

Tape four, side one:

JF: This is tape four, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley, on April 2nd, 1985. You were talking about your friend observing the death of her...other friend.

EB: Her...friend, who was devoured by the Rottweilers, the German Rottweiler dogs, the guard dogs of the camp. And this friend's little brother was beside her. And my friend Eva ran out from the barrack and pulled the little boy into the barrack and hid him there until...Buchenwald was freed. So he survived and he went to Israel because his parents and his sister both perished there. He was the only one who survived from that family.

JF: You had mentioned before that there were other stories that you would like to tell us, about the involvement of Christian Hungarians. Could you tell us some of these stories now? [tape off then on] One of the people that you had referred to was the aristocratic Christian...

EB: Uncle.

JF: Hungarian man who had married your aunt, yes. And perhaps you could tell us a little bit more about him and what happened.

EB: This is my aunt [unclear]. He, there was in the course of the divorce, he filed a divorce after and they want, he wanted to get a divorce because he fell in love with a Christian woman. And when the Germans came in, if a Christian mate of a Jew wanted a divorce, right away the divorce was granted. And instead of getting the divorce what he was fighting for years to get, he withdraw and he said, "Under the circumstances I am not going to divorce you."

JF: Why?

EB: Because if he would divorce my aunt, my aunt wouldn't get any exemptions as a mate of an Aryan, because he was an Aryan. And he said, "It's undecent and I am not allowing that." But they didn't live together. He lived with his girlfriend. He had a home with his girlfriend. And my aunt lived in their own original home. So, if they didn't live together, even if they were man and wife, she wouldn't be exempt. And a bomb fell on my aunt's home and she, either she had to come to us and live with us, and we were already in the yellow star house, or she had to go into the ghetto, because she was considered a Jew. And that ghetto, because she lived in outskirts of Budapest, in Cepe, it was already taken to Auschwitz much earlier than...the Budapesters. Budapest was the exemption but the outskirts was taken in the early summer to Auschwitz. So, he knew about that and he came, and he fetched my aunt and he hid her in his home, at his girlfriend's home. And not only that, but within my aunt 29 other Jewish people, during the whole German occupation and the end of the war he hid those people and saved their lives.

JF: He hid them in his home?

EB: He had, he fed them and he hid them and for no, any cons-, no consideration, just because they were Jews and he said he cannot tolerate.

JF: Were these people, these 29 people there at different times? Or they, were they there at the same time?

EB: I don't know. I never talked to him after the war. After the war they got divorced right away. But they had a very good relationship, continuously. And even his paramour, his girlfriend, came to Budapest and warned us—my mother and I; by that time my second father was already in the labor camp—and came up and said, "It's very dangerous to be a Jew and we'd like to hid you and we will take care of you." And my mother refused the woman because this was the woman who destroyed her sister's life.

JF: So she would not accept any help from...

EB: We wouldn't accept. And my mother's other sister, who died in Auschwitz, and her child, my cousin, her husband was in a labor camp close to...this pers- it was a camp which one, camp went to Auschwitz. But first they caught him—the Germans caught him on the street the first day when they came in—as a Jew, and they put him in this camp. And this woman find out and this uncle of mine, basically uncle by marriage, this Gentile uncle of mine, find out where was this brother-in-law, this Jewish brother-in-law of his, and this woman, the paramour, every day went there as a Gentile, as an Aryan, and said that was, she was his wife and took food to him.

JF: So they were both very involved...

EB: Very.

JF: Very helpful.

EB: Very, very nice, and very helpful.

JF: Were there any other instances like this that...you can relate to your family?

EB: Oh, yes, eh, not to my family. But to relate to other people...

JF: O.K.

EB: Who helped. There was two Catholic nuns who saved 450 Jewish lives, and they were found out. And the Arrow Cross investigated them. They wouldn't give out the names or the places. And they took them to the cellar of the Parliament. It was the last, almost the last day before the...Russian took over in Budapest. And to get the information they tortured them. First they pulled their nails out, and then centimeter by centimeter they pulled their skin off. And they wouldn't give the Jews out. They died, a tortured death, and all those Jewish children and women were saved.

JF: Where were the Jews that they had saved? They were in hiding?

EB: They were in hiding. They...find false papers, documents.

JF: The nuns had used...

EB: The nuns. They...found, the nuns, and...priests. And they took them to cloisters, the children, or in different Aryan homes. We were offered—my mother, I, and my sister—but we, by them, to accept those false papers and those sheltered homes. But the problem was we couldn't...go together as a family, three of us. Everybody would be placed in a different home, not knowing where the other is, not to give it away.

JF: These would be...

EB: And...

JF: Christian homes?

EB: Christian homes, yes.

JF: And you said some of the children would be taken in groups, to cloisters.

EB: Yes.

JF: But, in addition to that there were some Christian families that were organized by these two nuns...

EB: Yes.

JF: To take in Jews and hide them.

EB: Organized. There was a cloister up at the mountain Gellért, and there were saved at least 40 or 60 children. They were hidden there, and the Arrow Cross came, and they found out, because they always had, even with the nuns or the priests, some were the one who risked their lives. The other one who...ones who were on the German side and they were fascist. And they went and reported them. And there was a group of nuns who were hiding the children. And they were find out. And some of them escaped, and some of them were killed.

JF: You're talking about this mountainous retreat now?

EB: Yes, Nader [phonetic] mountains.

JF: Now, what was the name again of the location of this?

EB: The Gellért mountain. I don't know the name of the cloister, unfortunately. It might come back to me. They...

JF: They saved 40 to 60...

EB: Yes.

JF: Children.

EB: Yes, they did.

JF: And they, these...

EB: I don't know if they...could save that many, because they were found out. But some were saved. And there was another priest who was Jewish origin, Dr. Hussar [phonetic], who...gave out papers to any Jew who came there, until the Gestapo found him. And even he gave me false paper. Also this nun, Wilma Gernovich, [phonetic] took me there. And he gave me papers. The papers weren't false papers. They were from his rectory, who were registered there, baptized and registered. So whose ever birthday was coincidental, he gave the paper to the Jewish people.

JF: Had these people volunteered to have their papers used in this way? Or did he...

EB: They didn't...

JF: Just used...

EB: They didn't know about it.

JF: They didn't know the papers were being used.

EB: They didn't know, no. No, he did it.

JF: You said that he was Jewish.
EB: He was Jewish origin.
JF: Of Jewish origin.
EB: He was a converted Jew who became a priest. And he saved the lives. But the problem was he got in problem with the archbishop, archivi-, I...
JF: The Archbishop?
EB: Archbishop, because they find out what he was doing, and he was in danger in both ways—from the Gestapo and for the...priesthood. So he, I was the last one who got a paper from him, but I never used, a birth certificate of a Catholic girl, who was the same age as I was.
JF: And you never used it.
EB: I never used it, because I didn't want to go into hiding and leave my mother and my little sister.
JF: And they didn't get papers.
EB: They didn't get papers from there. We went to another...baroki [phonetic], another... Some of the...Catholic priests, some of the...*ecclesia* helped, and the others didn't. So wherever you go you find good and bad people, regardless.
JF: The Archbishop was not in favor of this kind of help.
EB: No, he...
JF: He...
EB: He was not in favor, that Archbishop in that...region, where he belonged. And so he went into hiding because the Gestapo was on his neck. But they...told him, so other people told him and he always got a little input from both ways. And he said, "Now I am in danger. I have to leave. And you are the last one. This is my last birth certificate what I can give you." So...the problem was with him, anybody who went in and said he was Jewish he will give papers. And some of were *agent provocateur*.
JF: What do you mean, that they were not Jewish?
EB: They were not Jewish, and they provoked him. They were from the Gestapo.
JF: They were trying to have him show his colors so that they could arrest him.
EB: That's right.
JF: I see.
EB: And he was not the only one.
JF: Mmm hmm.
EB: We had several of them.
JF: Who were...giving out...
EB: Yes.
JF: Actual church documents.
EB: And then they were...the...mass...converts, because that was a rumor...
JF: Mass conversions?

EB: Mass conversion in every religion. And those priests and ministers were willing to convert the Jews because that was a, that were a rumor in the beginning, if you are converted that you are exempt. So, everybody, it was a mass exodus from leaving the Jewish faith and becoming a Christian, even if they didn't want to, just for the papers. But it didn't work. But most of the ministers and...the priests tried to help. So they were willing to convert and go overboard and not to wait for a year. Because usually it's a year to become a convert. You have to study the catechism and you have to study the religion. They...overstepped their boundaries and within a couple of weeks, or right away they were willing to give out those certificates.

JF: But these were not of...any help.

EB: No, but they, that time they believed it was a help so they were helping.

JF: Mmm hmm. The nuns that you mentioned before, the two nuns...

EB: Yes.

JF: That you said saved...

EB: Shak, Sarah and Bernovic, Wilma. [phonetic] Their name in, if we anglicize their name, Sarah Shak and Wilma Bernovic. I have to emphasize those names, because they are martyrs and they deserve it.

JF: And they were killed...

EB: They...[unclear]...

JF: Through this torture.

EB: Right, the priest, the Jewish priest.

JF: He survived in hiding? Or...

EB: In hiding.

JF: Was he actually put in a camp?

EB: He...the Gestapo caught him and he, somehow he escaped and he was in hiding in one of the hospitals.

JF: You've mentioned both the Catholic clergy and the Protestant clergy. Were there some of each kind who were involved in helping the Jews, or did you sense that there was more help from one side than the other? Did it depend on the person involved?

EB: It depended on the person, on the individual.

JF: Totally on the individual.

EB: Totally on the individual.

JF: Was there any message given from people high up in the church of either kind that there should be help given or were...

EB: No.

JF: Most of these people...

EB: No. They did it...

JF: Regular priests, ministers and nuns...

EB: They did it on their own. They didn't do as much as they could, because the opposition and the antisemitism was rampant. And they were fascists. But some individuals

did lots of things. It was completely, totally individual, very little, but even the little has to be mentioned, because the little is much. And we have to see that the individuals can do lots of things if they want to do it.

JF: And many of these people that you mentioned were saved by staying in homes of individual Christian families...

EB: Yes.

JF: Who were not clergy, who were...

EB: No.

JF: Just regular Christian families who wanted to hide people.

EB: Lots of Christian families did it for money, and for benefitting.

JF: Mmm hmm.

EB: And some of them did for both things, and some of them did it just for their kindness and goodness. But there were people who were hidden by Christian families and hidden by...absolute strangers.

JF: Were there any other stories of this kind that you might be able to tell us, of the Christian involvement?

EB: Yes. [tape off then on]

JF: You have mentioned that there are some stories on the other side that balance the kindness of what went on.

EB: Yes. I was in the hospital. And in the hospital every day the survivors came in who were shot and needed attention and medical care. And the stories came out flowing. I vividly remember one woman—I don't know if I'm repeating that again, if I told you that, that, who was shot down into the Danube—and her daughter and her little baby grandchild was in her...arm, and it was shot and killed, for...

JF: The baby was killed.

EB: The baby and daughter. She was shot into the Danube because that was the first time of the Arrow Cross because they couldn't take us any more anywhere, just the Danube. And she was shot but not critically wounded. And she said she cursed the time when she learned how to swim. She was a very strong and good swimmer and she survived. And she got mad in the hospital. She went absolutely berserk and...she almost killed my little sister one night and they took her to the insane asylum. Then...

JF: When you say insane asylum, do you mean within the ghetto?

EB: No, no, no.

JF: Or this was...

EB: The regular kind.

JF: The regular one in Budapest.

EB: They had to...take her there. I don't know if they killed her or they took her there, but they had to take her out of this so-called hospital.

JF: The hospital was Jewish that you were in.

EB: That, yes.

JF: But the insane asylum...

EB: No.

JF: Would not have been.

EB: No, we, of course not. This wasn't a regular hospital over there. It's a make-shift hospital...

JF: Right.

EB: But we didn't have room. I don't know if they took her to the insane asylum or they took her to the ghetto. I don't know. I think so she was taken to a place in the ghetto because we had lots of mad people in the ghetto. Everybody went mad. They didn't have food. They didn't have water. They were cramped...and people died of hunger.

JF: Was there a place where the people who went mad were taken...

EB: No.

JF: To specific...

EB: No, on the streets and...are you kidding? There was no place!

JF: There was no, no way of taking care of these people.

EB: No, no, no. Taking care of anybody. It...it's no, you with a normal way of thinking, you cannot imagine. I can't imagine. And there was other stories there. People who were caught, by the Arrow Cross. I remember vividly one absolutely horrid story. It's so disgusting but it has to be repeated. This father, son and daughter-in-law were hiding in a place with false papers, and they were caught and taken by the Arrow Cross to investigate and torture them. Among their favorite torture was sexual torture. They forced the man to make love to her [his] own daughter-in-law...in front of his son [pause] and then they tortured him and shot them. And the daughter-in-law survived and came into the hospital and she was out of her head too and telling this story.

JF: This kind of sadism, was this peculiar to the Arrow Cross? Or was it also in the S.S.?

EB: I don't know as first hand but the S.S. did lots of crazy things. There were a lot of homosexuality perversion orgies, and...

JF: Where did you hear about this?

EB: I heard it by the people who escaped. One young man came in once—that was the first time I heard about Auschwitz. It was in November, right after I was shot. I was in the hospital and this young man came in and he escaped from Auschwitz. And the way he escaped, it was absolutely a miracle. In the trains, in the wagons, when they came in to Auschwitz and unloaded, he was working on the loading deck. And he hid himself under the wagon, on the train.

JF: He was already in Auschwitz?

EB: In Auschwitz, working on the...

JF: On the deck.

EB: On the deck. He was a Hungarian boy, a twenty-year-old boy. And he hid himself, and when the train was unloading, and came back, he escaped somewhere. And on foot he came up to the...metropolis and he was telling us the stories about Auschwitz.

JF: And what did he tell you?

EB: He didn't want to scare us too much, at least not us. Probably he told everything to the Jewish community elders and he told everything to the hospital doctors, but not to the patients and not to the individuals. But he got very friendly with me. And he was telling me a little bit, not...about the gas chambers.

JF: He did not mention the gas chambers.

EB: No, he just said that about the wagons and how many people are in the cattle cars and how hard they work and they don't have anything to eat and they're torturing the people and killing. But he didn't mention the gas chambers.

JF: It was through him that you heard about the homosexuality of the S.S.?

EB: Yes.

JF: Can you tell us what he told you?

EB: He said the S.S. women and the S.S. men, "They have their own favorites, and they have brothels. And I was lucky that I wasn't...because all the pretty girls were taken to the brothels and they used for the S.S. as prostitutes." And he said that the S.S. women, if they find a pretty girl, they...violated them. And that time I didn't know what he meant, really. I didn't have any idea about homosexuality. Now I know what he was talking about, but that time I really didn't know. It just went by me.

JF: So both the S.S. women...

EB: And the men.

JF: And the S.S. men were taking the young women.

EB: Young, or whomever they had a liking to.

JF: And there was also male homosexuality?

EB: Male and female, torture, sadism, masochism, everything. Using little children, whatever they could. They were perverted. They were worse than animals. Animals are not doing what they did. I think just mankind can do these kind of things because we have intelligence in us.

JF: In Budapest, did you see a difference between the treatment by the S.S. and the treatment by the Hungarians themselves?

EB: The interesting thing about the S.S., after I was shot down, the S.S. shed their uniforms. And whatever they committed these atrocities, they committed in civilian clothes, because they didn't want to be blamed in a occupied territory, then using uniforms and the S.S. did it. So nobody can prove against them anything. I have written documents which one says the S.S. was who shot me down.

JF: How do you have those documents?

EB: Because I had witnesses who were willing to sign, Christian witnesses.

JF: And when did you get these?

EB: After the war.

JF: After the war you solicited the witnesses...

EB: My...

JF: To say that you...

EB: My mother. Yes, my mother did.

JF: Saying that...that the men were in uniform, when they...

EB: And they were in uniform, yes.

JF: When they shot you.

EB: Yes. And this was a, it happened only that night and in two different places—one with me and the other in another place when that, there weren't uniforms.

JF: How did you find out that they had changed their style, that they had decided not to use uniforms when they committed these atrocities as you describe them?

EB: You see, in the hospital all the victims were, who survived, came in, and they were telling us what was going on.

JF: And they knew that...

EB: [unclear] was going...

JF: These men were [unclear]...

EB: Sure, because they talked German. And most of the Hungarian Jews, the middle class and upper middle class, they were educated in German.

JF: So they...

EB: So they understand.

JF: I see.

EB: They know, and all the orders came in German. And some of the S.S. spoke Hungarian because they belonged to the *Bundestag*. They were Hungarian German. The German *Volksbund*, the origin, was German, but they maintained the *Schwabes*. And they right away they claimed, they, Hitler wanted the *Volksbund* in every country. In Hungary, Romania, all over they had German communities, which one lived in Hungary for 100 or 120 years but they maintained their own schooling, their own German education.

JF: How do you know that these were not *Volksbund* that were making these attacks?

EB: Some were.

JF: Some were.

EB: Some were, but they belonged to the S.S., because as soon as Hitler came to power and he started the war and he started the occupation, he solicited them.

JF: So they...

EB: And they enrolled in the S.S.

JF: So there was no...

EB: And the S.A.

JF: No real way of telling whether they were *Volksbund* or S.S. from Germany.

EB: It doesn't matter. They were Germans. And they were S.S. They were part of the military, of the German military. So they talk Hungarian and German, some of them.

JF: Had you had any dealings with *Volksbund* before the war or, you know, during the time [unclear]?

EB: We knew about them, but that doesn't mean, it doesn't exclude the Hungarians because the Aryan Arrow Cross were more vicious than the S.S. They were the worst dirt who ever produced the world, the world ever produced. They were the Green Shirts, not the, they formulated their own clique after the Brown Shirts of Hitler, of Germany. Their leader was Sz<lasi [Ferencz Sz<lasi] who was hung after the war, and he was the worst dirt whoever ever existed.

JF: And you feel that they were more abusive and more sadistic...

EB: Absolutely.

JF: Than the S.S. or...

EB: Yes.

JF: The *Volksbund*...

EB: Yes.

JF: S.S.

EB: If anybody can be more, they were more. But it goes for every country, like the Iron Guard in Romania was worse than the S.S., and they started in 1938 when we didn't have that. We had the Arrow Cross; it was a little group like in here we have the neo-Nazis. And we always laughed at them and they were in prison. And then they took over after Horthy's declaration of independence from the Germans. And Sz<lasi became the...Horthy was arrested by Hitler, and Sz<lasi became our governor. And then the whole killing free-for-all became not only a command but a pleasure and an honor, to torture and kill children and innocent people, and rob them. They came into the ghetto and shot the people on the last night.

JF: The Arrow Cross.

EB: Arrow Cross, yes. And they were guarding that ghetto and the Arrow Cross wanted to bomb the ghetto. And basically what happened, the underground, the Jewish underground, led the Russian through the underground of the hospital because we were at the gate of the, front of the gate of the ghetto, our hospital, and underground, and went into the ghetto the Russians before the whole district was freed by the Russians, because the mines were under the ghetto by the Arrow Cross. And the dynamite, they-

Tape four, side two:

JF: This is tape four, side two of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley, on April 2nd, 1985.

EB: The Jewish underground led the Russians through the hospital underground, into the ghetto—we had the channels then, and cellars deep in the hospital which one went through to the ghetto. We were in front of there, this school what became this shelter, this hospital, the make-shift hospital, was in front of the ghetto, outside of the ghetto, but front of the ghetto's gates. Now ghetto was surrounded by the Arrow Cross, inside and outside, guarding the ghetto. And they put dynamite and mines, undermine in the ghetto. They wanted to blow up the ghetto before the Russians could free the Jews, or free the ghetto. So the underground was aware of that, and they led the Russians in before the Arrow Cross could blow up the whole ghetto. That was their plan, to blow up the ghetto.

JF: Can you tell us a little bit more of what you know about the Jewish underground in Budapest, about the resistance?

EB: It...was a very small group, mainly led by these Zionists and some of the young women and men who escaped the labor camp. And they were hiding. You have to understand we didn't have money, we didn't have access to ammunition. And a Hungarian underground, this was absolutely non-existent. The Hungarian Gentiles, it was a very small one, it was an underground, but it was a very small one.

JF: Was there any connection between the Hungarian underground and the Jewish underground?

EB: I am not aware of it. I have no research on that, so I...wouldn't know. Probably, but I don't know. They had to get some ammunition from somewhere. Probably they had some connection. But they did basically, if they could kill an Arrow Cross man there and get some ammunition or they robbed the...ammunition depots. That was their only way. Nobody supported them, except the Israelis, in that time the...Palestinians, the Jews who came, and they were caught. And...

JF: Who was caught?

EB: [tape off then on] Hannah Senesh, who was killed, and a couple of others.

JF: Who...had linked up with the Zionist group in...

EB: Yes.

JF: In Budapest.

EB: And the underground. Let me think....

JF: You had mentioned that they were...

EB: And they were...

JF: Primarily based in the basement of the hospital building?

EB: That was...the major focus, focal point of the underground, that was the hospital. Because they, if they...got hold of uniforms and some of the Hungarian, there

were some Hungarian Aryans who were in the military, who joined the underground or supported the underground and gave them ammunition, whatever they could...

JF: Gave the Jewish underground...

EB: And, yes, yes, some of them were involved. They came into the hospital and they were involved. And they were on AWOL; they left the military.

JF: And they stayed with the Jewish underground.

EB: Yes. Very few, but they did.

JF: You mentioned something about uniforms. The underground used the uniforms?

EB: Some uniforms...and...

JF: In order to get around the city?

EB: Yes, and they used the Iron Cross¹⁰ uniform which one was not too much uniform, you know, the arm bands and the hat and little shirts, like my cousin. He was dressed up that...an Arrow Cross member. [phone; tape off then on] There was a small Jewish underground existed. And what I have to point out, these people could save their life because they were in hiding anyway. And they didn't fight for their own life; they fought for the community and for...the people. Like the Warsaw Ghetto, they had to fight because they didn't have anything else. They fought for their own life. Either they die or they fight. These people voluntarily fought, and with very little help, whatever they could borrow, beg and steal. And they maintained it, and they had to fight against that. The other partisans who were clearing Jews...the regime and the S.S., they had a very hard time.

JF: Did you meet any of the people from the underground when you were in the hospital? Or was it just generally known that they, a group was there?

EB: It was generally known, and they were so invisible. They were very invisible, even if I met, what I met a couple of them later. I knew, later I found out they were in the underground, but that time they were very secretive and they tried to do their best, because you never know who can report them. They had to be very careful. They camouflaged themselves with their certain stories. And we know those stories when they put their uniforms on or had the false papers. But you had to be careful.

JF: One of the other things that they were doing was providing false papers for Jews.

EB: Yes.

JF: And you had mentioned that there were several sources of getting false papers, in addition, or *Schutzpass*.

EB: No, *Schutzpass* is a different thing.

JF: In addition...

EB: Thing.

JF: Which was a different thing, in addition to Wallenberg...

¹⁰ She may mean the Arrow Cross.

EB: As far as documents...it was a group, several groups, who were printing false papers.

JF: And...

EB: Those were false papers what...I mentioned about the priest he gave the...real documents, real certificates, and you took, assumed their identity.

JF: And the *Schutzpass* was yet another way of getting...

EB: A *Schutzpass* was another...

JF: Protection.

EB: Another thing. That's what Wallenberg arranged.

JF: You did not have direct dealings with Wallenberg...

EB: No.

JF: Or with any of his...

EB: No. I didn't have dealings with any of it, except I had this Christian certificate, birth certificate, what I never used. But I knew about it, and most of us knew. We knew of it, that the grapevines, you...got the information because that was your life. You had to know all those things.

JF: You...mentioned before that the man who escaped from Auschwitz did not tell you about the gas chambers.

EB: No.

JF: Did you hear it from anyone else?

EB: No, not until after the war.

JF: And your mother had not heard it?

EB: No. No, no, no.

JF: This was not common, this was not known.

EB: Not known in Hungary. We were sheltered by the community, the Jewish community elders, who knew about it and they didn't let anybody to know. Even if rumors went out, then they stopped the rumors, and they killed the rumors, because then we wouldn't be dead both sides.¹¹ And it wouldn't serve the purpose of the Axis, or the Germans or the fascist government.

JF: Within the ghetto, were other communities brought in to live there, other than the Budapest population?

EB: No.

JF: Just...

EB: No other population existed, Jewish community existed any more. They were all [unclear].

JF: They were all deported, so none...

EB: All deported.

JF: None of them were brought into...

¹¹Perhaps she was saying, "We would be dead either way."

EB: No way.

JF: Budapest.

EB: Not even the suburb. The suburb was already taken, except the center, like the center city or Manhattan. That was the ghetto that was there. But Budapest was a...very densely populated by Jews. It's very, a high populace of Jews.

JF: You had mentioned that there was another family member, on your husband's side, who escaped from Auschwitz?

EB: My father-in-law was in Auschwitz, and in the last time, when they evacuated Auschwitz, in the march, he and another man with him somehow hid in the forest. It was in January, a very bitter, cold January in Poland.

JF: Before the forced march.

EB: It was during the forced march.

JF: During the forced march.

EB: During the forced march they hid in the forest and then a miner, an absolute stranger, in Silesia, because that part is, I guess it's Silesia, in Auschwitz, when they went through in Silesia, the mining part, a Pole, [coughing] excuse me, an Aryan miner family hid them in their attic for more than a week. And they took these two men in. They never saw them, and they were very poor, the miner family. They didn't have too much to eat. And they shared their food with them. And when they heard, when my father-in-law heard from the man that Auschwitz, the camp, was freed by the Russian, their conscience couldn't take it, his conscience couldn't take to take food away from that family. So he, they said good-bye and they went back to the camp. Unfortunately, the Russian were not that philosemitic, and most of the prisoners from Auschwitz who couldn't escape the Russians were taken to Russian camps, among them my father-in-law.

JF: To a Russian prison camp?

EB: Yes, prisoner of war camp. Some of them were taken to mines and never came back. He was lucky. He went to Minsk. They took him to Minsk and for another eight months he was a prisoner of the Russians.

JF: The Russians took the Jews, Jewish prisoners from Auschwitz, after the liberation of the camp, and put them in prisoner of war camps within the Russian border?

EB: That's right.

JF: In Minsk? And other locations.

EB: Other locations. Like I had a classmate of mine, whom I heard from...other people survived Auschwitz, a beautiful young girl. Was, they saw her outside of the camp when the Russian liberated Auschwitz. The Russian took her, raped her, and killed her. And several of them.

JF: Your father-in-law was also from Hungary.

EB: Yes.

JF: Did the fact that he was from Hungary, and that the Russians had at that point occupied Hungary, have anything to do with the fact that he was taken?

EB: No.

JF: It was a random...

EB: It was a random thing.

JF: Issue. Can you tell us any more about what the Russian occupation of Budapest was like after the...war?

EB: It makes a difference how you look at, if you are looking at the point of a Jew, everything was better than the Germans, and we thought we were free. Now the surprise came later when the whole Communist take-over took place in 1948. Until then it was so pro-democracy and we were saved by the Russians. So we thought that we owed them. But we realized that they didn't save us. They came and when they find us on the street they would rape us the same way as they raped a gentile girl, or a Jewish girl even more. They...

JF: This was right after the liberation?

EB: Right after the liberation. Like, my husband had an experience. He was in the labor camp and he was one of the lucky ones who were in the same city he was from, Sighet. And in that labor camp the officers were very human, and very good to those boys. They wouldn't give them out to the Germans. They behaved very humanly with them. They saved them. He was in one of those camps which one was human. Very few of them, but were three or four in Hungary who...the officers, against their orders, they acted against their orders, in they were very, very good. And they saved their men's lives. So when the Russian came and that part of Hungary was freed in the 6th of October—that's the southernmost part of Hungary and the Russian came from Yugoslavia; this is on the Yugoslav border—and what happened, my husband, whose family was taken to Auschwitz and he was the only one who was there in the labor camp and survived and came home, couldn't get their homes back because the S.S. right away occupied their homes. If, what happened—actually, the Gestapo had their offices in their home—the Jewish homes...were the most elaborate or the richest Jews, one was taken over and became offices or quarters for the Gestapo or for the S.S. And my husband's father was the head of the railroad. He was an engineer and he was a man well-decorated in the First War. He...should be exempt under the Jewish Nuremberg Law, but they managed, a paper came after he was already deported, his exemption papers. And they had different degrees of collecting the Jews in that town, or probably in every town. The very prominent Jews, like the congressman who was a Jew, my father-in-law who...was the head of the railroad and had a title—it's "Most Honorable"; it's equivalent with "Most Honorable", given to him because he reached that point being a Jew—and other prominent Jews, were taken to a home, not into the ghetto. And they were the first ones who were put on the...wagons, of the cattle wagons, and they went straight to Auschwitz. The second transport, which one was from the ghetto, couldn't go to Auschwitz because that time the railroad was bombed to Auschwitz and they were the ones who went to Vienna in Austria and they survived. This group, which one was my husband's family, they went to Auschwitz, and his mother, who was 40 years old, his

grandmother was 60, his brother was 17, his father was 56 when he was taken, 57 when he came back, was taken to Auschwitz. His mother, grandmother, and his brother never came back. His mother and grandmother went to the gas chamber right away. And his brother we don't know what happened because for a while he was with his father. And then he was taken to a different camp and after that we don't know what happened to him. He never came back.

JF: And after your father-in-law was in Minsk, what happened?

EB: He said regardless he was a prisoner, but he was handled very nicely by the...Russian comparatively what the German did. The Russian gave them food whatever they can. They didn't have too much either, because they...were famished in Russia.

JF: Why, what was his understanding of why he was put in another camp, and not permitted to go home?

EB: He was Hungarian, and the Hungarians were enemies, so he was a prisoner of war, regardless he was a Jew or not.

JF: So it had to do with the fact that he was Hungarian.

EB: Yes. That was the explanation. But in the same time Wallenberg wasn't a Hungarian. He was taken by the...Russian. They were French, Dutch and all kind of Jews there, and non-Jews, who were taken. Like the...forced labor camp people who escaped and became prisoner of...the Russian. They were treated very badly the same way as the Germans. They were put together with the Germans. They didn't have differential.

JF: They were in, prisoners along with the Germans.

EB: With the Germans. And they...were transferred in, now I'm not talking about my father-in-law right now.

JF: No.

EB: I'm talking about the prisoner of war, who were, like forced labor camp Jews, the Jewish men, who were taken in wagon trains where they were caught through...Russia without food for weeks, and without any food. And they died in the wagons, too. So the Russian didn't discriminate, "You are a Jew or you are a German."

JF: Did your father-in-law come back from Minsk?

EB: Yes. He came back...

JF: And how...

EB: In 1945, in September or August in 1945, and he was freed in January 16th from Auschwitz. See he should be back in January. And instead of January he came back the end of the year. But he was the lucky one who came back. Some never came back. They were put down to mines, to copper mines, to work, or salt mines or wherever, or Siberia. And they never came back. We never heard of them.

JF: Your father-in-law was not placed, then, with Germans in this specific labor camp that he was in. He was not with other German prisoner of wars.

EB: No, no, he was with...Jews from Auschwitz.

JF: From Auschwitz.

EB: And they were treated, he said, decently. Because he was a very fair man and he said that the Russian let them out from the camp during the day time. They could go in the streets. They didn't work. They didn't make them work. They just kept them there, and whatever food they could give them they gave them.

JF: What was...

EB: Even cigarettes sometimes. And he never smoked so he got some bread for the cigarette, because he was a non-smoker.

JF: What was your experience with the Russians that came in to Budapest right after the liberation, your personal experience?

EB: It's a mixed experience. I was very happy that there weren't Germans, and I thought I was free. So, I couldn't walk very well for a long time, because of my wounds. I was lame in one leg. I was pulling my leg. And I had a friend of mine, my homeroom teacher's daughter, who survived in the hospital—she was working there like a nurse's aide—and, as I told you in the other tapes that her parents were killed in the last night of the ghetto. So we were very hungry, she and I. And so we went on the streets and everybody was robbing and pilfering the stores, bakery shops, everybody, because the Hungarians were under siege, you know, the city was under siege for more than six weeks, hand to hand battles between the Russians and the Germans. Since, more than that, because it was January 18th when the Russian took over the ghetto, and the siege started in October.

JF: You were in the hospital then during the siege itself.

EB: Yes.

JF: You were not...out of the hospital until after the siege had stopped and the Russians...

EB: Yes, until after...the 18th of January I didn't step out of those, I couldn't even walk, I couldn't get out of the bed. But the first thing in the, on the, when the Russian came in the next morning, her name is Yehudit, she lives in Israel. Yehudit and I went on the streets from the hospital because we wanted to know if we can go back to home. And so we went out, and on the streets we saw people going to pastry shops and bakeries, this is everything what is really laughable. We went by a pastry shop and everybody was robbing that pastry shop from pastry. And we stopped, I don't know how the, a window was bombed out. And in the rubbles we saw one big onion in the pastry shop's window. I don't know how this big yellow onion got into that pastry shop window! [laughing] And we grabbed it! [laughing] You know, we didn't go in. Everybody was robbing cakes and flour...

JF: Right.

EB: We just got hold of that big...

JF: You got the onion!

EB: Onion! [laughing]

JF: Aw.

EB: And then we went to visit a friend of mine, whose parents were Jewish but they were exempt under the Jewish law because her father lost his arm in the First War. And he had the gold medal and the family was exempt under the Jewish law. Exemption meant they could keep their home. And they had a liquor store and they could a bar in a liquor store and they could manage it.

JF: So they, the people who were exempt were permitted to continue to own their property and function...

EB: They [unclear] yes, except the children.

JF: Normally.

EB: If the children were over 18, then they had to wear the yellow star and they had to go to a labor camp, like their son who was that time twenty, was at the labor camp, in the same labor camp as my husband. So he was lucky. But their daughter, my friend, was underaged, so she didn't have to wear the yellow star. And she was, I decided to take Yehudit there and visit them. Maybe we can get a, to eat something in their home. So we went there and they had lunch. And you know, in Hungary, the lunch is the big meal time. And they were seated at the table. And we were looking at them and they said, "Are you hungry? The bakery in the corner is giving bread out. You can buy some bread there." And my girlfriend's eyes were watery when her mother said that. She started to cry and she said, "I'll go for bread for you." And she came with us and we lined up and we got a loaf of bread and we had the onion. And we were the happiest people on earth. We ran back, there was a...

JF: You had a picnic.

EB: We...thought we will because Mother had that goose fat, you remember? The goose fat was saved [unclear].

JF: You still had the goose fat!

EB: Yes! Yes, yes, yes.

JF: It was still...

EB: We had five kilo of goose fat!

JF: It was still in the house.

EB: In the hospital. Father brought, Father stuck it in the hospital with the goose liver in it, you know? You can preserve goose liver and goose...broiled goose, you know, broiled goose pieces in...the fat of the goose. It won't spoil.

JF: I see.

EB: And it was very cold. We didn't have any heat in the hospital anyway, and it was a cold winter. So Mother, that's what...saved our lives. We had something to eat. Now we had the bread. We had a loaf of bread between Yehudit and I. We had the onion. And Mother had that goose liver, little tidbits, and the fat. So we were...not hungry. We were the happiest person in our lives. We were alive. We were free. And we could eat! [tape off then on] So...now we are free, we are going home. We decided, Mother and I, and...my sister...

JF: This is after, the ghetto now has been liberated by the Russians.

EB: Liberated and we are liberated. Now we are going home. We cannot go home because in our home there is a Gentile people living in our original home. So we go back to the yellow star house. And my poor mother, she is carrying on her back the beddings what she took into the hospital. And we left all the other things. And I tried to help, and I couldn't. I was still bleed-, not bleeding but gangrenous. The gangrene was still coming out of my wound. And I started to walk. And I just couldn't. I don't understand. I used to be always very strong, and quite athletic. And for my weary body I was muscular. And I just couldn't...help. So we went back to the...yellow star house and we had a little pot belly stove there. We didn't have...our wood, you know, in the cellar we always had, we had wood. Mother bought wood for this pot belly stove before...I was shot and we were preparing for the winter. And Mother always managed somehow, with jewelry, with a little money, with, she was always very good at it. And so we went back there and we didn't have any food, because even in the yellow star house the Arrow Cross people took over and they gave their members our place. And whatever it was left there it was robbed. For instance, I had my dolls there. And they were cut off to bits and pieces because they thought maybe we hid some jewelry in there. All my books, I had a big collection since I was very little I always collected books, and some of my father's books were there. Everything burned. All the books were burned.

JF: This was all the Arrow Cross' doing.

EB: The Arrow Cross people who got our...yellow star home. You see, whatever was really valuable and good we took it out to a friend's land, to, they had a big villa, Aryan friends. And we thought it will be saved. And most of the furniture was stored, as I told you, in that place, but we took one room furniture and the kitchen was furnished by us. And some things were [unclear]. And among them my books and some of the books. Because we thought when we went to the yellow star, I was always an avid reader, so was my mother, so we decided that we will survive if we have a good book. So the books were very important to us.

JF: So a lot of the books were...saved. But the ones...

EB: We saved it, but the Arrow Cross burned it.

JF: Mmm hmm.

EB: These people, who got our homes, and who got that clothing and everything in the yellow star house, first our home, the Gentile took over. Then we went to the yellow star house. And when we...had to leave the yellow star house I was shot and my mother came to the hospital, as I told you. Now, the other people who lived in that compound were taken to the labor camp and every place was taken over by families. The Arrow Cross gave the Jewish homes to those families.

JF: So the books were, had been kept at the Arrow Cross...

EB: Yeah.

JF: By the...

EB: But this family who took over our place and...that woman who was in Dachau, who died in Dachau, and left a little baby and whose husband died in the labor camp, who was, as I told you, a certain square meter was given to us, appropriated in...the yellow star house. But we were very lucky and managed it, with money that my mother and my sister and I were in one big room and this other woman was in another room. So we had just two families in that apartment, which one was, a biggest privilege what you can imagine. Because in one room usually was 30, 32 people.

JF: So what happened when you found this destruction when you went back?

EB: My mother had to-