

## **Oral History: Alice Spierer Landau, August 13, 1996**

Alice Spierer Landau, born October 25, 1927 in Budapest, Hungary, to Rezhut\* and Margaret Spierer, describes: her grandparents; speaking only Hungarian in the home; moving outside of Budapest for health reasons to the nearby island of Chapelle\* in 1930; her parents, while conscious of their Jewishness and coming from Orthodox families, not being religious; having a brother, George, ten years younger; disappointment at being forced to leave school early; having many Jewish friends; her parents being active in the social democratic movement; not being conscious of anti-Semitism until being forced into the Budapest ghetto; not relating to Zionism until after the war; being aware of political changes in Germany; particularly after 1938, hearing about physical attacks on Jews and some German Jews being sent to Dachau, but not believing Hungary would go down this path; still viewing herself as being both Hungarian and Jewish; creation of forced labor camps in Hungary in about 1940; her father being taken to one camp near the Romanian border, then after a time at home, taken in 1941 to another camp, near the Yugoslav border, and then yet another camp, in Russia; getting word of her father's death on the Russian front in 1942; Hungarian support for Hitler; anti-Semitism being on the rise, though she was not much affected by it; things getting worse for Jews after the restrictive law of 1939; conditions becoming steadily worse after 1940; her uncle being forced to flee Hungary and an aunt committing suicide; men taken for forced labor wearing the yellow star and a yellow armband; Jews in the general population not wearing the star until 1944; her father having applied to emigrate to Australia but being rejected; knowing little of extermination camps until near the end of the war; the Nazi occupation of Hungary in March 1944; hearing about Jews being rounded up in the countryside and taken for forced labor or sent to Poland; hoping things for Jews would be better in Budapest but this changing in April, when the ghetto was established; moving into the ghetto with her mother and brother; being sent to labor in a munitions factory and disregarding her mother's warning that they would never see one another again, which turned out to be true; hearing while at work that the ghetto had been raided and all inhabitants taken for transport; receiving a warning that her factory was to be raided and being hidden in a cupboard; being one of a few survivors after the raid; living in a forest barracks and marched to the factory every day; hearing an announcement by Hungarian Regent Horthy over the radio on October 24, 1944 that Hungary's war was over; great celebration and the factory gates being opened and everyone leaving; Nazi sympathizers, including Arrow Cross members, then trying to ingratiate themselves with Jews; going to a friend's house only to hear shortly thereafter that the Nazis and Arrow Cross had taken over; moving to another friend's house and having to move again out of the family's fear over hiding a Jew; being beaten by an Arrow Cross member and taken to a police station; being taken by the police to Budapest, where she was thrown into a cell with prostitutes; being accused of being a spy and told she was to be executed, but taken instead to a camp for political prisoners, where she spent a few

weeks; taken by SS back to Budapest in November 1944 and housed in a sugar factory; doing forced labor helping peasants harvest crops; being warned that the Russians were about to break through and being hidden; her leg being hit by a piece of shrapnel; being discovered in hiding by an SS soldier, but his being killed in a bombing before he could act; Russian soldiers arriving; being hidden by another family, including a peasant woman who had pretended to be a Nazi sympathizer to protect the family; being told by a Russian doctor that her wounded leg would have to be amputated but refusing; the leg being saved by another doctor who cleaned the wound every day; the plight of the Jews in Budapest, including her grandmother starving to death in the Budapest ghetto and the deaths of several relatives and friends in Budapest or in the extermination camps; hiding with a family friend; the return from Auschwitz in May 1945 of two cousins, both of whom were in terrible condition; under the auspices of a Zionist organization, leaving Hungary for Palestine on September 15, 1945 via Austria and Italy; en route to Palestine, obtaining a residence permit for Australia and deciding to go there; arriving in Australia in early 1946; meeting her husband, a Holocaust survivor who lost most of his family; raising two daughters; advising youth to be good human beings and conscientious Jews. [Shows family photos.]

\*Transliteration as heard