

Key: EB — Eva Bentley, interviewee

JF — Josey Fisher, interviewer

Interview Dates: March 18 and April 2, 1985

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is an interview with Eva Bentley on March 18, 1985 with Josey Fisher. Mrs. Bentley lives at [address]. Her telephone number is [phone number]. Mrs. Bentley, can you tell us where you were born and where you grew up and a little bit about your childhood?

EB: I was born in Budapest and I grew up in Budapest. We were very proud Hungarians. My father's family goes back to 500 years in Hungary. One of the first Chief Rabbis of Hungary—because at that time there were different rabbinates—and [unclear] in Budapest they established a main headquarters for the rabbinate, and one of my great- great-grandfathers was the first Chief Rabbi of Hungary.

JF: The name of your family, of your paternal family was what?

EB: Wahrmann.

JF: How do you spell that, please?

EB: W-A-H-R-M-A-N-N.

JF: Thank you.

EB: This family gave one Deputy Finance Minister¹, the first Jew, to Austro-Hungary. My father served under Franz Joseph and the last King of Austro-Hungary, Charles V [Charles I] I guess, for eight years in the Navy, the Austro-Hungarian Navy. He was serving on the first submarine, in the Axis powers. He served on two submarines because both of them were destroyed. And for personal bravery—he saved lives; twice he got the silver medal and the third time he got the Iron Cross, and the last time for personal bravery—he became the personal courier of the last King, and he was stationed in the palace, the court palace in Vienna. According to the Nuremberg Laws, he wouldn't be considered a Jew because of those medals and his records in the Navy, but he died when I was five years old, and the German occupation in Hungary took place in 1944. He wasn't alive at that time, and those laws, even if they were applicable, I did not find, they didn't give the documentation out to Jews from the archives, so I couldn't prove it.

JF: In other words, the Nuremberg Laws that were applied in Hungary would have exempted him from Jewish status or identification because of his service to the Crown.

EB: Yes, because of his service to his country.

JF: Because of his service to the country, so that you, had that been documented, had you had those papers, your immediate family would not have been under any kind of persecution whatsoever?

EB: He wouldn't be, his wife and his child, if he would be alive; but my mother remarried so it wouldn't be applicable to my mother. I was the only one who would be able to use that protection.

JF: This was a special protection that was issued by the King.

¹ Moritz Wahrmann (1831-1892), first Jewish member of Hungarian parliament, leader in Jewish community.

EB: This was a special protection issued by Hitler, by Hitler's law.² This is the Hitler Law, and I don't know if you call it "Nuremberg Law," if it was active in Nuremberg or not. I can not call it, I am not a historian. The only thing I can tell is that certain Jews were exempted, and they got the non-Jewish status. They were the Jews who were awarded for bravery during the First World War.

JF: Such as an Iron Cross.

EB: Such as an Iron Cross and such as two silver medals what he had. I have one in here, even. And the other one is, if you were crippled, amputated, or...those people were exempted as Jews. They were not considered Jews and...

JF: Did that hold even through the German occupation?

EB: Yes, even in Germany. Hitler had one of the generals who was Jewish³ because of that.

JF: One of the Hungarian generals?

EB: No, German. In Hungary we didn't have Jewish generals. The highest rank I guess that the Jews had was a colonel.

JF: Your father died when you were quite young.

EB: My father died when I was five years old.

JF: Do you recall, or did your mother ever tell you any information about whether or not it was difficult for him to rise in the military system in Hungary because of his Jewish background?

EB: Yes. The stories that my mother and my father's sister told me was he was beaten by the...in 1919. It was a Communist uprising in Hungary. After that, Horthy, who after the King, he became our governor,⁴ and my father served under him because he was an admiral and he was on the *Navarre*, that was the second submarine which my father served on. He was the admiral in the *Navarre*, and my father served under him. And my father finished at the naval academy on the ships and when he was in the Navy, because he had enlisted before the war, and Horthy was a very antisemitic person by himself. He had antisemitic ideas and he had the Guard, they called it the White Guard, who were killing off the Red Guard, the Communists. Now, in the meantime, they were cleaning out Jews, too, not only the Communist Jews but, if they find a Jew on the street or wherever, they took it to the Britannia Hotel in Budapest and some of them were skinned alive or shot, and my father was on a trip...that time it was in 1919, after the war and the King wasn't in power anymore, and Horthy became the power and my father was on a trip in the country, and they pulled him up off his car and they beat him savagely. Because he was a Jew.

JF: This was the White Guard.

EB: Yes, this was the White Guard, and he was beaten savagely. He died of lymphosarcoma. At that time, the lymphosarcoma, they did not have the studies—they didn't know what. It could be because the submarines were not developed, and the caissons⁵ were dangerous and he

² Not Nuremberg Laws as interpreted in Germany or most other Nazi-occupied countries. Hungary was sovereign until 1944.

³ Not correct.

⁴ Regent.

⁵ She may be referring to caisson disease, or bends, caused by too rapid decrease in air pressure after a stay in a compressed atmosphere. But would that cause such a cancer?

was serving on submarines for a long time. At that time they said that the beating had something to do with that, because he was savagely beaten and left on the field dead by the White Guards.

JF: You said that he had served under the admiral on the *Navarre*. At that time did he experience this antisemitism?

EB: I really don't know because, quote, unquote my father had red hair, very light complexion, very German looks. Everybody thought he was German. His second tongue was German; and he spoke Italian. He was stationed in Poland and in Italy. So nobody would know unless they knew that he was a Jew, so I don't know what he experienced, because, unfortunately, I missed that part of my life, to know about his personal experiences. I knew dramatic experiences about this beating.

JF: This you were aware of, or this was reported to you by your mother?

EB: My mother.

JF: Your mother told you?

EB: My mother told me.

JF: You said that your mother came from a different kind of background when we talked about this earlier.

EB: Yes, my mother was born in Transylvania and my grandparents in that city, it was Sighet, the city that Elie Wiesel is coming from. The same town! That town was populated 75% by Jews. Very Orthodox Jews, with caftans and *shtraimels* and *paves*. My grandfather was not from that town. He came from a different part of the country, not that religious, but my grandmother was from that town, so my grandfather adjusted and he became a pious Jew, a very honest, very lovely, pious Jew. They were very Orthodox, and it was a golden time of my life to go to that city and see oh, everybody was Jewish. They had farmlands and they had lumber, even the maids were Jewish. The woodchoppers were Jewish.

JF: This was quite in contrast to your upbringing in Budapest.

EB: And my regular life, I spent my summer vacation there, and it was such a different background and a different culture, but I really loved it because everything was so warm, and the beggars were Jews, and I learned about being a Jew there, when my grandfather on my first *seder* there, I remember...It was after my father's death and I was five years old and my grandfather had a *seder* and all the doors were open, and at that table, I don't know, we sat around 18 or 28 people—I don't know—I was little—and my grandmother made a wine out of raisins and I drank so much, I got drunk. I recited every prayer with my grandfather. My grandfather sat at the top of the table, with white pillows, wearing the *kittel*. The *kittel* is the white dress for when you are buried, that's what they are wearing and I said everything whatever he said. And then I got drunk, and I was put in bed, but the doors were open because Grandmother and Grandfather said that not only the prophet, but everybody that was hungry or didn't have a place to sleep—their door was always open for people to come in and be fed and have a shelter.

JF: Did that happen, did people come in?

EB: Yes, my grandmother brought up so many strange boys, because there were poor people and they sent them to Grandmother and Grandfather because they knew they will give their home and their food to them. And Grandmother was always the first one in the town. My grandmother was a very proud woman and very stern, a beautiful big lady who was very snobbish in her

own way. And she was not very social with anybody whom she didn't know way back; and they had to have a certain standard. But when a poor girl wanted to get married and they didn't have a dowry, my grandmother was one of the first who gave and went around town to everybody who could afford it and collected for that girl's wedding and for the dowry.

JF: Your grandparents were of an upper class then in the town, or an upper middle class?

EB: No, middle class. They were very wealthy once, and then after the First World War they were robbed and they were not wealthy at all. They were good people, but not wealthy people, but they had a nice life. My grandmother every year went to Baden Baden or Marienbad...for the cure, to the spas. She always bought the best things for the children. She went to Vienna and she ordered the clothes, or she went to Budapest to the stores and ordered things, but there were much richer people there. They were not rich at all.

JF: So, your mother came from this observant background and this very intense Jewish identity.

EB: Except my grandfather's brother, who was the banker in the town...they had the first motor car. The family was well-to-do. They came from...they had lumber... My great-grandparents, my grandfather's parents, owned flour mills, and my grandmother's parents they owned a canteen in the mining town, close to Sighet, had a salt mine, and a canteen and a tobacco shop. The license was given by the government, was given to my other great-grandfather on my mother's side.

JF: And your grandfather was in what kind of business, your mother's father, your grandfather?

EB: He was a farmer.

JF: He was a farmer and he was able to own land? That was not an issue?

EB: They didn't live in a ghetto. The city had certain areas where the Jewish people lived. My grandparents never lived in this area. They were mixed, mostly where they lived, there were mostly Christian, Gentile people.

JF: And was that difficult? Did that present any problems that you remember?

EB: No, they were very friendly with those people. My grandparents never liked to live in a ghetto, in an environment where there were just...My grandmother said, "You belong to a land," and they spoke several languages, and actually, my grandmother went to a cloister, to the nuns to school.

JF: This was a common way of Jewish girls becoming educated in those days?

EB: Yes, because in those days they had just parochial schools, and my grandmother went to the parochial school, and even when they had the play *Cinderella*, she was the Prince on the stage. That was her big experience. But she wasn't academically educated, and she liked to learn but she made a point that her children were educated. Her only son became a dentist. She had eight living children. The girls went to parochial schools. My mother graduated from the *Gymnasium*⁶, and she went to Budapest to study pharmacy.

JF: Is that how she met your father, when she went to Budapest?

EB: Yes, because her older sister was already married and living in Budapest, and she met my father in Budapest.

⁶ a secondary school.

JF: Your grandparents' home was an observant home?

EB: Right.

JF: Kosher?

EB: Right.

JF: Your grandmother wore a *shaytl*.⁷

EB: Sure.

JF: And yet, she was a modern woman in many ways, in terms of her education and what she wanted for her children.

EB: She had a lot of common sense, and she had a born intellect, and she always wanted to learn. Even my aunt was telling me, that when they came home from school she was always sitting down with them. Her name was Rosie and she said, "Rosie wants to learn, too." She wanted to learn what she never did, because she just finished elementary school. In those days, you know, in the early 1800's, she went to the parochial school to the nuns and she finished that. But she had an urge to learn. Even when I was a little girl, she wanted to know what I learned. I had to teach her whatever I learned.

JF: She had a hunger for the outside world.

EB: She wanted to learn about poems and poets, and she had a, not a good voice, but a nice voice, and she liked to sing, and I have an awful voice, and she even tolerated that, and she was the one who built me up all the time.

JF: Your father's background was obviously not as observant as your mother's.

EB: Yes, that was an interesting thing. My father was an agnostic. He ran away from home; that is why he joined the Navy because his father wanted to make a rabbi out of him, because of the background and he was very much against it.

JF: So, he was rebelling against his background of the rabbis in his family and he became an agnostic and was not personally observant. What happened to their marriage? Your mother had come from a very different...

EB: So, he had to observe what my mother wanted. They had a kosher home because my grandparents wouldn't eat in any other way when they came and my mother was very attached to her parents and my grandparents always came and visited us. So he said, "Whatever you do in the home, that's your business, that's your home. Whatever I eat outside and whatever I do outside, I do, but don't ask me to wear a hat at the table or go to the synagogue." So once in a while he did it for the sake of my mother. He went to the synagogue on the High Holidays.

JF: This is what your mother told you later?

EB: Yes.

JF: Do you have any early memories of what things were like before he died?

EB: Little things. He was an exceptionally brilliant man and he was disappointed that he didn't have a son, so he wanted to make a son out of me.

JF: You were the only child?

EB: I was the only child, yes, so he asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I said that I wanted to be a ballerina or a star, a movie star. He said, "No, you can't be. You will be a

⁷ the wig worn by married Orthodox women.

politician and an attorney,” and I insisted that I wanted to have some artistic things. Every little girls have this. He said, “If you are that artistic then you can become an author.”

JF: He had definite ideas.

EB: Absolutely, not only that. He exercised me since I was born! Before I was born, he already put up the gym equipment in the house. He put me up on a big fence because we lived in our home at that time and we had a big fence and he put me up on the fence, which was a sloping fence, to walk on it and I said, “I am scared.” And he said, “You cannot be scared. There is no such a word, there is no fear. You are building it into yourself. You cannot have fear.” He got very angry, that’s what I remember. He said, “You cannot have fear, you have to overcome.” And I wasn’t even five years old when he enrolled me in a private Jewish school, because he wanted to teach me to read and write and he started when I was three-and-a-half or four, and I didn’t do well and he was very disappointed. He thought that I was a hopeless case. That’s what I remember.

JF: This was a private Jewish school?

EB: Yes, I dropped out of that. After his death, my mother took me out because I was too young for that. And I was very playful and they advised my mother that it is not my time.

JF: This was a school that was connected with the Jewish community?

EB: Yes, a Jewish school. They had Jewish private schools at that time.

JF: And when you say reading and writing, are you talking about in Hungarian or in Hebrew?

EB: Hungarian, not in Hebrew. It was not a religious school, it was a parochial school, like Protestant, Catholic, Jewish. And it was privately owned by the Jewish community and you had to pay fees, because a public school you don’t have to pay fees, or very little. But in the Jewish schools they measure up your financial status and according to your financial status, you pay your fees in the school because you are keeping up that school, and then the poor kid can come without paying anything.

JF: Was this a common thing in the social group in which your parents were, to send your children to a Jewish private school?

EB: We had private schools and we had tutors that were private besides that. So what happened...he knew he was dying, he diagnosed even himself. He was very fluent in Latin and he had the best professors who were taking care of him. In Hungary or in Europe at that time, the medical profession didn’t believe to tell the patients. They diagnosed and they kept it as a secret. He had a feel that what he had...and so he called one professor up in the name of the other on the telephone to get the diagnosis and because he was so versed in Latin. The diagnoses are always [unclear] in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s in Hungary, in the Hungarian medical school you have to know Latin because everything was in Latin and not in Hungarian; now it’s changed. So, if you were a doctor, your diagnosis was in Latin. So they didn’t assume that anybody who was not in that field could diagnose in Latin and converse in Latin. So he called them up and he got his proper diagnosis.

JF: This must have been a while before he died.

EB: It was a year before he died, so he decided that I have to learn how to read and write and be aware of things, and I still was a little child who was very playful. And at school I did not behave like...They couldn’t discipline me because I was playful and talking and chatting and en-

joying myself and putting ink all over my dresses and doing lots of other things. When you are with the six and seven year olds and you are not even five, then you are doing things what are not... He learned to read and write when he was three because he went to school with his older sisters and he was from the country in Hungary in the mainland. And at that time they had different age groups in schools, in country schools, so he was taught with his sisters and he loved to learn. He was brilliant.

JF: So he thought you should do the same.

EB: He thought if he had one child, then the child has to do it and the child was not that brilliant [laughter] as he was.

JF: The community in which you lived in Budapest at this time was what? What kind of people lived there?

EB: I don't know what you mean.

JF: Was it grouped by religion? Was it grouped by socio-economics?

EB: Socio-economics.

JF: So that there was a mixture among your playmates and a mixture among your parents' friends.

EB: Sure. My parents' friends were mostly Gentiles.

JF: Why do you think that was? It was an observant home...

EB: It was not that observant. It was such a Mickey Mouse observant. They knew everything about the laws. My grandparents were strictly Orthodox and when I went there, we observed. In our home we had a kosher kitchen but if ham and other things of that kind were coming in from the outside, it was served in a different place. My mother wouldn't eat it.

JF: But she would serve it.

EB: She would serve it but she wouldn't eat it, but she wouldn't mix the plates. She observed a kosher home what she had seen her parents. She loved her parents and she respected them and respected the laws. We didn't go to temple on Fridays.

JF: Did you belong to a synagogue?

EB: Yes, we did belong to the synagogue.

JF: What kind of synagogue?

EB: Basically Neolog. Neolog means...this is a German movement, it started in Germany in the 1800's and swept across Austro-Hungary, because we were always with the Germans and this is the base of the Reform. It is like the Conservative here. It was in a way enlightened. I didn't have Christmas trees because I didn't want any. If I wanted one I would have one, but I didn't.

JF: Did you have friends who did have Christmas trees?

EB: Yes. At Christmas we got gifts for Christmas. Not for Chanukah.

JF: You did get gifts for Christmas?

EB: Yes, not for Chanukah. Chanukah, we knew it was Chanukah. We observed Chanukah, we observed Purim, we observed very strictly the Passover. We had Passover *seders*. We didn't have bread in the house. We changed the dishes; so I knew everything about the law, but that was semi-Reform. You could call it almost Reform.

JF: And the people, the other Jews that you knew, lived in a similar way?

EB: Yes, most of them.

JF: You said that your parents didn't go to synagogue on Friday. Did they only go on the High Holidays?

EB: Yes.

JF: Primarily?

EB: And we went to the *maskir* on High Holidays. We observed Succoth. We didn't have a *succah*, but my mother's oldest sister had it so we went out there. And my mother's other sister who was married to a Gentile man—coming from this background, it was a terrible shock to my grandparents—but she was married to a Gentile man who saved 29 Jewish people during 1944—I went out there and she had the Christmas tree and she had different dishes because she wanted her mother to visit her, so she had the kosher dishes.

JF: At the same time?

EB: At the same time. But that was my first experience in antisemitism, in my aunt's home, whom I loved dearly. She was absolutely a lovely, lovely person, who was married to this Gentile man who converted to Judaism.

JF: Oh, he converted to Judaism.

EB: He converted. He was an aristocrat. He was coming from an aristocratic background. It was a big love. They went together for eight years, not because of his family was against marrying a Jew, but *my* grandparents were against to having a Gentile in the family, and he was coming from a much better background. And when my grandmother went over to his brother, who was a colonel in the Hungarian Army, a very high-ranking colonel, and his father was a general, and they said, "Well, if the two people love each other, it doesn't matter who is Jewish and who isn't. The main thing is that they love each other."

JF: Now, you said that this was the first time that you had experienced antisemitism.

EB: They had children where she lived. She never had children and she loved me very much and every Christmas, I spent there because it was so festive. And I had an aunt, my father's aunt, who went to visit Israel and came back and gave me a *Magen David*, a little trinket, and I was wearing it on my chain, as a child. And that was after my father died and I spent my Christmas with my aunt and there were children whom I played with and they weren't Jewish. And then my aunt said, "You don't have to tell them that you are Jewish. Please don't tell them." And I had this little *Magen David* on my neck and I ran to my friend's home to have to light the candles on the Christmas tree and they started to talk about how Jews killed Christ and...

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Eva Bentley. You were talking about the experience when you were visiting these Christian children's home to decorate their tree.

EB: It was already decorated because they said that Jesus is coming and the trees were decorated by them the children, I don't know, they made some [unclear] about that... To light the candles, and those were little sparkly things and it was beautiful. The room was dark, and the sparkles came up and it felt like in a fairyland. And in the fairyland came the tale about how the Jews killed Christ and all the Jews have big noses and all the Jews are bad and drinking children's blood and all kind of stories, and I had the *Magen David* in my breast and I thought what if they find out that I am one of them, what was going to happen? It's terrible. It's not true. And that was the first experience that I had and I took off my *Magen David*. And I hid it. I was ashamed of being a Jew.

JF: This was the first time?

EB: That was the first time and then I went back and I said to myself, "That is not true. Why are they telling that? It is not true. Those are lies." How can I find? I didn't want to be one of those people who are killers and bad. It was a stigma and it was burning. It was terrible burning and I still feel guilty about it that I took the *Magen David* off.

JF: You were about how old when that happened?

EB: Six, or so, and I didn't want to, I wanted to be one of *them* and not one of those Jews.

JF: That they were talking about?

EB: Yes, and at the same time I knew that it wasn't true and it was hurting. I was torn apart.

JF: Did you talk with your parents about it or your mother about it when you went home?

EB: I ran back to my aunt and then she explained that that is a stigma what we have to fight and it is not true. And I said, "Why can't I tell them that I'm Jewish?" Basically, she didn't express it. I couldn't talk to her about that. I didn't want to hurt her feelings. Subconsciously, and being a child, you know so much when you are a child, especially when you lost your father. And this aunt of mine was an absolute angel, a lovely, lovely human being. So I just couldn't confront her with this because she put me in a situation, she wanted the best and she didn't want me to get hurt. Probably she wanted to protect me, and that is why she told me not to tell them that I am Jewish. Because in that community they didn't know that she was Jewish or that her husband had converted to Judaism.

JF: This was in...

EB: The '30s, mid '30s.

JF: The mid '30s, and the town was...

EB: Hungary, Budapest.

JF: This was in Budapest itself, but the section was...

EB: It was the suburbs of Budapest. They had different districts. Like you go in Philadelphia to Rydal, or to Huntingdon Valley from Center City. We lived in center city Budapest and they lived in the outskirts.

JF: Now, this kind of situation is very different from what you described where you lived, where you lived in a community where there were Christians and they knew you were Jewish.

EB: Probably, it wasn't different. I just wasn't aware of it because they know I was Jewish and in this part of the town they didn't know I was Jewish, so...

JF: They didn't know that the family was Jewish?

EB: No, they thought they were Christians; so they were open with me because they thought that I was one of them.

JF: But where you lived, your family let everybody know that they are Jewish.

EB: Yes, we had the *mezuzah* on the door.

JF: And you had Christian playmates at home?

EB: Yes, sure.

JF: And it was not a problem?

EB: No, because they know. At that time it was no problem. Later on, much later on, it became a problem.

JF: Do you think, in the group in which you lived, had they not known that you were Jews, would they have been more open with you?

EB: Yes, yes.

JF: In the same way. There would have been more antisemitism expressed. And, they were not saying these things out of politeness or regard for your background?

EB: Yes, they would because it happened later.

JF: Now, you said that you went to a public school after your father died.

EB: No, after my father died, I went to a private school, an English private school. I started my first elementary. They called it a Scotch school. It was a private school that taught English from the first elementary grade on, and they mingled with mostly Protestant and Jewish kids. Very few Catholics in that school. And we had different classes. We had religious classes, Jewish religion, even in public school, you were allowed to practice your religion and the rabbi or the teacher, the religious teacher, came in, would be Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. They came in and we had religious arts and religious studies. In this school I didn't experience any antisemitism because most of the class was well-to-do upper middle class Jewish kids or upper middle-class Protestants. And it was an environment, mostly a Jewish environment because the Jews were the ones who wanted to learn English and wanted to get this kind of education, so we did...I went there.

JF: Was there a great number of Jewish children in the school, or were they just more visible?

EB: No, they were not. Let's say, that the class was 65% Jewish.

JF: And what was your experience in the school with these other children in terms of your Judaism?

EB: At that time it was...

JF: Was it comfortable?

EB: Comfortable, because we were, most of us were Jewish, so I didn't even know, don't remember who was Protestant and who wasn't.

JF: The friends that you had...

EB: My friends were Jewish, my little friends were Jewish.

JF: Why do you think they were Jewish?

EB: I will tell you why, because my best friend at that time was our physician's daughter and she was my bosom buddy after my father's death, and then we had a falling out and then my next friend was also a Jewish girl, so it just happened.

F: It just happened. It wasn't that you couldn't have been friends with the non-Jewish kids.

EB: It's just that it happened. And then after that I went to another school because we moved, my mother got married and we moved and the circumstances changed. So I went to a special school, but it was a public school, but it was called... It was a school which was a teaching school, for the new methods. It was an experimental elementary school.

JF: Was this also in Budapest?

EB: Yes, but in a different district. We moved from this district to another district and then my best friend became also a Jewish girl who happened to be my husband's cousin who is a psychiatrist now, and that is the way I met my husband.

JF: So, you were about how old then when you moved to this other school?

EB: I was about eight or nine. I had a very hard time there not because being a Jew, because in that class also we had lots of Jewish children, but it was an experimental school and it was very advanced. We had cubes, all those kinds of things that they experimented with, a new reform technique. So most of the school and classes had very bright children and most of them were Jewish children again. After my mother got married—it was the depression in Hungary and my stepfather had a furniture factory and he went broke—so our financial status from up went down from one day to the other and that was a very hard experience. So I experienced hardship, not because I was Jewish, because I experienced it with my Jewish friends, but because I wasn't as rich any more and losing my father and losing that kind of background, I had a very hard experience. But it was a short time and my stepfather made it back and he started again, so everything was going up financially again.

What happened? I had a birthday party. I was in the first elementary grade and finally we were doing well again and my mother gave a birthday party for me and I invited the whole class and even the other class, 40 kids, and two Christian girls came and most of the Jewish kids didn't. Five came—altogether we were five, three Jewish girls and three Christian. The Christian kids came. The Jewish children didn't come because their parents said we were new in the district and we were down when we came... They didn't know our background, because they didn't know my parents' background and they didn't allow their children to come to my party. Since then, I didn't let my mother give any more birthday parties for me.

JF: What a horrible disappointment!

EB: It was terrible, you can't even imagine. The cakes were ready and everything, and they didn't show up. And my husband's aunt who was my mother's friend—she came from Transylvania also, a different town—Koložvár—it's a very famous town. And my husband's grandfather was a school principal and his father was a school principal, Hungarian school principal, not Jewish, and his great-grandfather was a Jewish school principal, he is coming from this background. And my friend's mother came to Budapest at the same time as my mother, to the university to study medicine. And they found each other through us when we became friends. Her daughter and I became friends at school and we lived a block away from each other, and the mothers became friends and we became friends. So she came over and she was very embarrassed and she told my mother what happened because all of the parents, all of the mothers, told her why they didn't let the children come to my party.

JF: So this had to do with social status within the Jewish community.

EB: That's correct.

JF: When you...

EB: After that, I didn't talk to those kids. What happened [unclear] the poor kids, but I didn't realize that, I bore a grudge all my life. They approached me on the street later and everything and I didn't want to talk to them any more.

JF: Did you find other friends, though, in this community? You said that three Jewish girls came to your party. Were you as close to them as you had...?

EB: No, I was not close to them at all.

JF: You weren't close to them? You did not find the close friends after this...

EB: I had one close friend of mine that was my husband's cousin in that time in the elementary grade. And after that I went to the Jewish *Gymnasium* and I had lots of lovely friends, but these girls went sideways and I didn't even recognize them on the street.

JF: During this time...

EB: But I didn't have problems with the Christian girls in my class in the elementary. Later on I went to public school after elementary school, and there the antisemitism was rampant.

JF: Can you describe that to me?

EB: Yes, already the Arrow Cross... This was the late '30s and early '40s already.

JF: You're talking about...you were about?

EB: When I was 10, 11, 12, 13, already it was rampant. First I went to the public school and there the teachers were very antisemitic; the principal was very antisemitic.

JF: This was in the new community to which you moved.

EB: Yes. They always singled me out. They didn't associate with me. I went to a school where they only had in the classroom four Jewish girls. All the others were...we had 32 or 34 in the classroom and among that, there were just only four Jewish girls. [unclear]

JF: So this experience of antisemitism started for you when you were about nine or ten.

EB: No, it started at six at Christmas.

JF: But in school.

EB: In school it started when I was 10, I guess.

JF: You were 10 and this is when you moved to this other community when your mother remarried.

EB: About eight or nine. [unclear]

JF: That was about 1938 or so?

EB: '38, '39 and '40.

JF: That you were feeling it in the country. So, it was much different from when you were a younger child? It was much more overt?

EB: Not only overt, but it was a field day. You see what happened: we had art classes and the teacher who taught us art classes, she was a *Schwabe*. "*Schwabe*" means a part of Hungary where they had these old German communities. They lived in Hungary for 130 years, even longer, but they maintained their own identity. They considered themselves Germans. But you didn't have to be German; the Hungarians were antisemitic enough. But this teacher came from that background and she was not only an antisemite, she was out-and-out Fascist and a Nazi. I was the best student in the class, and she thwarted my effort of trying. I realized later that I could draw... She taught writing and drawing and she always ridiculed me in front of the class... When I went into this class, I froze. I could not draw a line. She was so mean to me. She was a sadist. She hit my hand. She ridiculed me. She said, "This is the bright one, the best student in the school; look how she draws a line," and everybody started to laugh. "Look at her books, how she writes." Even if I would be Picasso, I couldn't do anything there.

JF: Did she specifically say that you were Jewish?

EB: Oh, yes.

JF: She said this?

EB: Oh, yes. Sure.

JF: What did she say?

EB: She was always telling about the Jews how they killed Christ and the Jews are bad and the Jews are shylocks and the Jews are this and the Jews are that. She was indoctrinating the class and starting and instigating, brainwashing the children.

JF: Did you see a change in your classmates?

EB: After class always fights broke out because we were carrying the big boards, you know, when we draw. The art boards and they were heavy boards and we had to carry them in our portfolio cases. So we went out of the door and the Christian children were lining up and with their rulers and with their boards and they started to hit the Jewish girls, except me. They never touched me because I stood up and I stood in the door and I said, "Well, that's nice. You are brave Hungarians, hitting 30 against the four little girls! You have to be very proud! Now, you hit me!" They said, "We will not touch you because you are not Jewish." I said, "I am more Jewish than any of those. You just start with me."

JF: Why did they say that you were not Jewish?

EB: I don't know. You see, they needed me. If they needed a good... There were the tests, the written tests. They didn't know how to speak German and I was the best in

German. If they needed a good composition they had to turn to me, to make their composition, to help them. But, maybe that wasn't the point, because there were other bright kids, Christian bright kids. Not everyone did that, not everyone.

JF: Not everyone stood up to them.

EB: They didn't hit us. Not everyone of the Christian children did that. There was a group.

JF: A certain group. What about the other kids that didn't do that, did they actively befriend you?

EB: Yes, they didn't protect us, but they were friends and they didn't turn away.

JF: Were you able to play in their homes, and were you invited to their houses?

EB: Yes, even the antisemitic ones. They had Jewish friends. One of the biggest ones, you know, the Arrow Cross—that's the equivalent of the German Brown Shirts and we had the Green Shirts and they were more sadistic. If anybody could be more sadistic than the Germans they were the Hungarian Arrow Cross. And these girls had the Arrow Cross emblems and they were sticking it on their tables and their work sheets and everywhere. And they were active. It was...

JF: Did they have a youth group?

EB: They had a youth group and they liked it, and they were part of it and what was important, one of the leaders of this group at this school had...her best friend was one of the Jewish girls. They always played together, they went together.

JF: How do you understand this dichotomy? Do you think that these girls who were part of this Nazi youth group actually believed what they were hearing in the group?

EB: Yes, they glamorized it. They thought...look, the formative years are very important and you can brainwash anybody. They said, "Look, the Jews are doing so well. They are parasites, they are eating up our lands. They have the lands. They took the land away from us. They are landowners." Why are they landowners? They were money lenders and lent money to the Hungarian aristocrats and the Hungarian people who owned the land before and they gambled their lives away and the Jews worked hard and they lent them the money. They couldn't pay them back so they lost the land or they sold the land; the Jews worked all their lives and they didn't gamble away or drink away, or squander it away. They bought it. They couldn't stand it. The industrialists were Jews. There were certain professions that the Christians wouldn't touch because it was beneath them, like, having a bar or a tavern. Most of them were Jewish and they made money on liquor, but they worked hard. So later on they did something else. The Emancipation came in the 1800s—in the middle 1800s—1862, I guess, the Jews were emancipated so they went to the universities. They were studious and most of the doctors became Jews [perhaps she means "most of those becoming doctors were Jews."] The universities were full of Jews until after the First War and then they had the *numerus clausus* and just 6% of the Jews could attend. Later on, we couldn't even go to medical school or other schools—my age group. Not mine, but older than me because after the war I could go. So, they thought that the Jews were eating up everything. We had a depression, like you had it in America, so you needed a scapegoat and Hitler felt that the Jews were the scapegoat.

JF: Do you think that these children believed this information?

EB: Absolutely, because it came from the teachers, the parents and their elders.

JF: How, then, were they then able to be friends with these Jews that you were describing? You said that they had them in their home. How did they fit that together?

EB: Human nature.

JF: And the parents were accepting of the Jewish kids coming home?

EB: Yes, to play. They were antisemitic, but they accepted; they had Jewish friends, too. Do you know what they always said to my parents, what I heard, and I don't buy it and I hate it? They said, "Oh, you are different, you are not like the other Jews." Every Christian had their own Jews, their own home Jews. Even Horthy had a Jewish wife and his son married a Jewish girl. One of his sons. His best bridge partners and buddies were Jews who were exterminated in a concentration camp, but they were his buddies.

JF: These were the exceptions. Everyone had exceptions.

EB: And his granddaughter was working for Allied⁸ [unclear] in Switzerland.

JF: His children were raised as Jews, then, by his wife?

EB: No, his wife was converted.

JF: She converted.

EB: Her parents, or her...I don't know, but everybody knows that she was of Jewish origin.

JF: But his grandchild...

EB: Nobody is Jewish in that family. His son, who is alive—one was killed by the Germans, that draw us into the war, and they said that the Russians killed him, but the Germans killed him—he was a prisoner of the Gestapo—his son was always very involved with the Jewish community. All of his friends were Jewish. One of my teachers was his friend and he was the Ambassador of Hungary to Brazil and this teacher taught at the Jewish *Gymnasium*, was a poet and a translator of Portuguese and he took him out to Brazil and he escaped this fascism of the German occupation. But he was caught by the Germans, his son, and he was put in the concentration camp. He married a Jewish girl, whose father was one of the biggest textile industrialists, Goldberger, who died in the concentration camp in Dachau.

JF: What kind of information did you have at that point about what was going on in the rest of Europe?

EB: We had all of the information and you know, the Hungarian mind is that we know everything better than anybody. We read between the lines, and whenever they misinformed us we always read in between... By that time the press was very liberal, mostly in Jewish hands, and we got the information. We had the very bloody Nazi papers also, but the good information... And we had the radio, the BBC, and even later when it was not allowed to listen, but everybody did.

JF: And what did your mother and your stepfather discuss? Did they ever talk about leaving? Did they think that it would come to Hungary?

⁸ Possibly Joint Distribution Committee.

EB: My stepfather said I am a Hungarian first, foremost and always. It couldn't happen. I'm not a Galitsyaner, a Polish Jew, or Czechoslovakian or anybody—it couldn't happen in Hungary. My mother, who was coming from Transylvania and had more experience and more identity because my stepfather is coming from another kind of background—he was not religious at all and he did everything for mother, but that was it...

JF: Both times she had the same situation, sort of?

[Laughter]

EB: My mother said “I would like to leave”, but they didn't make any move and even in the last minute when my stepfather was offered false papers, Gentile papers, he said, “Oh, I would not do that. I am Hungarian.” And that what took him to Mauthausen and...

JF: He died.

EB: No, he came back from Mauthausen after typhoid fever and everything and the labor camp and beating. He was a Hungarian Jew all right. He didn't come to America because he was a Hungarian.

JF: Did you think that the family should have left at that time?

EB: Oh, sure.

JF: Your feeling at that time was that your family should be getting out?

EB: Sure.

JF: Was it the kind of situation where you could talk to your parents about it?

EB: Look, it was too late. We didn't have any place to go when the Germans took over. This was the last spot. It was 1944.

JF: Before 1944, did you feel that you should be leaving?

EB: I didn't know. I didn't have any feeling about that.

JF: Did you feel scared? Did you feel that the Germans were going to move in?

EB: I wasn't concerned with that. I was studying. I had my own life. I really...

JF: You saw it as something that was outside of you.

EB: Yes. We were in a situation we couldn't help. I didn't think about anything. I did what my parents did and my main aim was, by that time I was so involved in my school...I went to school at 7:00 in the morning and I came home at 6:00 in the evening. I had lots of homework besides private tutors, Saturdays and Sundays, my exercises and mountain climbing and everything to have a very rounded education. My mother was emphasizing always on languages and other extra-curricular things. So, I was so overrun and I was an avid reader. And we had our own group. And even everything was, we were chopped like, you know, the salami, that you slice, one and one and finally it goes out. That is what happened to Hungary. Hitler chopped us up and the fascism chopped us up. We were eased out of our businesses and we lost jobs. I was in a Jewish *Gymnasium*. Everybody was in a bad situation by that time, so...

JF: You are talking about 1944, or are you talking about earlier...?

EB: 1942, '43, or '44.

JF: So, you saw the families that you knew, their businesses were taken away...

EB: It got worse and worse, yes. You couldn't practice law by that time. The businesses had to have a Christian manager, like, my stepfather had to have a Christian "straw man"⁹ for his business because you couldn't get furniture, you couldn't get supplies. It was getting worse and worse. You couldn't buy this... There was a food shortage. Everybody was in the same situation. We were just studying and preparing ourselves to be super human in our school because I attended a special class in a special school. This was after the public school...

JF: After the public school...

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Eva Bentley on March 18, 1985 with Josey Fisher. The address is [given]. Mrs. Bentley, could you continue with your description of where you were in school at this time? You had been in a Jewish *Gymnasium*.

EB: After the public school, they enacted a law in 1940 which was set [?], a *numerus clausus* even for the *Gymnasium* for higher education. The Jewish children, after elementary school they had a limitation just like at the university. You had to be a very good student. Your grades had to be very good and besides that, they allowed a certain amount of children, 6% Jewish children, to enter the *Gymnasium*. Now, with my grades, I could attend any public school, any Christian school, but by that time I was so fed up with my Christian schoolmates, who singled me out being non-Jewish and singled out for being Jewish and hitting them, I hated that atmosphere. I didn't want to be a part of anything where Christian kids were involved, or Christian teachers.

JF: Now, this was 1940 that you are talking about and you are seeing a considerable difference, then, in the nature of the classroom from your...

EB: From my very early...

JF: Even within the last four to five years before this time, and you had been in a public school after your move with your new father...

EB: From second grade.

JF: From second grade on and you are talking about this need to change schools at that point—where there was this *numerus clausus*.

EB: Yes, and they established in the Jewish *Gymnasium* they were very much aware... They enacted a law that the Jewish kids had to learn some crafts. Either they became mechanics, the boys, or this is examples—and the girls either seamstresses, or whatever, but not the higher education, not the *Gymnasium*, and not what was necessary to have a degree to go to the university. It was closed and they started to close everything front of us, so the Jewish *Gymnasium* had 800 pupils. We had schools all over the country and they decided to establish a certain school which one will teach us the *Gymnasium* subjects plus subjects that we can use. Like learning how to design, how to sew, learning business

⁹ *Strohmann* - straw man is a business owner in name only, i.e. the business is owned by an Aryan.

school, like accounting, and languages, so they combined three or four different types of school systems which what they thought we can benefit by when we graduate. And most of the university professors who were Jews, they were fired from the universities. A Jew couldn't be a university professor. A Jew couldn't be a *Gymnasium* teacher. They were all fired because of the Nuremberg Law, so they realized that the professors being hired by the Jewish community center who was the head of that Jewish *Gymnasium* and they became *Gymnasium* teachers. So they decided to establish a experimental school that they are going to teach exceptionally the bright children and they selected from—you could apply from all over the country, you had to have the basic. You had to be an excellent student. You had to have your credits. Most of the parents could afford this because it was very expensive experiment to set up this school system with machines and with everything, so the parents had to be able to support the school, beside the usual fee that was always in private schools. It had an extra amount so you had to have ability to support the school beside that.

JF: This was the experimental school that you were referring to before.

EB: Yes, and by the percentage how much we paid, they allowed a couple of children who couldn't pay but they were excellent students. So, we didn't exclude the poor ones. It was how much we could afford and nobody knew who paid and who didn't. So, what happened? There was 1000 of us who applied from the country in that point. Now, they gave the test that was the equivalent with the test college tests here, I guess, and 40 of us passed the test from the 1000, and I was one of them. We learned English in that school. We learned English shorthand, what I don't know any more. We graduated simultaneously in English and in Hungarian. It was a tremendous stress put on us. We went to the school and the classes started at 8:00, but we went earlier when we had tests. Because they experimented with us and they thought that they could put all of the knowledge into us that they taught at the universities and they really worked us to the bones, so six of us got nervous breakdowns. They couldn't finish and after the first year they left the school and then two more, so 32 of us finished. Everybody was in a [unclear] under stress and it was such a stress that you didn't have time for anything—and it was a good point, too, because as you asked me what was my thinking about leaving the country. We didn't have time to think about our private life. We worked.

JF: Why do you think the stress was that great? What do you think the heads of the school were trying to do?

EB: They were in love, probably, with the German idea of the supermen, because after the war, they ceased the school system. They said that you cannot bring up the elite. This was a very elitist idea. It didn't work, it really didn't work. It was too much. Like, I have lots of knowledge, but I don't master anything.

JF: You were how old when you graduated from this?

EB: I was 17-and-a-half or 18 years old.

JF: It was the equivalent of a university?

EB: Is equivalent of a Bachelor Degree, of a college bachelor degree, because I have friends, see, who came out, one of my friends is at Columbia. She is on the faculty, and her degree—and that is why I know what our degree means. Because I have several

friends from the school who have different... With this school degree and not going here to the university, they have different kinds of professional positions. This one, whom I'm referring to at Columbia, this friend of mine came out. Right after the war, her parents sent her out, and her degree was the equivalent with a Bachelor's degree, and she got her Master's degree and she is doing the research on Alzheimer's disease. I have other friends in the West coast who are teaching retarded children with this degree. In Montreal, [unclear]. Because we learn special therapy classes we had, and teaching classes also. I have friends who are public librarians in Canada, with this degree. So...who didn't go and change the degrees and they didn't go for their Masters. At home, most of them they finished and they went to the universities and got their doctorates.

JF: This school was operating all the way through the end of the war?

EB: It was operating, yes, and it closed in '44 and it opened again, and it was in operation until '45, and then the regime closed it after the war because they said that it is an impossible task and you cannot do it.

JF: But during 1944, during the German occupation, it was operating?

EB: It closed after the German occupation and then it reopened after.

JF: After the war was over?

EB: The war wasn't over overall. They reopened after the Russian take-over when the Russians came in and took over Hungary and the next semester it opened. That's when all the schools opened. And then when we had the peace, it was no need for this type of school any more.

JF: Why do you say that?

EB: It was a need that created this school. The need was there. We couldn't go to the university and it was a waste of brain power what the Jews cannot tolerate. And the other thing—giving us a craft to make a living under very hard circumstances.

JF: It was for boys and girls?

EB: Yes. The boys were separate. In the private schools, I never went to school where I had boys. We were just girls, and the boys. But the boys' school was equivalent. They had the Jewish boys and the Jewish girls school.

JF: Did you have discussion in the school about what was going on politically?

EB: Oh, sure. Always. Always. [unclear] We sang the British hymn and the American, and we were dreaming about it. We read in English and we translated. And we were happy.

JF: Some of the families, I would think, left during the time that...

EB: During that time you couldn't...

JF: You are talking about '44?

EB: Nobody could leave.

JF: Before that.

EB: Nobody. Nobody, because we were locked in. We were already surrendered. Austria was under Hitler, Czechoslovakia, Poland, then Yugoslavia. We were surrendered with the Germans. We couldn't escape. We were in a cage.

JF: There was no way of anybody getting out?

EB: Getting out... Some people did with the Zionist movement, with the underground. They went to Rumania and Bulgaria, and from there they took the famous boats that were sunk and they were rat holes. Some people went out and died, but nobody could escape. Not the Hungarians. We were the last ones and were surrounded. The geographical situation was such that we were a dry, small land in the middle of this German ocean. Ocean, I mean, just an allegory, because we are surrounded, by dry land, by the Germans.

JF: Can you tell me about the German occupation?

EB: It's going to be 41 years tomorrow. March 19th. We thought the war was going to end. It was a very hard time for Hungary because most of the land was already in labor camps, and dying and nobody... Most of the people didn't have jobs, the Jewish people.

JF: What about your stepfather?

EB: We had our store because my stepfather had Gentile partners and under their name he operated the store.

JF: Under their name he operated the store. But financially, he was in partnership with them?

EB: Yes, he managed it and he was giving most of his shares to them, but we could operate it and we could live, under the circumstances, to compare with other cities, very well. But nobody lived well. You always have to see the circumstances. We had our home, we had our clothing and we had our summer vacations, still. We went to theaters.

JF: All the way through the '40s.

EB: Yes. We couldn't go in a car so my stepfather rented a car, but that was not the average life. Still, I had my English textiles, the woolens, because mother ordered it from years before and we always went to the [unclear] when the season started to make the clothes. We still had that. Now, when I learned how other people suffered those times and later on I suffered the same way, or maybe even worse, then I realized that we lived a charmed life, while everybody was suffering around us, without knowing it really.

JF: This was until the occupation?

EB: Yes, and that is why we have to come out in the open because we are so involved with ourselves in our lives and we don't look around and we don't think so that it can hit us.

JF: You think that it was more shocking for you because you had not had a lead-in before the occupation?

EB: We didn't want to have the lead-in, because I remember when the Polish Jews were escaping in 1940 and '41, coming across the border and the Jewish community center sent out to Jewish homes to give them food and shelter and clothing, it was our duty. They came to our home, too, and I remember one incident. I opened the entry hall door and there was two men and they had their papers. Because they always get a little slip of paper for the community center that so-and-so is assigned to you—so they came over and they spoke German and mother said, "O.K., let's feed them," but she didn't invite them into the house.

JF: You mean that she didn't invite them to stay with you?

EB: They had another place to stay. They had schools and shelters because they were in transit. They were going somewhere, they were trying, they know what they were doing. Some were stuck in Hungary. But they scattered with false papers. They know what was coming, but we didn't, and they were just coming for dinner or for clothes and then a new group came and a new group came.

JF: And what?

EB: Let me tell you about this incident, what is in my mind. You always have to tell one incident because that really points out the real illness underneath and the self-centeredness. Mother said, "Oh, give..." She was always giving with food and with everything. And that's our self-centeredness... Mother gave the food from our table. She said, "Take it out to them and let them sit outside in the hallway, outside on the steps, you know."

JF: On the steps?

EB: Yes, and I gave them the food and the man was hungry and angry and he took the bowl of soup or whatever I gave him, and I was just a little girl and he said to me, "You Hungarian Jews, you stink. You think you are so mighty. I had a home a week ago, like yours, even bigger, and I am not good enough to sit at your table. You are giving it out to me like a beggar. [unclear] It's coming to you! I don't want your food!" And he throw the dishes down and they run away. I never forget. He said, "It's coming to you and you deserve it!" [very agitated]

JF: You must have had such an upsurge of feeling after that.

EB: I still have it. I see his eyes, I see his face, and when it happened to us, I said, "Oh, yes, we deserved it."

JF: How did you feel about your mother's decision to handle it that way, at the time, then?

EB: I felt very bad about it.

JF: You think she should have done differently, then?

EB: Yes, because you see what happened, many times after and during and before, if they came and mother wasn't, nobody was home. Like once, the doorbell rang and a very beautiful young man—I was a little girl and this young man was *so* beautiful, standing in the doorway and he spoke, you know. Luck was that at that time I spoke German fluently, but I wanted to forget and I do. He said to me that he was looking for a neighbor of ours who was Jewish, but she was converted and she always said that she was not Jewish. So this young man came and said, "I am a friend of so-and-so and they used to spend a vacation... My parents had a summer home in Innsbruck, and she used to spend her vacation there—they had a pension, you know, it was that kind of thing, and our train was going to one of the concentration camps." That was the first time I heard about concentration camp. He said that he escaped from the train, from the wagons.

JF: This was in what year, do you think?

EB: I don't know, I don't know exactly, before the German occupation. Could be '42, '43, I don't know. He was escaping from one of the wagons, because he said he was hiding. He was blonde and blue-eyed, typical Aryan-looking, and he said, "I have just this

clothes that I have on. They caught me on the street and they put me in this wagon train and I know that we are heading to the concentration camp, and I don't have food or anything to wear." I said, "You know what? Come in," and I was shaking because it was a strange man and nobody was home and I took out from the closet one suit of my father's and shoes and everything and I said, "Why don't you go to the powder room and change here?" But I was so scared. Letting in a strange young man, anybody could come in at that time and I always was told not to open the door, not to let anybody in and you know...[unclear] And he said, "Isn't Mrs. Shank home? She knows me; she spent summers there and she said that she cannot do anything for me because she is not Jewish and she does not want to get involved with an escapee!" That's Hungarian Jews for you. So I didn't tell mother when they came home and they never missed the suit or that shirt or anything because my stepfather had a million of anything.

JF: They didn't want to get involved.

EB: No.

JF: They also didn't feel that it would happen to them.

EB: Oh yes, it wouldn't happen to them. They are superb. [long pause] Would you like me to continue?

JF: Can you?

EB: Yes.

JF: Can you tell me any more incidents, any particular incidents like this that you would like to record?

EB: This kind of incidents, before it happened to us? Probably I have a million, but right now I have a blockage.

JF: Do you think that there were other Jewish families that you knew that handled it in a different way?

EB: Yes, I am sure. I can give you a book about the other part other families. A friend of mine whose family was converted Jews—they were the biggest landowners in the southern part of Hungary, and one of the uncles was a friend of Horthy's brother. Horthy was [unclear] and his brother was one of the generals and, you know, as I told you, the Hungarian Jews, the gentry Jews, were very mixed with the aristocracy in their marriages and what not. We were just like the American Jews are now with inter-marriages and interwoven because [unclear] education, and they were intermingled. So he was called in because that time already the forced labor camps started for the Jews. A Jew couldn't be an officer or a Jew couldn't be in the army, but they wanted them to be involved, so they had these forced labor camps or they became ambulance chauffeurs. He became an ambulance chauffeur for the front until the general took him out and he came back home. By that time, we were in war with Russia and he was at the front. The front was in Poland and he went there and what he has seen it was unbelievable. They were already killing the Jews there in Poland. They were taking Hungarian Jews out of Hungary who lived in Hungary for 100-150 years—one of my classmates—but they were Polish origin so the Hungarians said that they are not real Hungarians and they were deported. And they shot... they had to dig their own grave and they were shot, so this man and all those Hungarian Jews who were with

ambulances tried to help them and whomever they can pick up in the ambulance, they put it in the ambulance and brought it back to Hungary. And he came home and he stood at the door. At that time my parents, my friends' parents were one of those aristocratic Jews who lived in a big mansion and they had butlers and footmen and whatever, and they still maintained that type of life in the '40s—came home from this dreadful hell, and he stood at the door—it was lunch time in the dining room, and they were served with the butler and with the maid and he said, "How could you eat? Do you not know what is going on outside in this world?" He was horrified. He lives in Vancouver now, British Columbia, this man.

JF: A friend of your parents?

EB: No, this was a friend of mine, a so-called boyfriend of mine whose parents and him, they were sitting at a table and his uncle was coming back—he was an ambulance driver—a friend of Horthy's—he was a gentry Jew, he still is—and he came back because you know, with his connections, he was released from his duties, from the front, but he saw this what was happening there so he came back [unclear] and the horror was there, the contrast that what he left behind him and his coming home and the family seated—at that mansion and the servants around them and serving the plates and he just couldn't understand it.

JF: Was this story relayed to you by...?

EB: By him the uncle, here in Los Angeles, and I have a book that he is written about and I will give it to you. This family was aware of lots of things and did a lot of good things but, unfortunately, they went to Auschwitz and nobody came back except this uncle who was saved and I will tell you how. But he didn't go to Auschwitz. The family and the boyfriend, everybody was killed in Auschwitz, and they were converted Hungarian Jews who gave to the Catholic in that time. They built a church and they built a hospital for the Catholics and the same time the father—who was a converted doctor [?] [unclear]—converted, but at the same time, he gave double the amount to the Jewish community. Even when he was converted. They had to, you see, because they rented lands from the [unclear]—that's the Catholic Brotherhood—very rich in Hungary and they were landowners. Besides that, they rented the land, leased the land, at least 20,000 acres, and from the Esterhazys, they managed their lands besides their own, so to fit in and not to lose that, they converted. But the father, Dr. Patko [phonetic] never wanted to convert, not even for that, but his wife was the one who wanted to blend in and convert, and she converted the whole family.

JF: So, she didn't actually convert, then?

EB: Not in his house.

JF: I see.

EB: Because he was the one—he went every Yom Kippur, even when he was converted, to the *shul*.

JF: And they, as converts, were still taken to Auschwitz?

EB: Oh, yes. [unclear], he went off to Hungary because of them to be accepted, and meantime, they were sent to the concentration camp to... The Primate, the Hungarian Primate, who was not a philo-Semite by any means, but he wanted to save this family and he did lots of good things. But he was not really philo-Semite. The controversy—what you

are asking me—that they were aware. In certain respects, this boyfriend of mine, before he was taken to Auschwitz, knew that he was going to die, and they had gas chambers because most of his friends were Gentiles and he knew from them. Even in that hospital—he was a medical student—even in that hospital he couldn't continue his studies because he was Jewish regardless he was converted. He was converted back to Judaism because that was my demand that if I ever married him, he has to be a Jew.

JF: Was he willing to do that?

EB: Yes, it wouldn't be a problem. That's what his uncle told me. He said it would never be a problem. And he's keeping the *yahrzeit* of his. When he [unclear] that he was gassed in Auschwitz and he wrote me a letter about it when he is not going to be here. I have to light a candle. So be it.

JF: What happened when the Germans came in? You are talking about the families, including your own, who are denying that it could possibly affect them. What happened when the Germans came in?

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

EVA BENTLEY [3-1-33]

Tape two, side two:

JF: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Eva Bentley. We were talking about the beginning of the German occupation.

EB: The German occupation took place in March 19, 1944. I been walking on the street with my friend and across the Opera House in Budapest, a strange man came over to us and said, "Girls, what are you doing on the street? You better go home. The Germans took over Hungary." So, we ran to the telephone and called our parents right away from the first public telephone booth and we went home. After that on the streets and everywhere we had placards telling what the Jews are supposed to do. They had to report to the squadron captain of the street, because they had [unclear] squadron...and when the sirens came out we had to go to the cellars, and they were the squadron leaders, so they had defense regulations and we had the Jewish community center and they were, we were supposed to report there and everybody who was Jewish had to take certain measures. I don't know the sequences and when and what they happened, but I know what happened. I don't know when, the day.

JF: Let me ask you something at this point. What was your parents' reaction? This was not supposed to happen to them and it had happened. Do you recall?

EB: Everybody was in a shock, and I remember my aunt who lived in outskirts in Budapest, this was New Pest, they called that suburb, and she was my mother's sister, the youngest sister, with my cousin, who, at that time was 11 years old. And she came in and she said that she knows lots of Czechoslovakian Jews who escaped from Czechoslovakia and they had false identity papers and if we want some, she advised us to get together and buy some papers and cover ourselves. And my parents did not want to know, and my father, my stepfather, didn't want to know about that. He said he won't go that way; he's not going to cheat. And that was one aspect. And then, some other people came and said that you better get some papers, false papers, Gentile identification papers. "We can get it for you." You know, they were doing it for money, and for [unclear].

JF: These were non-Jews?

EB: Jews who could get them.

JF: Your father said "No" again.

EB: "No," again.

JF: Do you think he was aware of what was going on to Jews in other parts of Europe?

EB: It was amazing how much we were in the dark about that. We didn't know about gas chambers. We thought the wagons and all of those things that was going on in different parts of the country... They started to gather the people in ghettos—that was the first thing in the countryside, and by May they started the deportation. We believed that they were replaced, relocated, to going to work and they covered it so much, and the Jewish elders in the Jewish community center—they were cooperating with the Nazis because of compromise or necessity, but all kind of reasons...and they didn't advise us, they didn't warn us, they didn't tell us, "You are in danger and everybody can do whatever

they could do,” because they were afraid of a revolution or fighting. We were a well-organized, law-abiding, very assimilated and educated society and that was our downfall.

JF: Did you think that the elders knew any more than you did?

EB: Yes. It came out in documentation. Professor Braun, who wrote about the genocide about the Hungarian Jews...his book is explicit about that. So first, they put placards on the street that certain age group has to report—men—for labor and they were sent to the labor camps. And other placards said that the Jews have to leave their homes and go to certain designated houses to move in. A family can have one bed and so much square meter place to live. So, they put us together with two families in one room and that was the designated yellow star houses. The Jews have to, every Jew over five years old has to wear a yellow star on the left side of the coat and then, after that in certain hours you can go out. We had rationing of milk and butter and a Jew couldn't have more than 10 grams of butter for two weeks and a certain amount of milk, and most of the time even if you lined up for milk—like my mother for my sister who was 20-some months old—they kicked her out. They didn't give her the butter or the milk unless she bribed with money or with jewelry. The stores were taken away and closed up or Gentiles stepped in and they moved into our homes. We could take certain furniture and a certain amount of clothing.

JF: What happened to your family?

EB: First, my second father had to report to a labor camp. Then he was stationed at the airport and they were bombing there so they had to clear it out. They were not allowed to go down to the shelter, the Jewish people. They had to clear the remains of the bombing and during the raids they had to stay there and whoever were killed were killed. Then we had to move into this yellow star house and because we had a little bit more money than... Mother wouldn't move into anybody's house where the room wasn't freshly painted and cleaned, so we painted it and we cleaned it and we managed to have a whole room for three of us; for mother, my sister and me.

JF: You had the time, they gave you the time to paint it?

EB: Yes. We painted it... We cleaned the bath. We cleaned the kitchen because my mother was an immaculate woman and she wouldn't move into a place when it was not absolutely clean, spotless. Another family was in the other room. It was a young woman, it was a smaller room and she also arranged it, so we moved in and another lady whose husband was a Gentile who came just to register there because of the law, but her husband most of the time took her out, so we weren't crowded as other people. This was a two-room apartment basically, but we had one bathroom and a kitchen and it was an unusually good situation because we bartered for money and this other woman whose husband was in the labor camp, by that time he was already dead, but we didn't know it—in the Ukrainians in the Russian front—had a baby also the same as my sister. She was a young woman and she got the smaller room and she had a day bed there and a little crib for her baby and a little hot stove and we used the kitchen together and we had the larger room which one we had a sofa bed where my mother and I slept and a crib for my sister and we had some furniture and we had the kitchen. So mother always managed. She had

the ladies from the farmer's market who always sent her something because she paid for it, so we had food and she had the goose liver, they sent her geese and she kept the goose fat and she put the goose part in that to keep it because she was afraid that she cannot feed us if she didn't have that.

JF: So, if you had money you could buy food above and beyond...

EB: For a certain time, but you were limited to get out of the house between certain hours and that was cutting shorter and shorter and if you went shopping and you had the yellow star, they wouldn't give you the food. So this certain farmer that came to the yellow star house sometimes, they robbed you. If you could afford it you could and so...

JF: Oh, so they came to the house?

EB: Sometimes, and my mother had good connection because we lived in the same place for a very long time and they know her and she was a good customer and so, she managed. She managed somehow.

JF: What happened with your house?

EB: It was given to a Gentile couple. They moved in.

JF: And your possessions?

EB: We could move out our possessions, certain possessions; they let us certain possessions to move out and we put it at an upholsterer who worked for my father. He was a Jewish man, and in his house where he worked his... and in his cellar he put it away and at that house nobody bothered belongings, and we took certain things with us to the yellow star house. Finally, the bombing was going on and the war was escalating. The Russians were coming very, very close, and Horthy, who was our regent, declared on October 15, that he is joining the Allies and that was the biggest mistake that he made because it was too late. He was always vacillating between Hitler and the Allies, and when he made up his mind, it was already too late and most of his people in the government were fascists and on Hitler's part, and Hitler knew about it and he asked him over to visit him in Germany and he put him under arrest and he never came back. So the Arrow Cross took over, and the Arrow Cross government is made out of riff-raffs and absolute killers.

So that was the 15th of October and on the 16th of October, the massacre began in Budapest. I am talking about Budapest, but you asked me about the occupation. I have to tell you that in different parts of the country, the deportation was already closed by August and they already were transported in cattle cars, the Hungarians except Budapest, the Jews in Budapest.

JF: Why was that?

EB: Because Horthy...they had a very good connection to Horthy, because as I told you, lots of his friends were Jewish and he was convinced that if he was keeping the Jews in Budapest alive [unclear] because we had most of our men in the labor camps— whoever remained there, he had a good point with the Allies, and somehow they convinced him of that. And by that time they couldn't deport us to Auschwitz because everything was bombed out. The train connections were bombed in Upper Silesia and in Czechoslovakia, so they had to deport and detour. The transports couldn't go to Ausch-

witz, they went to Austria instead of Auschwitz and they went to Germany instead of Auschwitz, even in the last minute after October, from Budapest. So I am not talking about the total Hungarian population. I am talking about Budapest. You have to understand that. What I am aware of and I can give you a picture of what happened in Budapest on October the 15th after he declared that he is getting out of the war and he's not on the Axis side. The Arrow Cross took over. And on the 16th of October the massacre of Budapest Jews began. What happened—the Arrow Cross and some of the S.S. and S.A. came to the houses. We were still in the yellow star houses and took the people out and killed the children and killed the people. Unbelievable torture was going on. On the 16th of October, this is my personal story. Mother got very restless and she got very afraid for us, so she packed a little bag and she dressed my sister up in two outfits. It was a cold fall. I dressed and I had my school case, an attaché case in my hand and we decided that we would look up some of our Christian friends to hide us, and we went on the streets. We took off our yellow star. We didn't have any papers with us, but we passed the Arrow Cross guards and they looked at us, but we went by. We arrived at this friend's house and we asked for shelter and she said that she cannot have us and that we should go back to our home. And we were wandering on the street and nobody would take us in, so we had to go back to the yellow star house. On our way back, we ran across a [unclear] an Arrow Cross [unclear] and picked us up and took us to the precinct. We couldn't talk them out of it and they put us in jail.

Now, the police were quite nice to us. When we arrived at the precinct, we were seeing lots of friends of ours, Jewish friends there, and everything was filled with people. And they were taking their vital statistics down and when they came to us, and it was our turn to give our vital statistics, the sergeant, the police sergeant and then a plainclothes detective, two plainclothes men came down and looked at us and they went back to the sergeant and they said to us, "You just go back to the cell and later on we will come to get you. We are not taking statistics down." We really didn't know what was happening, and they were clearing the people out. They were taking them in police cars and later on we heard they were put in wagons and they went to some of the concentration camps and they were gassed. They never came back. The whole wagon went to be gassed, and we were there. And there was another lady whom I know through a friend of mine, a friend of my mother's who was this lady's friend, and we were talking and the detectives, and sergeant thought she was with us, that she belonged to our family. I had never seen those policemen before or those detectives before, and they hadn't seen us before either. So, finally, when they cleared everybody out, it was midnight, and they came over and they said that it is your turn, and then the two uniformed policemen and the two detectives said, "Now, where do you live?" And we said that we are in this yellow star house and we have to go back there and they said, "Don't you have any place to go where you will be safe?" And we said, "No, nobody is taking us in and we have to go back there." And then they asked the other lady, "Do you live with them?" And she said, "No," and my mother said, "Yes, she does. She is coming with us. She doesn't have," she didn't, a place to go any more. So she came with us, and they didn't talk too much, the policemen,

but they said, "On the street if we run into a patrol of Arrow Cross, we will tell them we are taking you to interrogation to the Parliament, to the Arrow Cross headquarters, and you just shut up and don't say a word." So, they took us back; and they saved our lives.

JF: Why do you think they were so sympathetic to you?

EB: They were good people and they saved our lives. They just took us back. Four strangers. They just couldn't stand it any more and that is what they said. They just cannot stand it what these hoodlums are doing, what was everybody, and whatever they can do, they do. And they did it. After the war, when you had to vouch for people what they were doing with the police and with certain governmental functions, mother went and vouched for them, because they really saved our lives, for nothing. Just out of the goodness of their hearts.

JF: All the other people that day had been shipped off and this was the end of their day, and this was one more family.

EB: We had a friend and we know them very well, and they were cleared and others we know, because the detectives and the policemen told us because they followed it up and they told us what happened. So we went back and that was after midnight and so mother made a bath for us and we had a bath and this lady had a bath with us, and whatever mother left in the kitchen and in the icebox we ate and the whole house was very happy to see us, and in that yellow star house, they always nominated a house, they always had Christian people there and they could move out and they could get a better quarter from the Jews. And in that house most of the Christians didn't move out. They stayed in the yellow star house and they said, "This is our home. They were our neighbors, not all of them because we had Jewish neighbors, and we are not moving out because they were good before. They are good for us and we are staying in the yellow star house." And they stayed with us.

JF: Were these people that you knew?

EB: I didn't know them because it is a different house. I will tell you what happened to the house where we lived, and where I grew up, and Mother was good for the manager of the house, because it was an apartment house. Her son, he became the manager and he became an Arrow Cross man. His son reported me to Eichmann, to the S.S., and to the equivalent...that I was a spy, an English spy.

JF: This was a family from your own home?

EB: Before we moved to the yellow star house. I am not doing it in the periods that I should. I am going ahead of myself and I am not doing this part. Now, this part is important because what happened... They came out to investigate me. And...

JF: Who is they? Who came to interrogate you?

EB: They were the Hungarian Counter-Intelligence officers.

JF: So, they were Hungarian men?

EB: Two Hungarian Counter-Intelligence officers.

JF: And they worked under Eichmann?

EB: Yes, because by that time, I don't remember the name of the German, Weissmueller [phonetic] I guess, who was the governor at that time, the German gover-

nor, and everything belonged under the German protectorate so, the Counter-Intelligence was a branch of Eichmann's. They were a cooperating, not official branch. But its a cooperation and it was basically directed by Eichmann, who was residing in the Schwabe Mountain. That was the name of the mountain, and that was his headquarters, so the counter-intelligence always worked together with the Germans. And the counter-intelligence and the Jewish question was under Eichmann. Eichmann was the man who everybody reported to finally, so the counter-intelligence men came and they looked at me and said, "Are you Eva Wahrmann?" And I said, "Yes, I am." They said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "I am sure." They said, "You are a little girl," and they were looking for a *femme fatale*, for a spy, a woman, and they got this little girl who at that time had not even 98 pounds!

JF: Did they question you?

EB: Yes, certainly they did.

JF: Were they rough in any way in their questioning?

EB: No, no. They saw the whole thing. I don't know basically [unclear]. They showed me the papers. The whole thing started... It was a revenge and they were very nice and they said, "Now you disappear. You get some papers and disappear. You are in danger." Because they showed me...if I recognized the writing. Because the name was a false name. Whoever reported me didn't report it in their own name. They used a false name.

JF: So, at that point you didn't know...

EB: I know because of the writing and I remember... They showed me and I remembered the handwriting. They were extremely nice. They were absolutely nice. My mother was so shocked that she went in the kitchen and opened the gas because she wanted to commit suicide. She was so scared, and they ran in and they brought her back and they said, "Don't worry. This is a ridiculous thing and just don't worry." But they gave me an advice, and they said, "You get some papers. And even if you don't, you don't look Jewish, but get away from here. You have enemies and they are going to kill you. You have to get away, you cannot live in this house and you cannot stay here." And they went away. They said that the whole thing is ridiculous but, "The only thing what we are asking you to do, for two weeks you don't leave the house because we are going to report it, that we interrogated you and we put you under arrest and you are not here. After that you escape and you disappear."

JF: You were to be under house arrest?

EB: No, no. They were supposed to...

JF: They were supposed to have taken you and put you in prison?

EB: Yes, that is what they reported. Some people did things and I haven't seen them before and I haven't seen them after. They were good people. Now, it happened that I didn't go out for ten days, really, but I couldn't get away to leave my mother and leave my sister and we couldn't get anywhere, so I stayed and then we moved to that yellow star house. But for ten days nobody had seen me, so they didn't know if I was under arrest or not because these people were in the house. Now, what happened, the manager's

EVA BENTLEY [3-1-40]

wife, after the German occupation, came over and said to mother that the Germans were here looking for us and if mother gives them 10,000 *pengö*, then they can protect us. And mother told me. I came home that day and mother said to me, "You know, honey, that was Mrs. Seidler, that was the name of the woman, told me if I give her 10,000 *pengö* she will protect us, because the Germans came and asked how many Jewish families do you have in the house and what are they doing, who are they? But she can save us if I give her money." And I say, "Mother, this is blackmail, and she won't save us. She just wants to blackmail you and she won't do anything." And I went down to her and I said, "Look, Mrs. Seidler. Did you talk to those S.S. men? Since when are you talking German?" They speak fluent Hungarian. "They were speaking German," she says. "We were talking German." And I said, "Since when do you speak German?" And the German S.S. men wouldn't come to her and tell her that she take care of us for 10,000 dollar [*pengö*] and then nothing happens to us. And I said, "Well, you leave my mother alone and you won't get a penny from us." So, after that, that's what happened. So, when we moved to the yellow star house, which was a couple of houses down the street in the same block, the people were very nice there. They didn't know us, but they were very nice to everybody. The manager was a lovely woman and everybody was just really nice in that house.

JF: The manager was Christian?

EB: Christian. Yes, and you know, they were very nice people. In that house, as I told you when we came back—now I will go back to that point when we came back from the precinct, the next day there was a bombing raid, a big bombing raid. I didn't like to go down to the cellar and most of the Jews didn't, because we enjoyed it when it was bombing. That was the only time when we went up to the roof and we could breathe, and we were people and everybody was in the same shoes, so we didn't like to go down to the cellar, but we had to because the squadron captain said, "You have to go down. And I had such a premonition. I never, usually I'm, I wasn't afraid in my life. I didn't know what fear was, since my father told me not to fear anything. But that time I was just shaking. And I...had such a tremendous fear. And I told mother, "I don't know, Mommy, but I have such a fear something is going to happen to me today. I just don't know. It's just, I just, I just don't know." And after the raid we came up and I was knitting a little sweater for my sister. And around 6:00 in the afternoon, it was dark, dusk, we heard a tremendous noise. Because we had to lock the gates, because we weren't allowed to get out at all. To a certain [unclear] we can get out, and then we couldn't get out. We were locked in, in the yellow star house. And we heard a tremendous noise, like a dynamite going up, and that was it. Twenty-two S.S. men came in, with machine guns, guns, and hand grenades. They threw the hand grenades in through the doors, and they said, "All the Jews downstairs! You line up, you put your coat on, and go down!" So, we put our coat on and they lined us up on the street. The street lights were darkened because of the raids, the air raids.

Tape three, side one:

JF: This is tape three, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley, on March 18, 1985.

EB: They lined us up eight abreast and they surrounded us on both sides. They draw their guns and they had their machine guns out and they told the neighboring tenants and occupants of the building to go inside. They had to go inside anyway. After 6:00 nobody could go out the street any more. And across the yellow star house was the Protestants' church and the living quarters of the Protestant minister and his family. The man didn't go inside. He leaned out of his window with his wife and with his children, looking at us, and they let him be there. Then the S.S. men started shooting. First they shot their lights out, totally, the street lights. And then they started to shoot and saying things and, derogatory things about us. This lady, when we came home from the precinct, was standing beside my mother, between me and my mother, and when they started to shoot I asked her to change places with me. And I didn't realize one of the S.S. men had a gun drawn and had his machine gun pointed at me, from the back. And I didn't realize that. So he started to, when we changed places, he already shot. And he shot that lady. She had six bullets in her lungs, the whole lung and her heart came out from the back.

JF: Why...did you ask to change places with her?

EB: I said, "Now they are going to kill us. I'd like to stand beside my mother."

JF: Oh.

EB: And she said, "Of course."

JF: Mmm.

EB: And that was her downfall.

JF: And he didn't continue to shoot?

EB: Yes, he did. He continued to shoot, but Mother padded me the day before, and this day, too; when we went down to the air raid shelter I always had sardine cans and chocolate and everything on me because Mother said, "If anything happens, until we are dressed and they are coming for us, you have to have those foods because then I can feed you and Agi and we won't starve if they are taking us. Because they were always taking people to places. It was going on every minute. So we were aware of it. So I was such a skinny girl. And she padded me and nothing showed.

JF: I see.

EB: And I had all those sardine cans and canned foods and three pullovers and one culottes and under the culottes two panties.

JF: And the cans were stuffed inside your...

EB: I, and I had my winter coat on.

JF: Your shirt?

EB: So he continued shooting, and all those machine gun bullets came down on my breast and tore apart my coat, tore apart the cans of sardines, but didn't hit my heart. It went down.

JF: They were diverted? They, they...

EB: They were diverted by the can of foods, and the chocolates! Now what happened, he, the others started—it was a good game—so another one drew a gun and he

EVA BENTLEY [3-1-42]

shot me in the kidney. I got four shots in my kidney. Because I was so padded it didn't harm my kidney, it went above my kidney. Two bullets came out, two stayed there. At that time I didn't know what was it. I...went down and I was shot up. I was dead for a couple of seconds. So I was on the street, lying on the street. Mother wanted to know what happened to me. And they were shooting. They were constantly shooting, until they ran out of bullets and they refilled their gun and machine guns. That was the time when they had a little recess. So that time Mother tried to bend down. And when I came to myself, because I was unconscious and perhaps, I don't know how long, I told Mother. Mother said, "What's happening to you?" I said, "I am all right, Mother, don't worry. I'll be all right. I'll be all right." And so Mother bent down and one of them had a bayonet. They had the bayonets also. And he drew a bayonet and cut off my mother's coat. But by that time we were wearing winter coats. And Mother's winter coat, it was a fur-lined winter coat. So that saved her. And she had in her arm my sister, who was 22 months old, 20-some months old.

JF: So the bayonet went through the fur?

EB: Yeah...it just got stuck in the fur.

JF: It got stuck in the fur. And...

EB: So she wasn't harmed at all. And I was...

JF: Did this, did the man know that he had not harmed her?

EB: Look, it was dark.

JF: So he couldn't tell.

EB: He didn't know. It was such a confusion there, and so many people. And they were just shooting, and enjoying the killing.

JF: So he felt that he had injured her or whatever...

EB: He was in euphoria of that killing and killing.

JF: And he just went on to the next person.

EB: And he...just did his...he did, he shot, whomever. But what happened that time...the minister was seeing all of this and he was yelling, "That's good! You just kill those bastard Jews!" And he was enjoying it tremendously.

JF: The Hungarian minister.

EB: The Hungarian Protestant minister, and his family and his children. He said, "Now you see? That's the way to treat those bastard Jews! And when you grow up, you do it!"

JF: This is the minister from the church that you're...

EB: From the church.

JF: That you're describing.

EB: The Protestant church. Now, in the same town a man shows up. And it was a curfew. Nobody could be on the street except a doctor or...military personnel. And a man shows up in the fighting and...he says, "What's going on?" He opens his mouth. And the S.S. says, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm Doctor so-and-so." He said, "What are you doing here?" He tells the S.S. man, "You are shooting innocent children! And women, you are big military people. I am here to take care of it, take care of the wounded.

Even in the war we give first aid to our enemies. And you are killing.” “Don’t touch, those are Jews.” “Jews? Innocent, I don’t see any Jews. I see innocent women and babies here. Now you get those down to the first aid shelter and I’m going to take care of them!” They didn’t dare to do anything to that man. One man, against 22 armed men. He was another Hungarian Gentile.

JF: But they listened to him.

EB: Of course! He was alone, and the minister was enjoying himself. And this man, who was only...

JF: Why do you think they listened to him?

EB: Because he said, “If you want to shoot, shoot. Here, I am a man. Shoot me.”

JF: Mmm.

EB: And he gave first aid to me.

JF: This man.

EB: This man. Now after that I had to get to a hospital. Now Jews weren’t allowed in hospitals. We had our, the Jewish hospital, like the Mount Sinai. It was taken over by the military. They took over an old Jewish school, a high school, and that was our shelter or hospital, outside of the ghetto. By that time they were building the ghetto and everybody’s supposed to move from the ghetto to a week later, from the yellow star homes to the ghetto. They were cutting us down and down. And that hospital, so-called hospital, was working out from that school, outside of the ghetto’s gate. So they took me there. And we didn’t have any medicine. We didn’t have bed, enough beds. We didn’t have blankets. We didn’t have anything. We didn’t have food. And in that night, they brought in 180 serious wounds, gun wounds, because that was going on in different parts of the city, with the Arrow Cross and with the S.S. They were going around and doing that. That was the first night, when they started, and they were going around doing that for a long time, until the Russian took over...Budapest. So, they were treating people. The doctors didn’t have too much to operate with. They didn’t have themselves food. Most of the doctors weren’t there because after the proclamation of Horthy everybody left the hospital and they thought they are free. And now the new regime is starting, the war is over. So, the next day or, it was a day-and-a-half later of the proclamation when this whole horror began. We didn’t, the doctors couldn’t come back, even if they started, what we later learned, they were caught and they were killed and massacred, too. So whoever could slowly come back some way, they came back to help. But the others either were killed or they went into hiding. They couldn’t get out. So, I was on the floor without blankets and without anything for a week. And my kidney got damaged, so I couldn’t urinate. And when I started [to] urinate it was just blood coming out. And so I was operated and I stayed there. And then I saw the horror because everybody, whoever had been saved somehow, came in. And the stories were tremendous and...unbelievable.

EVA BENTLEY [3-1-44]

[tape off then on] The Russian Army was approaching Budapest. By November 6th they're supposed to be in Budapest, but they were stopped by Stalin and with other political reasons what we can read in the history books. So I'm not a historian. I am not going to record that. Because probably I will make mistakes there. But they were stopped. So they left plenty of time to the Arrow Cross people to go around and massacre the Jews of Budapest.

I'm just picking up the Jewish orphanage story. We had a Jewish orphanage with 200 orphans. And Christmas night—it was a very bitter, cold, snowy night—the Arrow Cross people went into the orphanage to celebrate Christ's birth, and took each and every children and every teacher out of that orphanage. The children were in their nighties, and barefooted. They marched them through Budapest in that snowy night, at midnight, to the Danube, to the bank of the Danube, and they shot each and every one, killing them into the Danube. They froze in there. By that time the Danube was not the Blue or Brown Danube, it was a Red Danube, because of Jewish blood. They said, "We cannot send you to Auschwitz. We cannot send you anywhere any more." That was Christmas. "So we'll take care of you as the way we can. We are going to kill you here and put you in the Danube."

JF: There was something that you wanted to add about the time after you were in the hospital, after your...bullet wounds.

EB: What happened, they came out with a new law and regulation that they posted, that every Jewish woman—because the men were already in the concentration camps—every Jewish woman of Budapest, under 44 years of age, or they have a children over two years old, they have to report for duty at the labor camps. And because they didn't have any railroad to take them to Auschwitz or...to the concentration camp, they marched those people to Dachau, and they exterminated them in Dachau.

JF: How did this affect your family?

EB: My mother was under age, but she was lucky, because the squadron leader, the Christian woman who was the squadron leader and responsible for the house, came in and they asked for her birth certificate. And Mother was so nervous she couldn't find it. And she said, "I'll vouch for her. She's over 44." And then she came in to the hospital when one day they opened the doors and they could go out for food for an hour. And she came to the hospital to visit me with my sister, and she fainted there. And we arranged it with the doctor because we didn't have enough room even for the sick and the ill, to keep my mother there. She fainted, and one of the women doctors, who was a very nice friend of a friend of mine there, one of the nurses, in the nurse's hat, and that doctor gave Mother a [unclear] shot to make her, simulate a heart attack.

JF: These were Jewish or non-Jewish?

EB: Jewish.

JF: Jewish.

EB: Jewish. Jewish.

JF: O.K.

EB: But we didn't have room. We didn't have room to feed our own ear. [She probably means "mouth".]

JF: How...

EB: And we didn't have...

JF: How did you make arrangements for your mother to stay there?

EB: I had a bed, and I had a terrible wound. If anybody would walk before my bed I could scream from pain but I held myself back. My mother, my sister stayed in the same bed with me. And my poor mother for months didn't sleep, just sat up not to bother me.

JF: And your sister who was still what, under two years of age?

EB: Yes. She was almost two...by that time.

JF: How...was she in this very contained kind of situation? What did...she do?

EB: A child adapts. The...very interesting thing, she was running and she was everybody's pet there. But we had other little children who were shot on the street and they didn't know even their names. They were brought in with wounds. They were survivors, little babies, the last children. And everybody, every one of us who could muster a little food here and there, would give the children. And my sister was the pet of the ward. She was running around and they made her a little apron from an old surgical apron and she was the head doctor. And she was running and talking about that, when the...*Nyilas*, that was the Arrow Cross, Hungarian name, they came and they shot Evie, and they shot Evie, and then she was repeating the story and the story what she went through all the time, all the time.

JF: She witnessed your being shot...

EB: Yes, and all those horrors. And it stayed with her for a very, very long time. And she went...under psychiatric treatment when she was six because of that, because she remembered all those horror stories and it affected her.

JF: After the war...

EB: Sure.

JF: She went into treatment.

EB: Yeah.

JF: Did it help? Was...it able to...

EB: Yes, but she...

JF: The fact that she got help so young?

EB: She has fear complexes.

JF: Still.

EB: Still. She is a mother and she is a very accomplished woman, but she, her fear complexes are very deep-rooted and they are there. So, they took all those women, what I was telling you in the...

JF: Mmm hmm?

EB: Labor camp, that forced labor camp there. They called labor camp. This was concentration camp. And they let them work there and then they gassed them. Most of

the people didn't come back. I don't think so any came back from the horrors. So if my mother wouldn't be that lucky, I wouldn't have a mother.

JF: Did you know what was going on in Hungary with the *Schutzpass* situation, with Wallenberg? Was this common knowledge?

EB: Oh yes, yes, yes. We had different kind of *Schutzpasses*, from different governments, and it rated differently. And you see, what Wallenberg did one man can do, and we would have at least ten, then probably the whole Hungarian Jews will be saved. You just have to be a man. You just have to be human under inhuman circumstances.

JF: Like the man who stood up to the men who were shooting you.

EB: Yes, that's right.

JF: And the...

EB: And that...

JF: And these guards responded to him, and stopped.

EB: And you know what? We didn't live in that house, and we weren't good or bad or anything to that manager and janitors there in that, the yellow star house. And you know what happened, there was the manager's niece, who was a...cook for somebody. It's not in that house, somewhere else, but she lived with the manager during that period of time. And she didn't even know me, just knew me when I was in that house and I said hello to her. And we weren't even too friendly. She went up to the...place where we lived, in the...yellow star house. And from the pantry she took out jams and food and brought it...to the hospital to me and to Mother, risking her life, because that time the Russian were shooting the Germans, and the Hungarians. And house to house fighting was going on. And among the bullets she was running several times, bringing food to us. And there were other people, another neighbor there, who came into the hospital, who didn't know us either, another Gentile neighbor from that house, who brought some juice to us, his own, what he saved. And nobody had too much food at that time, not Gentile or Jew in that city. And Mother had given for a ten days' old loaf of bread a thousand *pengö*, what was...

JF: How much is that?

EB: It would be equivalent with a thousand dollar, what you can buy before. I mean, if you want to have the real deficit of that time, it was no such a thing because it was a war-time currency. But before the war, five *pengö* was a dollar. So you can equate with that. But what you can buy, the buying part, or a, in salary this was equivalent with a thousand. And she put it in water and she fed us. But the goose flesh and the goose [unclear] enough, because when I was in the hospital and Mother was allowed, once when she find out—for ten days she didn't know where I was—and when she find out, because they were locked in in that, in the yellow star house, they were lucky again because one man. After I was shot down the whole house was put up in...big trucks, and they were taken to a center where all people were sent to the concen-, from, where the older people were sent to the concentration camp. Now this lieutenant or captain, police captain, who was in charge of them, who took them, said, "You don't get out of the trucks. You stay there, and I'll take care of you. I'll take you back." And when the Arrow Cross people

came and said, “Well, now you have to empty your trucks and go to the, to this point and leave the people,” he...said, “Those are my charge. I am not responsible for you. I am responsible for my unit. I am taking them to my unit.” And he turned the trucks around and took them back to their homes.

JF: And they didn't stop him.

EB: No. You have seen those policemen who weren't stopped, who stood up. You have seen that one doctor. You have seen that police captain or lieutenant, I don't know the rank because Mother told me this story. So when my mother find out—they were locked in, the houses were locked, permanently locked; they couldn't go out even for food. So many people died of hunger there. So Mother had these saved goose things, the lard, and other things. And the first time when she heard I was in the hospital, that was my birthday, the sixth of November. And she came with a little food, poppy seed noodles, and she brought her saved goose things. And then I said, “Well, I will leave it here because it's safer. I don't know what's going to happen there but at least,” we were thinking, I was thinking, “Mother, you stay in this hospital. Don't go back.” But she had to go back because my sister wasn't with her. “The next time when you come you will stay. I will arrange it.” So she brought the food in and that's the way we survived.

JF: You stayed in the hospital then, until the end?

EB: Until the end.

JF: And your mother was able to stay. They didn't check to see...

EB: They checked, and they wanted to kick her out. That is another man who comes into our life, again, who saved us. He was a Jew. He was a doctor. He is a doctor. He lives in Washington. He owns Jefferson Memorial Hospital. If you like to see his write-up in the *Fortune 400*, he's one of them. He deserves it. That man saved lives. He didn't have anything to eat. he wouldn't take the food away from his patients. We had a chapel upstairs. This was the Jewish school. We had a chapel upstairs. And he slept on the bare floor, on the chapel, a couple of hours at night. [unclear] had to get undressed and he operated day or night. He was that time I think 29 or 28 years old. They screamed, the patients, because we didn't have enough food. The toilet, *toilets!* The lot of toilets were overflowing. In front of the lava-, in the lavatory, people, wounded people, were on the floor, laying there, in the feces and you just, the horror. And what you have seen. And *we* had the *best!* Because the ghetto was overflowing. People were dying of hunger. My second father's mother died of hunger in the, in there. She went blind first.

JF: Then, your second father's...

EB: Mother.

JF: Mother died.

EB: Yeah, yeah, my step-grandmother. And her daughter survived her but committed suicide in the ghetto. The ghetto, it was a terrible place—no food, no, that...people upon people. The Arrow Cross come in every, every night and killed people in the...cellars and wherever they had. They had a shooting area near there, killing people.

JF: You had said that this doctor saved your mother.

EB: The way...he operated on me he saved my life.

JF: And he, you also said that he kept your mother in the hospital so that she could be saved.

EB: Because they were, the selection was going on. And they selected the people who didn't need it, medical attention. And even who needed medical attention but their life was not, their situation was not life-threatening. My situation was life-threatening at that point, because of the kidney shots and bleeding. And I had a drain passing my kidney. And I was quite in limbo if I survive or not. And...

JF: What did he do?

EB: And...they always had a selection committee, made out of other Jewish doctors in the hospital, and other people, because they needed the place. They put, in life-threatening situation in one bed three people. Because we didn't have a bed. Finally I had a bed. That was the biggest thing. The nurses arranged it for me because they liked me. And they wanted to save me. I don't know, God took care of me. And Mother was in that bed and my sister. So they said they can put two patients with me in that bed. So they made a selection and Mother's supposed to go the next morning to the ghetto, with my sister. And I said, "If Mother goes, I'll go." And they said, this committee said, "O.K., that's your decision. That's your life. If, we cannot keep them here; if you want to go with them, you go. If you die, you die. We cannot take care of you there. But that's your decision." If, so many people are dying, so one more or one less, everybody was critical at that point. We were, decided that we don't have a chance in a million to survive anyway, so only until then, they had to take care of their patients. So, this doctor, who was the most honest person ever, because you can meet people, whenever you are in every situation. Some doctors, they were good. They weren't bad. They took some food from the patients. If they had. Some people gave some jewelry to these certain doctors; they were taking it. We are human. Because we are Jewish, they are human. This man wouldn't take a blanket for himself. This man was, in that time, an angel. He wanted to save lives. That was his duty. And he would not tolerate himself to take anything from anybody. And I had friends among the nurses, and one of the little nurses said to me, "Eva, you go to Dr. Tabor." Because they named him the head, because he was so honest that they know his decision wouldn't be altered by anything, just by just. He was a just man that time. And if he makes a decision, nobody questioned it, because nobody can alter his way of thinking just to do the best. So I said, "O.K." And that was the first time I stepped out of my bed, and I made my steps. I couldn't walk! And I had to make myself to go. And I walked up to the third floor, to the chapel. And I saw this man, dead tired, laying on the marble floor, the bare marble floor, in this, in it was in early January, in the cold of January, with nothing, and sleeping a dead man's sleep. He was, he was out. He was, operated on 120 people that day. And he couldn't stand it. And I leaned over him and he opened his eyes. And a smile came over and he said, "What is it?" I...had always

From the collection of the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive.

The audiotaped interview is the primary source record for this transcript which was produced in partnership with Gratz College.

been afraid of him, because he was very stern. And he didn't have time to talk to anybody. He was, I thought, "Oh, he is so mean and he hates me." I was scared. I was absolutely scared of him. And I said, "Dr. Tabor, they selected Mother in the selection committee. And Mother and Agi has to go tomorrow to the ghetto. And if they go I'll go with them. What is your decision?" He said, "You go back to bed. I won't let you and your mother and your sister go there."

JF: Mmm.

EB: "You stay here. And your mother stays here and your little sister stays. I wouldn't put anybody in that bed but you. You offered that bed, and you are sharing with your, because of your mother and your sister, you are suffering for that. I wouldn't put another patient. We are not missing anything. And if they survive, you'll have to survive." I hadn't seen this man until 1969. You know what would happen to my mother? My homeroom teacher was in the hospital the same day, and her daughter, who was my classmate, who was [wore?] a nurse's hat, you know, just to save her life, and she couldn't stand the stink and-

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

EVA BENTLEY [3-1-50]

From the collection of the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive.

The audiotaped interview is the primary source record for this transcript which was produced in partnership with Gratz College.

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Tape three, side two:

JF: This is tape three, side two of an interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley.

EB: My homeroom teacher, and her husband, who was a rabbi and a religious teacher, [unclear] and her daughter who was my classmate, [unclear] she was passing as a nurse's hat [unclear]. She was working there. And she brought her parents in. And they didn't [unclear] people were sitting there all night. And she just couldn't stand the stink and the, sickness and she said, "I'm getting out of it." And she got a *Schutzpass*, a Swiss *Schutzpass*, for Swedish, and she went to this home because they had the homes which were, came under the umbrella in different countries and different embassies. And she said, "I am going back, now back." She couldn't go back there. They took them to the ghetto, because they dismantled those [unclear], and everybody had to go to the ghetto. So she...went to the ghetto that morning. And everybody who was selected to go to the ghetto that morning, that was Mother's transport, if she would be in that selection, and I, because I would go with my mother, we would go to the ghetto. Now they designated a first-aid cellar for us, from the hospital, which was the first house in the ghetto. And that was almost the last night before the Russians liberated the ghetto. All those people were killed that night, the following night. In the morning we're supposed to, when we were supposed to go to the ghetto in the morning, [tape off then on]

JF: The Arrow Cross...

EB: The Arrow Cross came in that night and massacred everybody in that cellar—my homeroom teacher, her husband. And she asked her daughter to come with her, and she said, "No, Mommy, I can be helpful here, I don't leave the hospital." And she went in the next morning, because that time the Russians were approaching and we already freed, the ghetto was freed before the, our part. And she went in and she found her mother had slashed, and her father massacred, terrible. And that would be my fate, and my mother's and my sister's. That's why I'm saying that man saved my life. Not only when he operated on me, because he operated on me.

JF: Yes.

EB: Oh, also, but saved physically our lives.

JF: You said you met him in 1969.

EB: Yes. He was a student in the Jewish *Gymnasium* in a different time. He graduated in 1932 and, because his father, he was again, he didn't count as a Jew because we had the *Numerus Clausus* in...Hungary. And in medical school the Jews weren't admitted at all. *Numerus Clausus* in certain universities, but in medical school, no Jew was, after the First War, admitted. And he was admitted because his father was a war hero.

JF: Oh.

EB: He died in the First War. And him and his brother, his brother attended the engineering school. And he was a medical student. Beside that, he was

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-53]

a, the gymnastics champion of, the college gymnastics champion of Hungary. And he was coming from a very religious background. And we had a reunion of the Jewish *Gymnasium*, the 50th reunion of the Jewish *Gymnasium*, in New York, in 1969. And he was one of the organizers. And there I have met him again.

JF: What a thrill to be able to see him again. You said that this happened shortly before the Russians entered the city.

EB: Mmm hmm.

JF: Were you still in the hospital when they came in?

EB: Yes.

JF: Can you tell me about that, about the liberation?

EB: It was a strange thing. The ghetto was liberated first because the ghetto was undermined and the German wanted to blow up the ghetto. So, the Jewish underground, which one we had some Zionists, you know the...we called them the *Siserat* [?] because most of them they were the Jewish Zionists. And they were working in the underground making the false papers and coming. And basically that were, the focal point of their [unclear] that was the hospital, because the hospital was outside of the ghetto.

JF: The focal point of the Jewish und-, of the Zionist underground...

EB: And the Jewish underground was the hospital.

JF: Yeah.

EB: Because everybody was then coming in and out and in the basement and they tried to make false papers and they...had, they changed uniforms. They went in, like my cousin, who looks like an Aryan Aryan—blond, blue-eyed—he was wearing an Arrow Cross uniform, and went into the ghetto and got his parents out of that.

JF: Did you know all this was going on while you were in the hospital?

EB: We had a somehow feeling, yes, because everybody was coming in and out and all those men, and they were trying to do. It was, you know, they really didn't do it openly because you never know. And because we had real Arrow Cross people, too, coming in and Gentile people too, but that was the focal point of the underground, the hospital. Everything was going on there. So, they liberated the ghetto first, and then they liberated us. But they were coming through the ghetto, because these people, the underground, led the Russians through the ghetto, to the...other part of the town. And we were at the gate of the ghetto. We were not in it, but we were in front of the ghetto, at the gate. It was unbelievable. The night before, we were talking with Mother and Mother said, "Sweetheart, what do you think? What's going to happen?" I said, "Mommy, at this point I don't think, so few people ever, ever survive. We are going to die." That was the point when I couldn't keep my mother's spirit up. And I couldn't be positive.

JF: Before that...

EB: We were all...

JF: Before that you had...

EB: Before that I always kept a spirit up and I always...

JF: That was your role.

EB: That was my role. And that time I said, "But Mommy, but at least we go together." And by that time I didn't know the Russians were already in the cellar. And we were already free! And that was just unbelievable. And whatever happened after, it's not that simple, but some other time.

JF: Your father was in a labor camp during this entire time?

EB: Yeah.

JF: Did you have any way of communicating with him? Did you know where he was?

EB: He was, for a while, yes. For a while we know because he was stationed in Budapest. He was the last one. He was, again, luck has so much to do with life. He, all his contemporaries were drafted much more before, earlier than he was. And they were killed off. He was one of the last ones when the German takeover, that, who was drafted and went in. Now he was stationed in Budapest, as I told you, at the airport. And then after that in another school they were stationed there. They were the clearing crew, of the, after the bombs. And when the Arrow, and that time it was a period when Horthy didn't know which way he is going, so those people were relatively safer than the others because everybody was in Budapest. So he was stationed in Budapest. So sometimes he could come to the yellow star house, when he had a leave. And we knew about him, even when I was shot down. After that he was coming to us to the hospital to visit. And then they, then when the Arrow Cross took over, they...evacuated all those people. That's where Wallenberg comes in, he went on those wagons, and freed those people, and took care of them. So he was taken to the western part of Hungary, the border of Austria and Hungary. And from there, in March, end of March, we were already free. Budapest was free. But that part of the country was not. He was evacuated and marched to Germany. And then he was taken to Mauthausen, to the concentration camp. And most of them who survived, died. And he had the typhoid fever after the liberation. He was liberated by the Americans, I think. And he went to Linz. And he had the typhoid fever. And he came home in the summer of 1945. He survived, and he came home. He was limping, and he was down to 90 pounds. And his usual weight was 180. He was not a small man. You have seen him, Josey. And...

JF: Where were you living at that point? At...

EB: At that point we went back to the yellow star house, because our home was occupied by those Gentiles, who demanded new homes for themselves. And until they got new homes they didn't want to leave their premises.

JF: You still legally had the right to your home.

EB: Yeah. Now, after that we did. So it took a while, and we got it back. You know, a little fighting, and they had to get a home and it has to be acceptable to them. And when they accepted it, then we had our home back. But already it was bombed out. We didn't have windows. We didn't have a toilet. We didn't,

everything was bombed out because we had a bomb there. So we had to rebuild, and we start everything and it was very hard.

JF: Your possessions, as you mentioned, had been stored with someone.

EB: Some possessions.

JF: Some, some of your possessions had been stored.

EB: Because the possession Mother wanted to save, gave to the partner of a, a father, the Gentile partner, the strawman, before the stores. They had a vineyard west of Hungary, and they said they are going to save every belongings of ours, and it will be safely stored. We never got back *anything* from them. The furniture was taken down to this cellar and the people in that house who used this as an air-raid shelter never touched anything, whatever I left, what was the most interesting thing. That's why I know that I have family in America, because I had my school books in my room furniture, my whole room furniture was there. And I didn't remove my school books from my drawers. And I had, not the *Megillah*, you know the *Mishnah* and the *Megillah*, because we studied that at the Jewish *Gymnasium*. In that I had the papers which were my aunt's, who died, my father's younger sister, dictated my ancestral and my family line.

JF: This is in...the Talmud, in the *Mishnah* and the *Gemora*...

EB: Yes, yes, the Talmud.

JF: The Talmud.

EB: Because we studied that. And I had it there. I put the papers there.

JF: And that gave you the clue.

EB: And that, there was an address because my aunt, at that time you couldn't even correspond with America because we were at war with America. So my aunt said, "Look, sweetheart, you have a family in America. Your father's two sisters live there. And you should know your family. And this is the address. And whenever you can write, when the war is over, you write to them and tell them that's who you are and they'll know about you." And there was my aunt's address. And my aunt and I had a cousin, who also wasn't considered a Jew under the law, because his father also died during the First War. He was a war hero. And...he didn't have to wear the yellow star. And the last day, as I was told, he went down on the street and somebody recognized him as a Jew. He was a Jew! He didn't ever said he wasn't, but he wasn't considered a Jew, so he didn't come under the jurisdiction. And this man went to the Arrow Cross, and they shot him. On the street they killed him. [pause]

JF: Were you able to live in your home until you left?

EB: We had a home, with my husband.

JF: You married...

EB: I married my husband and we had a home.

JF: You had...your own home.

EB: Yeah.

JF: And your parents stayed...

EB: No, I didn't live with my parents.

JF: They stayed in their house.

EB: Mmm hmm. I had a beautiful home.

JF: And when did you...decide to come to this country?

EB: 1956.

JF: What was it like under the Russian occupation? Can you tell me a little bit about that? [pause] Did you have any difficulty getting out in '56?

EB: Oh sure. We escaped. Once we were caught.

JF: You were caught once. How were you trying to escape?

EB: On foot.

JF: And you were stopped, at the border? Were you punished for trying to escape, or just sent home?

EB: Luck again.

JF: What happened?

EB: You have to [tape off then on]

JF: Perhaps that's something you can talk about at another time.

EB: Another time. Because I haven't finished this. I have so many stories, like my brother-in-law, who was three years old, we are still at the fascist era, so let's just stay with that.

JF: O.K. Do you want to tell...me about that?

EB: You see, there were little children whose mothers had to go to the forced labor camp or this concentration camp, as I told you, from their houses. My brother-in-law's mother went under this category. He was three years old that time. His father was already killed in the labor camp somewhere in Russia. We didn't know he was, that time we didn't know he was killed, but later on we found out he was already dead. So his mother had to go. He was three years old. And they put these children in the makeshift orphanages, all those children who [were] left in the homes. They gathered them together, the Jewish organization, [unclear] with the Red Cross, and...these underground, the Israeli underground, the Zionists, and they put them in different places, in houses. Now the Arrow Cross knew about them. After they took care of the Jewish orphanage they went to every houses where they had those little children shot. This was one of the homes, and I don't know how many hundreds of children there, and they...did shooting practices out of the children. They were on the third floor, and they were throwing them down in the yard, and shooting in the air, and shooting. And my little brother-in-law was among them, and they had so many dead children in a pile, and they throw him down, and then threw other children on top of him, he was protected by the others and he wasn't harmed. So after the shooting was over, and these people went away and it quieted down, he crawled out under the dead children and he started to roam the streets. And, again, the Red Cross and the Jewish underground and Zionists were rummaging the streets for the survivors. And they were helping. And they find him walking on the street. So they had the Red Cross homes. He was put in those, one of those homes. And after the war they couldn't identify them, because most of them they were so young.

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-57]

They...didn't know their names. They didn't know their parents. They didn't know where they lived. They knew something, but some of them knew but the parents didn't come back. The children without parents, without homes. They were young, older, old, and they were little savages on the street. They were hiding in the ruins and they were feeding for themselves and ate rats and they were little gangs. Or they were in little, in homes, what the Joint put up for them. All by the Red Cross now. If they couldn't find a parent, then people who wanted to take care of the children, like foster...parents, they came in and asked for children. They could be Gentiles or Jews or whoever. So in this particular Red Cross home came a couple of farmers, and he said, "Well, we've always wanted a little boy." And they selected my brother-in-law. And they took him with them. And his mother came back from Dachau and she was looking for her son. And to research the papers it was very hard. Finally she found out, she went through hell for a whole year. It took her a year day and night, searching for her son. Finally she came to this farmer's place in the country. She traced him. And that time he was already four years old. And that was in a summer day, high noon. And in Hungary a high noon is a very hot time, and the farmers are usually having their main meal that time under a shade. And they were sitting under a shady tree and they're having their meal. And this woman was coming across the field, walking across the field. And this little boy stood up and starts screaming and running. He said, "Mother! Mother! My *real* mother is here! My *real* mother!"

JF: Oh.

EB: He recognized his mother.

JF: That's a miraculous story.

EB: And [whispering] we have two children, my sister and her two lovely children.

JF: This is...your sister's...

EB: Husband.

JF: Husband. Is there anything else you want to share with us today before we stop?

EB: I don't know.

JF: Mrs. Bentley, thank you so much.

EB: You are welcome. I hope [tape off them on] I wish I wouldn't have such a story to tell. [tape off then on]

JF: This is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Eva Bentley, done on April 2nd, 1985. Could you tell us a little bit about how the Jewish community organization functioned during this time?

EB: We had the...address, the Jewish community address, and as you know from the history of it, it has a very bad reputation, because the Hungarian Jewish community, the people tried to...please Eichmann and the Germans and the authorities. And that, I don't know if firsthand that is true or not, but it has happened that they knew about Auschwitz. They knew about the deportation, and

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-58]

they didn't told the Jewish community, and that's why most of the people were docile and went to their, their way to the gas chambers. And I still, an argument about it that Hoess should have been [unclear], but I cannot judge. I am not a judge. I've just been there.

JF: What was your understanding as to why they didn't tell?

EB: You know, hindsight is great. That time we didn't know that they know more what they were telling. They...didn't want to cause trouble or revolution and maybe they were naive—what I cannot believe—and they didn't know what was happening. But the history proves that most of them knew.

JF: Were they doing anything during the time of the German occupation that you felt was helpful...

EB: Oh yes.

JF: To the German people?

EB: Yes. Uh, they...

JF: I'm sorry, to the Jewish people.

EB: Yes, as much as they could they tried to give a little assistance and food and shelter and organize the people. But in the same time when they organize they organize the people to go to the labor camps and go to the concentration camps. So, the good things for us aside, because the bad thing is so magnified and so horrendous that we don't remember the good.

JF: You're talking about the cooperation with Eichmann.

EB: With Eichmann and with the Germans. Weisheimer, Eichmann, and with the government.

JF: How...

EB: But in the same time they served a purpose, because they were the head and they...tried their own way. But...they were serving the Germans. They were subservients. And maybe that's the generation and the believing in law and order. So it's easy for us to judge them. They were in, we don't know how any other organization would behave under a certain government. So they...tried what they thought was the best. And they thought probably if they saved some, they don't lose everybody. They didn't want to lose everybody and they tried to save some people and they...did their best, according to them. If they could do better, that's the history to judge. And I don't know.

JF: Were they involved in the *Gymnasium* that you were attending?

EB: Yes, now it belonged...

JF: Were they supporting it?

EB: Oh, at that time, yes, but after that it was closed. It belonged to the...Jewish community. It was a privately owned place and everybody was supported by...the Jewish community. We had very wealthy Jews, like the, the industrial barons, textile manufacturers, the biggest iron ore manufacturers—Weiss, Manfred—mine owners, and all of them, like in here, they supported the Jewish community.

JF: Do you think that these people...

EB: They supported the Jewish hospitals, the Jewish...the *Gymnasium*, the Jewish schools, the Jewish orphanage. It's all been privately owned, and not subsidized by the government.

JF: Do you think that these families that you're mentioning got any preferential treatment by the Jewish community in terms of the deportations?

EB: No. No. Mr. Goldberger, who was a, the biggest textile manufacturing in central Europe and is still one of the biggest textile manufacturing compound, owned by the government now, died in Dachau, one of the...baron Weisses died. Some they went to Switzerland, but really, they couldn't do anything. They went their way too.

JF: They couldn't do anything to save themselves.

EB: No. One of the...Baron Weiss, one of them, went to Switzerland. But I don't know it's before or...during, with money, had come to that point, with money they...tried to save some children. To, the S.S. needed the money as a reserve for raw goods and for ammunition. And they promised that two plane load of children will be exempted and go to Switzerland and some people. Now, they, first they deported those, for money, and they deported them to Bergen-Belsen. And from Bergen-Belsen there was a compound. And they took the children with the plane load to Switzerland. But the plane had the S.S. insignia on it. And it was the end of the war when it happened. And it was shot down by the Allies, and all the children died. So the next transport—I know this firsthand because my best friend was among those children, and she was in the second transport. And they were, she stayed in Bergen-Belsen because the second transport didn't took off. It was already too late for that. And the first transport, I had two friends in the first transport, two school mates of mine, who died.

JF: Was the S.S. plane the only one that was available to them for this transport?

EB: Yes! We didn't have any planes.

JF: That was what was there.

EB: Hungary itself didn't have any planes, not to mention the Jews! [chuckles] And that was the safest way out, because no Jews could leave the country. And the S.S. took them, like they deported them to Bergen-Belsen, and Bergen-Belsen, they had one barrack for those children. And the first transport left, I think so, with 60 children, and they were shot down. And some of the parents were on the plane, too. I had, my physics teacher was on that plane, and her husband was an industrialist.

JF: Do you know approximately when that occurred?

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-60]

EB: I can ask my friend. She is in Toronto. She is the head librarian. She buys all the foreign books for the public library system of Ontario Province. And she is the one who knows more about that, because she survived in that barrack. In that barrack they had a little bit more food. Means more food? They got some cans, canned food, and they didn't have to go out to work, those young children. And she survived there. And she has seen another friend of ours, who came from, with the regular transport, and she was looking out of the barrack window. This friend of ours was scavenging at the, in the pile of garbage, for food, with her little brother. And she saw her. She was already a skeleton. And she recognized her. And before she could yell out to her, the S.S. guard turned those dogs on her and in front of this friend of mine, whose name is Eva, Eva Shtiosnie, [phonetic] she saw that the dogs [pause] took this other friend, whose name was Clara, Clara Kemen, [phonetic] killed her and...

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

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-61]

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

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-62]

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...

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-63]

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?

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-64]

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.

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-65]

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 an-

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-66]

ywhere, 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.?

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-67]

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

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-68]

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

EVA BENTLEY [4-1-69]

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*.

¹⁰ She may mean the Arrow Cross.

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

JF: In addition...

EB: Thing.

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

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.

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

JF: None of them were brought into...

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

EVA BENTLEY [5-1-78]

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. Every thing 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-

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 Ar-

row 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 came 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

EVA BENTLEY [5-1-80]

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

EVA BENTLEY [5-1-82]

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

EVA BENTLEY [5-1-84]

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 doooooon’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 any-

thing. 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-

<https://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

EVA BENTLEY [1-2-87]

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.