along, that it is possible. So I stayed in that factory and I worked there.

We went out to get back to the ghetto. And the ghetto was always less, and less, and less. And my parents were always less and less independent and more and more relied on me. So the roles reversed between parents and children. And are not children because it was only me. That it was me who directed them what to do and how.

Like for instance, when I had to go to work with mother, the Germans looked up, and mother got old very suddenly in the ghetto. And it happened, it coincided with her menopause, too. So that was really a hard thing because she acted sometimes very strange. And I was very much afraid.

Everything fell on her. And she just couldn't digest the tragedy which fell upon her. And I sometimes was the one who had to lead her and say it will be good. And I remember, I pinched her cheek sometimes so she would just survive because maybe I made a little bit her hair so that the Germans won't say, well, you are too old to work.

So this was a couple of memories from the ghetto. And then of course, there was also memories that I met there a young man who worked in a soup kitchen. And you know, when you are 20 years old, no matter what situation, you are thrust into it, you always have a little bit romantic space in you because that keeps you alive.

And I met a young man who was very kind to me. And he gave me always cake, soups, and things like that. So I sometimes met him. But he had somebody else. I had somebody else. But there, it developed some kind of rapport between us. And I remembered him long after that. That was, of course, my present husband. But I didn't know at that time yet.

But when it came the time that the ghetto got from 20,000 to a couple of hundred, I said, that's it. And I discussed it with my mother the last day. And the last night, when I knew that I'm leaving in the morning, you know, we rather stayed away from kissing, or touching, or something because you changed.

In order to survive, you have to lose your-- certain feelings disappear from you. But that was the last night and mother just touched me so because she had her own thoughts. And I had my own thoughts. And the only thing what I remember that I just wanted just nobody should touch me and nobody should kiss me, just to push it away because one more touch and one more kiss, I'm not going to leave. And that was the reason.

I never explained it to her, I hope she understood it. Because when she wanted to touch me, I just like pushed it away. And I did it in order that I should be able to leave.

And next before I left, my father gave me that talisman, which I carry with me. And I never, never leave it. Wherever I go, the talisman goes with me. And somehow I don't-- I'm not superstitious otherwise. But I truly believe that that talisman saved me from a lot of situations. And when the time will be that I have to go, then I have to decide which of my children will have it.

And that was the ghetto. And I went away. And I went back to Budapest, where that time, even so that Hitler that was far in advancing all over, but it was still not the ghetto. Only a couple of months later.

Yeah, what year was this?

I was there a whole year in the ghetto, from 1941 to 1942. And I have to tell you one incident there because that is an-- I

try not to go into little details but that is.

No, it's OK. It's fine.

But this detail was so remarkable that I have to mention it. After about 25 or 26 days, the 20th day, they caught us. I think, did I mention it or I didn't mention it?

No.

Or I told you that before. So we were walking at night to reach Hungary from Poland to there. I mean, it was a long road, but I cannot go into every aspect in it. But in any case, we were walking at night and sleeping at day time. And that was just about the last day before. We saw already the Hungarian border.

Then when somebody probably who noticed us told it to the German guards, and they came up with-- we were 10 of us who were escaping from the ghetto. And they came up, the German guard, and the shot everybody on sight.

And I ran away that time. And it was laying there a big tree, you know, eaten, knocked from the moss. You know, hollow inside. That is a lot of fate was in my life, but I have to strongly believe that there must be something, somebody, somewhere, who prepared that tree for me there where I went in that tree, in that hollow tree was laying. And I was laying. And I was in the tree.

And I just heard the shooting, and crying, and saying, no, no, no until everything was got quiet and I walked out from the tree. And what I saw was only dead people.

And I started to walk because I think that time, that that's from that day on, I was not quite right. And I think I was singing or something. And I said, I'm going back to mama, and how wonderful it is. And I stumbled by accident over the smuggler who was also escaping.

But not only that he was getting shot, and escaping, and I found him, but everybody had a little knapsack. You know, a little knapsack where we had things. And he, in a big hurry, instead of taking his knapsack, he took my knapsack, and I am the one who survived. So there is little incident what I sometimes wonder how that worked out.

And so I found him, but he was injured, and he said he cannot do nothing. And he gave me his pocket knife. And in his thigh he was-- they probably was the shot. They shot at my back and it went into his thigh, near the genital areas. And he gave me that little knife, and he said that I have to take that bullet out, which I did.

And he was there for the night. And then he said, write me that letter that you are here so I can get my money. I won't get too much, in any case. Because from the 10 of you, you are the only one survived. So that's what the paper what I showed you that I wrote him. And that was from the woods. This was the Hungarian woods, in Korosmezo. That's how.

Could you spell that?

Korosmezo.

Yeah, you can write it for me.

Where shall-- but how will I know? Here, I write down here. Koros-- this is a border town. Korosmezo. Ko-ros-me-zo. This is a border town. And from there, when I am in Korosmezo, I am already in Hungary.

So he said that-- he covered me over with leaves and he said, I don't feel good. So he left me with my knapsack what I had a little sweater on it. It was cold in the woods already. And he gave me an onion, by the way. Which was very good. And he went away. And he said he will come for me. He will whistle a certain way so I know. Because that was.

So it was in the woods, but people could still go there. And he said, when you hear that whistle then tell that this is you.

So and he went away. And he left me there 4 and 1/2-- four days and one night, I was in the woods by myself.

So I was really-- can you imagine a 20-year-old girl in the woods, you know, rain or not rain on anything? And there was one incident where something moved. I probably moved. And a peasant came there who was taking lambs to eat, to graze, or whatever you call it. And he heard.

And he come straight, he came straight where I am. And I was just there huddling there, covered with certain leaves there. And I heard the steps closer and closer. And the only thing what he did, he peed. And he peed on me. And I was just standing there. And well, that was one of the incidents.

And then people ask me, so what did you eat for four days? I mean, well, you have to eat for four days, which is not necessarily so. But I had that one onion. And then blueberries grew that time. So when I felt safe enough in the night, then I went around and I ate some blueberries.

But the fourth night, I dreamed about my fiance in Hungary at that time. And it was a beautiful wedding and everything. And when I got up, and I was in the situation, you know, in whatever I was in there, and I looked up, I said, this is-- I can't. There was a limit what I could endure. And I said, well, I just don't care anymore nothing when I heard the whistle. So little coincidences.

And he did come. And I told him, where were you? I couldn't talk so good to him because he didn't talk Hungarian, I didn't talk so good Polish. But he said he was sick, and I believe it. I'm not such a good surgeon. So he came for me the fifth day.

And he took me to a place where I had to walk up on the top because even so I was in Hungary, I think my husband explained it, when they catch you there, then they immediately send you back to Germany. So everybody was afraid to hide you.

So I was up there in some kind of an attic, waiting for further instruction to go deeper into Hungary. The deeper you got into Hungary, the safer you were that they won't give you over to the Germans. This was in 1942. And as I was walking down the steps-- because he told me to come down, now is we are ready we have a car and we will go to the next town, which is Maramarossziget.

And as I walked down, I saw a figure on the bottom of the steps. And I didn't recognize quite. And people didn't recognize me. But when I wrote that letter, you know, what I gave? My fiance, he himself came all the way to the border town to bring the town, and that was him standing downstairs. Well, I don't go into the feelings and sentimental aspects of it. I'll leave that to your imagination. But it was something to behold.

And his life was, of course, that time in danger. Because if they would catch him, he would also be-- even so he was a Hungarian citizen. But what I wanted to tell you, what I don't want to leave out.

As we wanted to go to Maramarossziget. With that car. And from Maramarossziget, you already are in Hungary, you can go with the trains, cars, buses, whatever you want to. But until that time, you were in danger. And there was a long row in car before the bridge. When you passed the bridge, you were already on my destination. There was a long line of cars.

And on the beginning of the car, the chauffeur looked out, the one that was paid. And he said, we are in trouble because they're checking the cars. And when I heard that they're checking the cars, my first instinct was to jump out.

Because if they see me, the way I looked, full with lice. I was full with lice, by the way. My head was full of lice. I was dirty, I was bleeding, I had wounds, I had all kinds of things there from the woods. And if they catch him, he would pay his life for it. So I wanted to jump out from the car.

And if that's the way it has to be. And he was holding me back. And all suddenly, a soldier comes to our car. Mind you, there was a long line of cars there before us, crossing the bridge. And he doesn't even look in the back.

And this was such a remarkable incident that I will never forget it. And he doesn't look in the back. He just goes to the chauffeur, and he says, you know, I lost my key. I can't even remember what he said. That the license, or my key, or if he said something to the chauffeur, would you please drive me to Korosmezo?

And the chauffeur said, of course. He was an officer of the Hungarian Army. And the chauffeur said, of course. And he came in and sat next to the chauffeur. And as we walked by, you know, the cars, and as we reached the point where the guy checked everybody's car, they just looked in and saw a Hungarian officer. And they just saluted. Then we went by.

So to this day, to this day, number one, I don't forget the incident. And number two, I don't believe in supernatural. I cannot quite believe it, but there is a tiny little doubt in me whether this was not some kind of an angel sometimes. Because why would? I mean it is a coincidence to be mentioned.

Oh, yes, indeed. You know, you had mentioned earlier when we were talking that you were some type of an encounter with Wallenberg?

Yeah. Well, that came later. Yes. Because when I came-- then I came back to Hungary. And in Hungary, as I said, that time was from 1941, from 1942 in the ghetto. And that time, Germany still didn't occupy Hungary. And was no ghetto yet.

It was my aunt there. And she asked me what it was. And what she didn't believe I ate potato peels and stuff like that. But as we closed into the year, more and more Germans came to Hungary, until finally on the main street of Hungary, the Germans marched in. And that was the end.

Hungary was occupied by Germany. And you know Horthy, Horthy was there. So he went away with his white horse and stuff like that. But he tried, as a matter of fact, to save the Jews. But he was too weak to do anything on that respect. And then the Germans came in. And then of course, Germans took over like they took over the other countries. And then it came the ghetto.

And knowing what the ghetto is because I had a little bit of experience before. So I said, I am not going to go in the ghetto. And as I said, I worked with that lawyer, and I had these papers from this lawyer's daughter, what I stole from the safe. And I said, I'm not.

And my aunt said, well, come with us and everything. She said, by the way, that time, she said, now I know what you told me what went on in the ghetto. I can believe it now more. And as the year went by, she believed me, unfortunately, more and more. She was a very lovely lady, very nice aunt what I had.

So they all went to ghetto, and I went with the Catholic papers. Do you know where the Balaton is? That's a lake, Balaton Lake. I was working with my friend, with a Hungarian friend of mine, as a maid and a nurse. One week, I was the maid and she was the nurse. And one week, I was the nurse and she was the maid.

And we worked there a month with my papers what I had. And she had other papers. As Catholic, we went to church, and I learned to pray, and all stuff, and with the children.

And one day, a policeman comes to our house and checks our papers. And checked her paper and checked my paper. And just said, OK. We will check it out, and we'll come for you in the morning. And I knew that they will check out my papers.

This was an aristocrat, what I worked. He had a fund, you know, that lawyers. So I knew that they will know it that this are-- that I am not the daughter from that aristocratic man. So I said to my friend, Monica, I said, you know what, they will know that we have papers, let's run away.

And we went out to the railroad in the night. I had four children there. And the parents were somewhere else. So I tucked them in. And I hoped nothing will happen to the children. And we went through the window. And we went to the



railroad station.

And at the railroad station, we met the same guy who came that day for us for our papers. And that was the end of our freedom. They caught both of us. And that's how we went from camp to camp to camp to camp that I was that time. That was in 1943. So two years.

These were all Hungarian work camps?

These were all Hungarian work camps. Only that one Organization [? Dot, ?] which was near the Austrian border. And I ran away from most of them, by the way, because I had the experience already. I cannot go every aspect of camp life, it will take too long. But if you want something to know, I can tell you. I had many, many incidents.

Which one or two stands out?

The one which stays is Wallenberg, the one what stands out. We were in-- that was, I think it was at Sarvar. You see, my memory is failing me, too. What Wallenberg did, he had a truck. And he had a list of names.

Right.

And he went to these camps. Because from these camps, you know, like for instance, in Sarvar, where we were, there was a camp when the war was full written, goodbye, goodbye. Because from Sarvar, they went to the German concentration camps.

This was a collective camp, where they collected people. When they had enough, you know. Because they didn't take just from the people. That didn't pay. When they were more, then they took them away. So this was a camp where from there on, there was only one way.

So Wallenberg with his truck and his men went to these camps with a list. At that time, they still acknowledged, you know, Wallenberg's authority. So he came to the camp, and we were all standing there, and the German guard-- not the German, the Hungarian guard came with him.

And he said, this list what I am reading, all stand forward. Because this is under the Swiss Schutz protection. And he had that list. And I was in the Swiss house, that's how he knowing my name. I think I mentioned to you that I was there.

So he comes and reads the list. And people stand forward. And then he comes near me. And I remember his face and everything. We called him the angel of the Jews because he saved so many Jews.

He stand before me and he says, are you Margit so-and-so. And I was a little, I guess I was stupid. Because I didn't wanted to say nothing because I went after the rules. So I am not that. And the girl next kicked me and said, so why don't you say that you are Margit so-and-so? I said, yes, yes, I am Margit so-and-so. He says, well, why don't you step forward? He tells me, Wallenberg. Why does it take so long to recognize your name?

And I stood forward. And they took us in the bus, and they took us back to Budapest. And that was one encounter I had with Wallenberg in person. And I went back to Budapest. And now, I didn't had again papers. So the other things what I had from my father, you know, they wore these gold watches.

A pocket watch, right.

It was a chain. And I had that chain. I had that gold chain. And I sewed it in in my-- not my girdle, I didn't wear a girdle, but what holds the stockings. How do you call that?

Garter belt.

Garter belt.

Right.

And I sewed that of the garter belt around it. And for that garter belt, I bought the papers what I still have home. This is the papers what I showed you. And with that papers, I lived in one of the Christian-- I never went to the ghetto. I rented a house. And Budapest was very, very hard bombed. And of course, between bombing and the Germans coming to where we went in the basement-- how do you call that?

The bomb shelters.

The bomb shelters. We were-- between that and that, I sometimes walked on the streets. The bombs were falling, the dead people were around me. But I felt safer there than in the bomb shelter. Because the more it bombed, the more and more Germans came. They had nothing better to do. And the more and more came to the shelter, and took out people, and took them out to the Danube. And the Danube was floating with thousands of dead people.

As a matter of fact, I will tell you. Remind me if I forget it because I have to tell you a very important incident after the war with that. Remind me for that.

So now, what did I tell you before?

The Danube was--

Oh, yes. So January 18th, we were liberated by the Russians. And January 16th, they still came, the Germans, looking for Jews. And one of them, when they came in and I was there in the shelter-- I couldn't walk anymore on the street because it was just really 100%. Because the bombs were falling like anything. And there, I made an acquaintance.

You see, I must to tell you one other aspects here. What I don't like to go into that. But it may be sometimes embarrassing. But I said, after the ghetto that I came back, I said, I have to survive. Standing or laying, but I will survive. Was no morality left in me. Even so I was brought up in a house where if I wasn't home by 8 o'clock, my father was walking before the house, you know.

And there was one guy who said, well-- I think, I am almost sure that he knew I was Jewish. But he somehow got a liking to me. And he said that if I am nice, he will be nice. And said, I will be as nice as you want me to be. And when the guy came to check-- because they checked the papers who is Jewish, who is not Jewish.

And there was another family there. A woman, a husband, a woman and her husband, and a son. A nice, fat, beautiful-looking Jewish boy. And she was with papers, and I was with papers.

And somehow, one Jew recognized the other one, somehow by feeling, or by look, or by eyes. There was some kind of rapport that one Jew knew the other Jew.

But one aspect of this, which is maybe nobody told you. Or maybe they did. There was an aspect to it. When one Jew was caught, then they had the tendency, unfortunately, if I was caught, then you should be caught, too. I don't going to cite psychological reasoning. But may be there is a reasoning what there is an answer to it.

And then the German guy came, when that Nazi came to check the papers, they saw the boy was standing beside me. Oh, it runs out? Yes.

Oh, yes, so in any case, so as I said, they came, these Nazis. The Hungarian Nazis, what they called it's the Nyilaskeresz, that was the Hungarian name. They were sometimes more brutal and more perverse than the Germans, if you can be more.

You said Linka, Linka guard?

Nyilas, Nyilasok. No, Linkas was in Romania. This was the Nyilasok, yes.

Sorry, OK. Now I'm confused.

So when he came to this couple, what I told you, that mother, and father, and son, and take their papers, and they did not accept their papers. And they took them out. And of course, as I told you at that time, there was no-- there was such a big bombardment that they didn't had time to take them to the Danube. So they shot them all, too, mother, father, and son. I found that out later. I didn't know that they were shot right before the house.

But that was not the end of the story. As they walked out, they looked at me. And I knew that in that moment, in that-- how do they say that in English? There comes a moment of--

Moment of truth.

Moment of truth. In that moment of truth, I didn't know, will they tell me? Well, if they take me, she's Jewish, too. Or they will say that or they will not say that. But in order to save that moment of truth-- you see, everybody had a blanket or a quilt. Or we called it different, not quilt.

And in that moment, when they took them out, I thought, I have to-- you see, that time, I escaped from so many things already that I had a little bit of experience. And I was far from that naive already, what I was before. I said to the guy, who was standing beside me, I said, oh, these people, these Jews-- I used the word-- they had a very nice blanket, and I don't have one. Can I have it?

It startled the guy who checked my paper. Because you know, before I even gave him my papers, the other guy said, well, you don't have to check her out. She will have the new blanket from the Jew, and I will check her out. And he didn't even had my papers in his hand.

Because my papers was even so. I have it with me. And they were not-- I was a prostitute according to that kind of papers I had. And I certainly acted sometimes accordingly. So that's another story, again.

But in any case, they went away, and they took them out, and they shot them. Now, I have to interject here now a scene. These people whom they shot before the house, she had a brother. And after the war, when we were still in that house, the brother came to pick up whatever they had.

And then they said, I heard that there was somebody here, some shiksa here who said, who took away my dead brothers whom they shot before the house, the [INAUDIBLE]. I want to confront that woman. And I was still-- because that time was still not safe to go out. But even so that the Russians took already over, the Germans sometimes came back and forth. So it was not safe yet to give yourself away. And I never did it.

Some people did it. They gave themselves away. And then the Germans came back, that was the end of them. I never-- I still didn't. Because I knew that they come. Budapest is two parts, Buda and Pest. And in Buda was the Germans and Pest was the Russians. And they went back and forth. And it took two, three weeks until finally, the Russians took over.

So he wanted to confront me that who is that who took her? And to tell me certain things. And when he came there and was confronted me. And it was even so that time that the Russians were there already, and I was still afraid. I said, just don't make too much commotion. I did that to save my life. I'm Jewish, too. We talked there sometimes. And he said, well, in that case, I understand it. So that was the after effect of that case.

So in any case, we were there in that shelter all the way until January 18th in the night. One Russian guy comes down. You see, I talk about the Russians so much because the Russians are the ones who liberated us. If not the Russians, I'm not here.

This is 1945 already?

This is-- no, that is 19--

'45.

'45, January 18th. So my war lasted from 1941 to 1945. So I was 4 and 1/2 years wherever. So when the first Russians came in. And mind you, I was still with Catholic papers there. When the first Russians came in, somehow, you know-- in any case, that they saw already with the bombardment is just catching these parents and everything. I am quite sure that I was mentally really not right. And understandably so.

So I was really, really on the end of my line. I couldn't take too much more anymore. And when I saw the first Russian, I sat there with other young people around there, wherever we were living in the shelter. And that was in the basement, of course, and half of it was bombed and everything. And I wanted to run to that Russian and kiss him from top to toe. And I'm free, I'm free. You know, in the movies?

And they were holding me back. And they said, don't you know what the Russians are doing? They did a lot of raping, you know that. And they didn't care whether their 18-year-old or 88 years old. They didn't care.

But the difference it was that the first fighting group who fights for a city is always the elite of the military. And they do not do any raping. They are not the one who does it. The occupying troops are the one who does it.

When all kind of when it was free. Free robbery, free raping, you could do everything. But the first elite group didn't do too much raping. But I wanted to go out. And then the girl next to me, he said, what are you so happy about to see the Russian wasn't-- what, you know, she started. Because she really didn't know who I am. She just knew hi, my name is [HUNGARIAN]. So he was holding me back and I didn't go.

But the second day-- because there came more and more Russians to the basement looking for men, you know, who was hiding also. And that young man who stood beside me. And he said-- you know, that was up on the floor, it was a department store. And in the department store, they had honey left. And food was a big thing that time.

And he comes to me, and he says, before yet the Russians came, he said, you know what? There is a big, big container of honey there. We will go up there, and I will give you a lot of honey. And honey, this was gold at that time. And that was already after that incident with the Germans, so I said, now, I don't need him anymore.

But as he said, you know what, I will give you the honey. I saved your life. But he knew already that the Russians are on the corner. But when it comes to it, will you save mine? Oh, how can I save it? He said, you know how you can save it. So he knew who I was. Because he wouldn't ask me that question then whether I can save your life or not.

So when the Russians came in, when they were already in looking for Hungarian soldiers or non-Jews, you know, he came to me, and he said, help me to get out of here. I helped you, you help me. And I did help him to escape. Whether I did it right or wrong, but I did it. And he did escape. I don't know what happened.

Well, in any case, then the Russians came in. And then of course, I don't know whether you know about the aspect to how the Russians behaved. I mean, it was soup kitchens again. And it was again standing in the line. It was all the ruins.

And I had nobody. I just walked on the streets, you know, and sawing people coming out from the ghetto. And everybody said, oh, Jancika, [HUNGARIAN], Jurika, and I went there, and I had nobody. Because everybody died.

So I said, well, I will look for my aunt. You know, that aunt who didn't believe me? They were in the ghetto. And they were the rich aunts in the family because they had a house in Hungary. And that was like having a house in New York that time. So they had some six, seven rooms. And that was an awful lot of room in Hungary. Here, people who works can have four rooms, too, it's nothing.

So in any case, they did survive. And I did go to them. And it was a big, beautiful reunion. Of course, they took away their house, and they took away their apartment, and they gave them the room where the maid used to live.

And there, where the maid used to live, there I was living for them for a while until they got another room attached to it. They got back their own room. Not the house, just the room. Because the Russians, of course, won't give them back the house.

And what was life, you will ask me, after the bombardment, after the Russians came in? It was a tough life. It was, first of all, the first days were-- the first week, rather, after the war. It was also interesting. You know, we lived on the fourth floor when we didn't go to the shelter.

And after the so-called fighting, I went up on the fourth floor, looked out the window, because I was more or less like free. Because after five years, you felt, well, mommy, I survived.

And I was rather careless that time. And I went, and I looked out the window because I wanted to see what is a war. You see, this is not a war like here. They drop an atomic bomb, and everybody's boom, finished. There, they are fighting, you know, corner to corner.

And I went up on the window, and I looked down. I saw this one is Germans, and this one is Russian, they are shooting. And I look out of the window. So they shot up. And they almost shot my head off. So I got well, because I didn't know better.

Right.

So I went back until things subsided. That time, houses were closed yet, and Russians were standing all over. And slowly, slowly, life got back to it. You couldn't buy nothing. And as I said, I was secretary of a lawyer. And I had to make something. Money didn't mean anything, and I had nothing anymore to sell. The only thing it is to work and get food for it.

And the lawyer where I worked, whom I worked before once, he took me back. You know, some people came to advise us, and they gave him eggs, and bread, or pork fat, or whatever. They gave him, he gave me part of it as a payment to the secretary. Until things can get back to more or less-- I couldn't call it normal because this was far from normal.

I met one day a friend of our father and mother who did survive, her family didn't survive. But her house, her room was bombed. And she lived in a small room. And her living room got a full hit from the bomb. And it had a hole in the middle. And so I lived in the little room but in that house.

And she was very attached to me because I was young, and I walked. You see, Budapest has many, many beautiful, beautiful bridges, which were all bombed, all the bridges. So people went through the Danube back to Buda to get potatoes or flowers. So I sometimes brought it back. So she was attached to me because she knew that being young, I will bring something also.

And by the way, that time, there was another incident what maybe I will tell you certain main aspects of it. That there was a couple of days after things settled down, there was a so-called free looting. Free looting.

So people went with big bags in these big department stores. And whatever they found, they put it in the bag, and they took it home. It was free loot. The Russians stood there and told you so take it, take it. If you went out empty-handed, they sent you back to take something. So I'm living there in that house, where above it was a department store.

And in this department store, I thought I will go looting, too. Why not? The other people go. But I didn't prepare myself with the proper looting. I didn't have the bag, I didn't have the knife, I didn't have the scissor. So I was not quite made for this looting business.

And there was a big, giant man there cutting materials and everything. And I was just there. If they make me, I was some 85 or 90 pounds. If they gave me a push, you know, I would just fall down. And they said, if you want to live, you better go away.

But I wanted to loot. So I went down where the food was. And there in the food, people went also and took the silverware and whatever it is. And finally, one guy lifted me up and put me on a bag of flour. And he said, you'll stay here if you want to be alive. Because they were strong people. And I was just the wind could blow me away that time.

And I was still in there. And people took everything. And I stood there on the bag of flour until everything was looted out. And I stood there with the bag of flour. Of course, I couldn't take the bag of flour. And that was full with pickles, and jams, and everything, and on me.

But I still was sitting on a bag of flour. So what did I do? I had one and only dress, and I took the flour, and I put it in my heel like this, in there. And I went all the way, walked that way to my landlady. And I said, here, we have flour, we make bread from it. Which we took out the glass, and we did make bread from it.

But after a while, it was not humorous anymore with the soup kitchens and everything. And that got to-- I lived that time, I went away from my aunt, and I lived in a friends of mine. The same friend who was together with me in the camp.

I went to that house, and I lived, and you know, there was-- they call it belated reaction. When you know you survived, when you know well five years went away, you survived alone, but you survived. And then after that, when you know that it comes that psychological for what, and for whom, and for why?

And that was on the fourth floor where I lived that time. And it was in December. And I was just alone, just I came to a point that I need help, which I, of course, didn't get. Psychological help. So I opened the window and I went on the windowsill. And I thought, well, many people did that, by the way. I was not the only one.

And I said, well, let's finish it up. And my landlady, who was a very nice lady, she came into the room, and she says, Elizabeth, you must be crazy. You are opening the window and the whole heat what I put up here, it goes away. I mean, I don't heat here that you open here the windows.

And I am standing on the window ledge, jumping. And I got very mad. And I went there. And I got so mad that I went to her and I started to hit her. And I hit her and I hit her, and she kneeled down beside me. And she said, oh, Elizabeth. Don't do that, don't do that. She did that and said that just to bring me back from the ledge. It was a nice lady.

So after that, I said, well, OK, let's start living. And I went to the soup kitchen and I asked for a job in the soup kitchen. And in there, there's so many incidents. So many incidents happened there during the war, after the war, during the bombing, in the ghetto, where it is interesting. But as I told it to Henry, you cannot go into every aspects.

OK, well you can tell any ones that you would like to.

Well, what is really standing out, I told you with the-- so one day, when I went to home to my landlady, I met-- you see, I was working with the lawyer. And in that law office, I met a young Jewish man who also survived the war. And who met me in that soup kitchen. He went not for soups because he was that time in the black market business.

And he started to make-- that time, people made only money because there was no businesses, nothing, there was only black markets. And he started the black market business very successfully. And he always had an eye on me, but I was not too interested.

But after the war, when he gave me a proposition, he said, you know what, I mean, what is that? You work in the soup kitchen. I have money. You will come and live with me. And we will see what we will do. I probably would have become what papers I had before. And I said, OK.

And I went to my landlady and I had, as I said, one dress, which I watched. It was full with flowers. And I said to her, well, I have a date with that man. And he was standing down with the car. I lived on the second floor that time. [INAUDIBLE]. And I told it to my landlady, he's waiting. And my landlady said, OK, well-- because she wanted

something from it, too.

And I opened the window and I said, I'm coming down five minutes. As I said, I had one dress. And I went down to go on a road what could end like Madame X or who knows what. I don't know what would have become.

But as I walked down the steps going to the guy who was waiting for me at the house before the car, a Russian soldier comes up the steps. And I see a Russian soldier, and I run. Because I had incidents with a Russian soldier, which I didn't tell you. Which I wrote about it, if you are interested, a jar of pickles were-- you know, the Russians did there plenty. So when I saw a Russian, I run. This was my experience.

And the Russian guy tells me, well, Elizabeth, don't you recognize me? And I didn't recognize him because he was a Partisan uniform with a red star. To me, that was Russian. So then I looked at him and then I saw. And I went back with him to my landlady. And landlady opened the house and the door and said, are you crazy bringing a Russian here? Because she knew.

Said, he's not a Russian, he's not a Russian, he's Jewish. And I know him from the ghetto. And then he said, but he's waiting downstairs with the car. And I said, but you know, it's interesting. And I don't want to be sentimental about it. And we are old enough not to be. But you know, five years I fought for my life, and in the minute he came into my life, I said, well, that's it for me.

That's it.

Now take over. And he did. And that was how we met. Now what do you ask me now? What do you want to know more?

I think you should probably do it. I think.

And then of course, we waited. And then we went to Vienna. And from Vienna, we went to the consulate. And the consulate said, the quota is closed. And then all suddenly, my brother kept sending me affidavits and everything. And meanwhile, I got pregnant, too. And we thought we settled down in Vienna like many other Jews. But then one day, the consulate writes me a letter, the Polish quota is open. So the Polish quota is open, let's go to America.

Well, you mentioned something about a trip to Israel. That was just to visit?

The trip to Israel was before, when we knew already that we come to America. And we had brothers that time in Israel. So we went to Israel. As a matter of fact, Barbara, our daughter, the first move that she made was in Israel. So that was the trip before we go.

But one thing I want to tell you more in the tape because that was also a nice incident. We came with the Mauritania. And when you're nearing the Statue of Liberty, the captain, and especially at that time-- by the way, we were one of the last who didn't go to Ellis Island. Before us, they still went to Ellis Island. When we came, it was not Ellis Island anymore.

So there were two incidents what I want to tell you. So when we were on the boat, and we were nearing the Statue of Liberty, and the captain of the boat was reading there, you know, give me your tired, your poor.

And we're standing, Andy and I, and he had his story to tell. And I had my story. And I was pregnant. And we went to America. And we were holding hands. And looking at the Statue of Liberty. And I said, well, we made it. That's the end of the story.