

Tape five, side one:

JF: This is tape five, side one of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley on April 2nd, 1985. You were talking about after the return to your yellow star house, and the Arrow Cross family that had lived there had fled, after destroying much of what you had left, much of your possessions.

EB: Whatever they couldn't take with them, because they stripped the place. Whatever we had there they took—food and clothing and everything whatever they could move in a hurry they took with them. And whatever they couldn't, they destroyed. The doors were...cut up to pieces. The books were burned. And we went back home and Mother didn't have anything to feed us with. We had a neighbor of ours, a Gentile neighbor who stayed in the yellow star house because I, as I told you, several of the Gentiles who lived there originally and they were offered bigger and better homes for their homes, they didn't took up on that because they didn't want to move into any Jewish home which one was left. And they stayed there. One of our neighbor, whose apartment was bombed out half way, he had some lemon juice saved, because the Gentile people didn't have anything to eat, too, because everything was bombed out. The firms didn't existed and...Budapest was a besieged city. He gave the lemon juice to Mother to give it to us, to my sister and me. And I wasn't feeling well, and I...there was a Christian doctor, a pediatrician, across the street. And Mother took me there. And he took my temperature, and my temperature was 104. And we thought that was the gangrene. And that was not. I had the measles.

JF: It just didn't stop.

EB: So I had the measles and Mother had to feed me, and us. So what she did, she went back to this partner of ours, who had that store from my father, and who were gentiles, and we thought they were decent people because most of our belongings were hidden in their villa, in the country. And Mother went there and said, "Look, we are free. We survived. Could you give us something to eat?" And then the man looked and said, "You are free now. This is your world. You get something to eat wherever you want," and threw Mother out. So what the people did in Budapest, there were the dead horses on the streets, and they were cutting it up and taking it in to eat. And they...find some frozen potatoes. And that was, everybody [unclear], so Mother wouldn't lower herself to cut that meat—she couldn't eat that no matter how hungry we were—but she found some of the frozen potatoes. And this friend whom I mentioned, the Jewish friend of mine whose parents were exempted, when we find that...bread and onion, in the same place they were giving out frozen potatoes. And I brought the potatoes—I have forgotten, my mother had the potatoes. Now the frozen potatoes are the worst thing whatever anybody can taste! So Mother didn't know what to do, and that, she had somebody, this man was a supplier of my father at the store. And he came, he was a Jewish man. He found out that we are alive and he came to the yellow star house. And Mother said, "You look so well-fed. How did you survive?" And he said he was hiding but he knows sources where we can find some,

where Mother can buy some flour and some dried peas, yellow peas. And, so Mother gave Father's cigarette case, a gold cigarette case, and his insignia ring, signet ring, and we got five kilo of frozen yellow beans. No, the yellow beans didn't come from there, the peas. We got...flour, some sugar, and...something else. I don't know what else, for this gold. Half a...kilo of flour and a little sugar and something, a bread or something. And then Mother gave, because we had two rooms in that apartment then, some people were evacuated from another place where they find a dead bomb. And they weren't sure if the whole building will go up so they had to be relocated. So these people were looking for a room. And they came because we had the two rooms. And Mother said, "O.K., I'll give the room if you give me some food." So they gave us...five kilo of frozen peas. Since then I cannot *stand* peas! So, and water was very scarce also, because the water were shut off in Hungary anyway. They were, the water mains were bombed out and so Mother somehow managed the water and she was cooking the peas all the time! And I was sick. Well, I put my sister beside my bed but she didn't get the measles. To get the measles and get it over with!

JF: You had mentioned before that there was some mistreatment by the Russian troops.

EB: Now let me tell you what happened, if we are going back to the Russians. So you see, if you have this kind of disease like measles...scarlet fever, what is a catchy disease, you put out a red paper on your door, and you stated, "Don't...come into this house because..."

JF: Like a quarantine.

EB: It's under quarantine now. At that time we didn't have the official yellow papers, but we find in one of my book a yellow pa-, a red page. And we put out that page and not to let anybody come in. And well a Russian soldier came in and I was so happy. I thought, "Oh, if a Russian soldier comes in we will have some food!" Because the first troop was very nice. The first troop which went, came in, they were the fighting troops, not the occupational troops. And they were just passing by. They gave on the streets bread and whatever they can, food, they shared with the people. So they...in the beginning, in the first step, the first day or the first couple days they had a good reputation that they are giving food to people. But the occupational group were terrible. They raped and robbed and they were absolutely terrifying. So this was the other group already because we were home. And he came in. He came in not to give, but to take. But he saw me and he saw the terrible circumstances, and he ran out of the door! [chuckling] After I recouped, you know, we were scavenging for food. We had, the first, first day when we...came out and we, I was just feeling weak, we went to this friend of our mother who didn't hid us, who refused to hid us, and we went to her and we told her that we are here. And she made a very good dinner for us. A very good dinner means she shared with us what she had, and she explained to us why she couldn't hid us. She was already having in her place four Jewish people. And we came and we were very visible...front of the neighbors. So she was scared that she is going to risk the four lives if she is going to take us in. So she had to make that decision.

And I understood it. Mother couldn't forgive her. But I really understood her, her position. And she loved me very much.

JF: Oh, this is after the liberation.

EB: After the liberation.

JF: But she still would have been in danger for taking you...

EB: No, no. I am talking about the previous experience. In other tapes, you will recall that experience, when, the day before I was shot.

JF: Ah, O.K.

EB: We went for shelter to this Christian friend...

JF: O.K.

EB: To this Aryan friend...

JF: O.K.

EB: Of Mother's.

JF: All right.

EB: This lady, who was always an antisemite, an open antisemite, but she was very much against the fascism and against killing the people, and so she hid four people without us knowing. But we went for shelter.

JF: I see.

EB: And...she said her neighbors were watching her at that time. But I really believed. And she was already having four Jewish people hidden in her place. So she couldn't risk, we didn't come secretly enough. So, it wasn't arranged. So she had to refuse us openly, and very loudly, to protect the others and herself. Because she could be killed too. So...she was in a very bad...compromising situation, that she explained to us. So she made a good dinner and what happened, after the dinner I went around with this friend of mine who I told you about who was...exempt. And we went on the street and a Russian officer, a Captain, came over to me and said, "Come in to this house." And two Russian soldiers surrounded me. And she started to run and I couldn't run because I couldn't walk properly. And I wasn't afraid of the Russians, so I went into this house, which was a headquarter for the Russian Army for this particular platoon. And it was a bombed out house, and they had their headquarters in the cellar, in the air-raid shelters. And the tenants of the house, it was a house which one is a, the Hungarian Christian lived. They took me downstairs and they said for questioning. But I understood in...German and Russian how they, he explained it. I said, "Why should you question me?" He said, "You are a spy. That's why I took you in, because of your description, it's, you are a German spy." I said, "A German spy! I am a Jewish girl." And, "No, no, no." They took me down. And downstairs they had a room just for the Russian. And I went in. And in that room there were other Russian officers, and women, but the women were Hungarians. So I asked one of the Hungarian women what's going on, what's happening, why he took me in. I said, "He says I am...a spy and I'm a Jewish girl." I said, "I, look, I cannot walk, and I was shot

down by the Germans. How could I be a spy!?” She said, “It’s baloney. He took you down because he wants to rape you.”

JF: You had not thought...

EB: No!

JF: That you were in danger when you went with him?

EB: No, not at all. Not, I didn’t know. I was a naive, young girl. And beside that...I was free.

JF: You had not witnessed then any abuse by...

EB: No, I didn’t know anything. We just...

JF: Other soldiers.

EB: Came out from the hospital. We were walking home, and then after that I went around and basically I wanted to find Wilma, the nun. And I went to the cloister where she used to be, to reside. And there I got the news that she was killed, and they told me, very gladly. Well, a nun and a priest were sitting there and everybody was still in the cellars because some bombs didn’t go off. The fighting was going on in Buda. That was Pest, one side of the Danube, the left side, the left bank. This is the left bank. The right bank, Buda, wasn’t freed until February 11th. So other three to four weeks. And they were seated in the cellar and the fighting was going on. But we Jews, we didn’t care, and we didn’t want to sit in the cellar if we can go around. We thought we were free; the euphoria was there. And so I asked about her. That was my first visit. I went to this friend, I had a good dinner, and after the dinner I told Mother, “I’m going to look for Wilma.” And I went to look for her, and I asked about her and this nun and the priest said, “Oh, they were killed because of those Jews.” You see, they were always talking openly to me because at that time I find my good coat. I didn’t have the yellow star on my coat any more, on that coat I never had, because that was my good coat and I hid it in the cellar in the downstairs and I find a couple of dresses of mine and this coat, this my winter coat was a very elegant *haute couture* coat. [laughing] So I walked out in it...

JF: And you didn’t look.

EB: I didn’t look. I didn’t. You see, I put everything on me so I looked a little bit fatter because I was skin and bone. And I had my very long hair, so I didn’t wear anything on my head. And I never looked a prototype Jewess. So, they looked at me and said, “They deserved it. They saved those...stinking Jews.” And that was the priest, who informed the Arrow Cross about them, later I learned. But that time, and I said, “Yes, they saved those stinking Jews. I am one of them. They didn’t save me, but I am one of those stinking Jews.”

JF: And what did they say to you?

EB: They didn’t say anything. They got red in the face and, but, when I decided to report them, they were already gone.

JF: What were you...

EB: From the nun...

JF: Where did you report them?
EB: To the police, to the new police.
JF: What would you report them for?
EB: Somebody came after me from that cloister, another nun, and said, "Those are the two who reported on Wilma and Sarah."
JF: So you were going to report them...
EB: And I said, "Why don't you report them?"
JF: As the informers.
EB: She said, "I am, I reported them today, so if you want to report you could."
JF: Ah.
EB: And I was back on my way when I was caught by the Russian.
JF: I see.
EB: I...and my friend was with me in that cloister because she was escorting me all over...

JF: Right.
EB: You know, she was always walking around. And her mother told us not to go, because the Russian are taking the girls. It was a rumor. And we said, "Oh, that's not true." It was a rumor going on that the Russian are raping—everybody. Old women, children, young, everybody. And they really did. But we didn't...want to acknowledge it. They were our saviors, so how could...you acknowledge something like that? So when the Russians took me in she ran, and she ran away from me and she ran home. Later on I find out that she was worried about me but she...didn't want to tell Mother. She didn't go back to tell Mother. She went home to her mother, and her mother said, "Now, you just wait. Don't go to her mother yet." That was a very good thing. So, going back to the cellar, in that room it was lots of vodka and drinking and eating. And the man, the Captain, said, "Sit down and eat." I was, I couldn't eat. I couldn't drink. And this woman, whom I talked to, she was a prostitute. And God bless her, if she's still alive. She said, "Now you watch it. You don't drink." I said, "I cannot drink." "Don't tell him," she said. "You give me the drink," and she'd throw the drink on the floor always when he wasn't looking. "You pretend." Then there was another woman. She said, this blonde woman. It was a beautiful blonde woman across the table. And she looked at me and she said, "She is the girlfriend of the Colonel, who is in charge of this platoon."

JF: This, the Russian Colonel.
EB: The Russian Colonel [unclear]. "Now, I'm going to ask her to help you, to talk to that Colonel, to call the Captain up and let you go." And this Hungarian woman, this friend of the Colonel, went up to talk to the Colonel. And the Colonel came out and said, and in the mean-, said, "Send down for the Captain." And while the Captain was going upstairs, to report to the Colonel, this Hungarian woman pulled my hand and said, "Now you go and run as fast as you can." I said, "I cannot." She said, "I'll help you." And she was pulling me, and she was pulling through this, through air raid shelter where all the

Hungarians were seated. And her parents were there. She was not a prostitute prostitute. I mean, she was a friend. She was a girlfriend of one of the Russian officers. But she was a Hungarian woman. So they were catering, I don't know how they call it now, they were catering to the...officers. They were girlfriends. And she was pulling me. And her parents were in the air raid shelter and said, "What are you doing? What are you associating with this girl?" She said, "This is a Jewish girl. She...is wounded. She suffered so much. She is a little virgin. And this man wants to rape her, this Russian. I have to save her." And her parents said, "What do you want to save her, [unclear] save yourself! What? You are putting your life...on the line for a Jew?" And she said, "I don't care what you are saying. I...*have* to save to save her. How could you do that? How could you talk like this?" And she was pulling me outside. And when we were outside in the courtyard, the Captain came out from the Colonel's office and saw me and he said, "What are you doing?" And...the Colonel came out [unclear]. The Colonel said, "I freed her. She can go." And the Captain turned against the Colonel and they started a fist fight!

JF: Oh my!

EB: And he gave the order to the guards not to let me go. And they escorted me back to the cellar. He had a fight with the Colonel and he wouldn't let me go. And I got very, very scared. And the woman was holding my hand and said, "I...tried to save you. I just, you just listen to me, just believe me. I will do whatever I can for you." And we went back there and he is trying to, then the Captain came downstairs again and said, "Don't be afraid of me. I'm going to take you home. Tell me where do you live? I'll escort you home. I won't touch you. Just, you are so beautiful. I just love to look at you. I just want to look at you, and I don't want to forget you. I want to look at you. I want to come and visit you and just to look at you." And the woman said, "Just dooooooon't trust him! You just watch it." And he started to dance. He was an extremely handsome man. Because the Russian men were goodlooking. But this man...

JF: [chuckles]

EB: Was a blond, blue-eyed doll, White Russian. And he started to dance.

JF: Mmm.

EB: That Russian dance. And he had in his mouth the bayonet, the end of the bayonet, and he was dancing the sword dance. It was, and he wanted me to dance. I couldn't even move! [chuckles] I didn't know what to do. So, the women there, all of them, started to go around him. His, he had a girlfriend there. The girlfriend could kill me for it. There was another Hungarian woman, and the Hungarian women had money, jewelry from the Russian, and food. So, they were in the profession they wouldn't give up those Russians because they're, that was their meal ticket. So the...his girlfriend was already very jealous of me, and she started everything but he pushed her. So every woman went around him and the girlfriend of the Colonel was very nice. And they started to surround him and give him more drink and more drink, and he finally, he got so drunk that he didn't know what was going on. And this woman pulled me out, my favorite, pulled me out and said, "Now! Let's

go!” And I don’t know how I got, she pushed me, and she ran out on the street and she took me to two blocks away from the house. And it was in our district, not very far away from this friend of ours, who gave us the dinner, the lunch. I think after that I got the lunch, yes, not before. It was after. And so I kissed her and she kissed me, and I was looking for her afterwards but I never find her. So I went in and I told Mother what happened. Mother and my sister and this, and Mary, who was the Gentile woman who gave us the food, were sitting there and she was cooking my favorite. It was prune, plum, no, plum-filled...

JF: Dumplings?

EB: Dumplings.

JF: Mmm.

EB: And I just loved it! And she had her last plum, because they didn’t have too much of her preserves, she put it in and she cooked it for me. She always loved me when I was a little child. And she never had any children. And she cooked that for me and then afterward we went home and I had the measles.

JF: Did the situation that you’re describing with the abuse of this second group of Russians continue?

EB: Yes. Continue all the time. You were, like when I went for food, to Sighet because Budapest didn’t have any food and we had to have some food. So Mother gave me money and...in the country, that part of the country, the farmers were accepting money. In Budapest nobody needed the money because the money couldn’t bring you anything. You can use it for toilet paper because we didn’t have any toilet paper. The money didn’t worth anything if you don’t have food. The food is the most im-, shelter and food is the most important thing. So everybody went, to the country. Now trains were, were very few of them, so you were on the top of the train. In that time the trains weren’t even working. You went by foot. And on the road there were the...Russian because they went, they were still fighting, on the Buda side, and on the west part of Hungary was still under German occupation. And...the groups were going. And if they saw men or women they took them for a, to labor camps, to Russia. You had to be very careful, regardless if you had your documents or not. Women were taken to labor camps and disappeared or they...were raped.

JF: The men would be taken under what pretense, that they were enemies of the state?

EB: No! They needed...a work force, to clean up. Sometimes they took them just for cleaning up. And if you were lucky, if not, then...they took you to the regular camps to clean up Russia.

JF: Was there any way to get out of Budapest at that time, to leave Hungary?

EB: To leave Hungary? No.

JF: Once...the Russians occupied there was no way?

EB: After that went...for a very short period of time, until 1948, you could leave Hungary. [unlcear]

JF: Did your family make any effort to leave the country?

EB: No, no. My family didn't make any effort. That's why we didn't leave there. Lots of families, I mean that was till 1948, '49, they could leave the country. They, lots of people emigrated.

JF: Why did your family decide not to?

EB: Because my second father was Hungarian. First, last, and almost he didn't leave after '56 either. And he was out here, visited. He never wanted to live anywhere else, just in Hungary.

JF: He had been in...

EB: Concentration camp.

JF: In a concentration camp. Had your mother known, or had you known during the time that you were in the hospital and he was in the camp...

EB: No, because...

JF: Where he was?

EB: No.

JF: Did you know whether he was alive?

EB: No, no, until he came home we didn't know.

JF: You knew nothing.

EB: Not a thing.

JF: And it was his decision not to leave.

EB: Yes, not my mother. Mother always wanted to leave.

JF: And your sister also stayed in Hungary...

EB: Yes, yes.

JF: After '56.

EB: Yes, my sister stayed and she was a little girl. She was, how old, she was 14 in '56. And she did, she had the same emotion as her father. Now she changed but now it's too late because she had, they have two elderly parents and the situation is such that they cannot leave and as it will be possible, but now when you are getting older it's very hard to establish yourself if you are 40. That's much harder. She is, regrets that now, but it's too late. Because you cannot get a job or you cannot change; it's very hard to change life after 40. And you have to have it within. You have to be cut out to be an immigrant. You have to know, "I left everything behind me," because after that, under the circumstances we had a very, very good life, a beautiful home.

JF: You're talking about...

EB: About myself and my husband...

JF: When you...married.

EB: When I married. And we came with a key [?], with nothing else, and we've never regretted it regardless, how hard our life was, because we wanted to be here.

JF: You said that you had known your husband before the war.

EB: Oh yes.

JF: And you were not, you did not date until after the war.

EB: No.

JF: Can you...speak a little bit about what it was like to be a teenager during that time, how it...affected your life as you look back on it now?

EB: You were not a teenager. You were an adult. You had responsibilities. You always had responsibilities. But, in any circumstances...youth prevails. If you had a piece of chocolate, you had to decide, we had rationing. It's nine, twelve decagram of, after the war, twelve decagram of sugar per person, for a month. I don't remember how much was the flour. And everything was rationed. And you have to line up for hours to get it even there. And on the black market if you had a little jewelry, because the inflation was rampant, you can get some eggs or powdered eggs or a little chocolate. And I was very lucky because I had relatives in America and they sent me CARE packages. So I can change it for...shoes, because all my clothing was robbed. These people, who-

Tape five, side two:

JF: This is tape five, side two, of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley, on April 2nd, 1985. You were speaking about the robbery.

EB: After that, when we got, finally, we got our original home back, it had a slight bomb damage. So we didn't have our toilet. The porcelain of the toilets and the bathroom were shattered to pieces. The windows were shattered to pieces, because of the fighting. And glass was non-existent in that time so you had to paper your windows. To get it, just one toilet replaced was a big thing. Finally we managed that. Our furniture, some of our furniture was saved in that cellar, that we got back what we never expected. Nothing was touched and...in the safe places where our really valuables were hidden, we never got back not even our clothing or fur coats or my...or silvers and art objects and whatever, because those people, who didn't need it, that people who had the villa, said they were robbed by the peasants in that countryside and they didn't give a single thing back to us. And they resented the Jews. The people who took over our possessions resented us that we are alive. So most of them, they looked at us, you didn't dare to ask back your things, and even if you did you wouldn't get it back. Most of the people, were some decent people, and most of them were not.

JF: So you did not get back what you stored in the cellar.

EB: No, not from those people, no. We got back what we put it in the open air raid shelter in that carpenter's or, upholstery man, who worked for my father, who had his own workshop. And we put everything in that workshop—my room furniture and all our furniture. Most of our furniture was there, and in the yellow star house. Nobody touched that. It was an open air raid shelter. In that house the people were so decent they wouldn't touch anything, not a leaf of my school books were missing.

JF: Did you find after the war that there was any increased antisemitism in Hungary?

EB: Certain parts, yes, in the countries. Very few people came back from the camps, but who came back they...went back. They belonged there. They belonged there for centuries. They went back to their homes which was...no existent. The family, they were, everybody ran back to their own place because they were waiting for their loved ones. They were waiting for their family to return. And they thought if they are there, the others will come back. They were waiting for them. Most of the homes were ransacked, or other people lived there. And ninety per cent of the population resented the Jews who came back. There was a saying going that more came back than went. This is just like the Zonder [phonetic] case now, and all the other cases. They said...they revived from the ashes like the Phoenix and...they multiplied. When a village, when you had 5,000 Jew and one came back, then they multiplied. Well in certain parts they started pogroms. In 1945 and '46 they had pogroms in the country. So most of the Jews left the country and they came to Budapest,

because it was no use to wait any more. Nobody would come back. They realized that. But it took a while to sunk in that people are not coming back.

JF: Was there increased antisemitism in Budapest? Or had it not changed?

EB: Not changed. Not changed. They...were not open because they were afraid of the Russians. Because that time, and in the government were...Jews in the government, unfortunately. They didn't say they were Jews; they were Communists. But some, some Jews were Communists, or Communist Jews, or whatever, but they were Communists. They didn't associated with the Jews and they...were not Jewish, but they were Jewish origin, and therefore they were Jews. And...you know, now it was open. The universities were open for Jews. The *Numerus Clausus* didn't exist, and most of us who survived and wanted to go to, could go to universities, enroll to universities. And the older people could get jobs in the government. Some of the attorneys became judges, the doctors practiced and everything went back to...a democratic stage because it was democracy, so-called democracy. And antisemitism was punishable by jail. And they had their war criminal trials, the Hungarian war criminal trials, going on, on and on. The atrocities and the trials, whoever were caught, were tried. Some of them were executed and hung. So, it was an atmosphere when it was not healthy to express antisemitism, especially not in Budapest.

JF: What do you think kept you going through all that time?

EB: God. Believing in God. And God helped me and made me a goose [unclear], brought me back from...death. The only thing is when you are alone, and when you have trauma and when you have hardship, and when your life is at stake you realize you are all alone, and whatever happens it's God's will. And God is the only thing, *for me*, God was the only thing what made me survive.

JF: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

EB: Not right now, I don't think so. Lots of other things, but right now it's just...

JF: O.K. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Bentley.

EB: Thank you.