

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

AGNES ADACHI

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin  
Date: July 18, 1989

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Gratz College  
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AA - Agnes Adachi<sup>1</sup> [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Date: July 18, 1989

*Tape one, side one:*

NL: It's a great pleasure, Mrs. Adachi,<sup>2</sup> to be able to speak with you about your experiences during the war. But before we do that, I wonder if you would be good enough to tell us a little about your life at home in Budapest, let's say from 1940 until the time of the troubles, let's say not necessarily the invasion by the Germans in March of 1944, but even of an earlier time when you felt the sting of persecution by the Hungarian government. Would you be able to sketch those years for us?

AA: Yes. Yes, I could. Well, actually you have to know that Hungary was always antisemitic. It was nothing new. Not that you were barred from anywhere, but we knew that we were not liked as the Jewish people. However, in my life, I did not feel it very badly because my father was a businessman and he was a person who believed that there are no differences between people and religions, and that's how he brought me up. He felt that Christmas was not a religious day, but it was a giving, love and happiness, and he invited all his employees to our house. So I grew up with a Christmas tree. He was not a religious man, neither was my mother, but Mommy had to have her candles every Friday night, and I was always blessed by Mother on Friday nights with my father together. Otherwise I was not brought up as a child of Jewish religion. So much so that when it came to junior high school my father took me to the best school in Hungary, what was a Reformed Church school, a Protestant school, and told the principal there, who was a lady that time, that he would like me to go to this school. And the principal looked at him and he said, "Mr. Mandl, why do you want your little daughter to come to our school? We do not have Jewish children. We have Catholics, but no Jewish." And my father said, "Because your school is the best. And I don't like bigots. I want my daughter to know everything." And then she smiled at me and she says, "Would you like to come here, little Aggie?" And I said, "Yes." And I was in. And my Jewish religion I learned from the Reformed Church religious teacher.

NL: Amazing.

AA: Who was my best friend. The Catholic children were not allowed, but I was allowed every morning to sit in the ten-minute hymn singing—'cause I love to sing—and to hear a little prayer, and then, as I lived in school until 7:00 in the evening for the half-pension, she was the one three or four times a week who would take my hand and say, "Come, Aggie. Let's learn Hebrew. You have to learn it."

NL: Do you remember her name?

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<sup>1</sup>née Mandl.

<sup>2</sup>Agnes Adachi is the author of *Child of the Winds: My Mission with Raoul Wallenberg*, Chicago: Adams Press, 1989

AA: Oh yes.

NL: Let's put it in the record.

AA: Olga.

NL: Pardon me?

AA: Olga, that was O-L-G-A.

NL: Olga.

AA: Tante Olga was her name.

NL: Tante Olga.

AA: And she was about six-foot-ten, and 300 pounds, with the most beautiful black hair, and she gave all the love, and she told me, "You have to know that the Jewish religion was the first one in the world."

NL: Where did she learn Hebrew, I wonder?

AA: Well, they all, Reformed Church religious teachers are all learning Hebrew.

NL: Interesting.

AA: And from her I learned. The next year we already got some Jewish children, and then we got a Jewish teacher.

NL: I see.

AA: But I was the one who broke the ice. But the school has given me everything, and I never felt, except once, and that was in the last, no the last before year, when we graduated. One girl, who was a officer's daughter, she said something, "You bloody Jew." And I really didn't know what she was saying, but I didn't like it. And the next day I was out in the corridor and I saw her with one eye coming and I thought she's coming to hit me and I turned around and hit her right in the nose, and our dear lady principal walked into the room. We were 45 kids there, cause they say here they can't manage 15 children.

NL: Yes.

AA: Private school and we were 45, and there was quiet in there, you could drop a needle. And she walked in, and she said, "I understand there have been a religious slur in my school."

NL: Wow.

AA: "And I will not, and there was a fight. I will not name names, but I want everybody to get up, whoever hurt another person, either by words or by hitting," and of course we all got up, except one little girl.

NL: Oh my.

AA: And she looked at her and she says, "You never hurt anyone?" And this kid spoke up, she says, "No!" So we all looked at her, and then she said, "I will not do anything now, but if it ever happens again, the children who did this will be removed from the school." Not only it never happened, but this girl of the officer became my very best friend and the rest of the year, because she didn't know what she was saying, and I didn't really wanted to hit her.

NL: She was repeating what she had heard.

AA: She was repeating, what happens in this country too.

NL: Yes.

AA: You repeat what you hear from your parents.

NL: But, Mrs. Adachi, how do you account for the fact that this school seemed so insulated from the social and political antisemitism in the country? Was it organized in a more liberal tradition?

AA: I believe it was. As the Protestant Church always have been—the Reformed Church—now, I don't know...

NL: The Reformed Church.

AA: Because I never went, I—didn't become more interested in that either, but later on our new principal was a Reformed pastor, Beretski [phonetic], who became later on the Bishop of Hungary.

NL: I see.

AA: And when Hitler<sup>3</sup> walked in, he arrived to our house—he was a very tall gentleman and he had a crew cut and beautiful blue eyes, and he looked at my father who was the same age—and he said, "Uncle, we have to baptize this child, because the radio just said that anyone who doesn't have a Jewish religion will be saved. Would you like to save my child? Because she is my seventh daughter." I was always together with his daughters, and he was...

NL: And what year was this?

AA: And what could my father say? This was in '40—the end of, no, the middle of '43, just before the Germans came in. The Hungarian Nazis already started Eichmann's work. Up till now it was quiet.

NL: Is that so?

AA: And what could my father say, no? He said, "Yes." So we went, the three of us, to the Reformed Church, and my father was crying, all the way in the back, and he kept on saying, "Uncle, be quiet. I have Jews down in the basement. And if they find out, we'll all be killed." And he baptized me, and I think his tears were more on my head than his water. Maybe he saved me; I don't know. It was a nonsense what he did, and he looked at me, and he said, "Child, you have learned as much of our religion than you did in the Jewish school. Whenever you want to go back, you go back, but I want to have the feeling that I saved you." That kind of people they were.

NL: Was there some special relationship then that he had with your family?

AA: No, but he had a relationship with me.

NL: With you.

AA: Because I was part of his family. I spent my time in his house with his children. There were six daughters, and I was, as he said, the seventh.

NL: Seventh.

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<sup>3</sup>This may be a reference to the German invasion.

AA: And in the school, then he took over that little hymn in the morning, and I was there, and the Protestant and the Jewish teachers kept on teaching me what they wanted me to know, but I never felt in that school that I didn't belong there.

NL: It's extraordinary.

AA: And around us, people hated everybody. And then it started. We didn't believe either, you see, we had already Polish, German, Austrian, Czechoslovakian, Romanians, coming into the country, those who could run away, and told us the stories, and we didn't believe. We were just as bad as were the Allied forces. We didn't believe, no.

NL: You heard nothing about what was happening in the other parts of Europe?

AA: Yes, they told us, but we didn't believe.

NL: You didn't believe.

AA: And we said, "No, in Hungary it cannot happen." And then it did.

NL: Let's step back a bit. How long did you stay in this particular Dutch Reformed school then?

AA: It was not Dutch.

NL: Excuse me, Protestant Reformed.

AA: For the whole junior high and senior high.

NL: Until what year?

AA: That was, let's see, when did I finish? Ah...

NL: Approximately.

AA: Approximately. I can't remember. Let's see, '38 I think I finished, that's when I went to Switzerland.

NL: Ah, '38, I see. Then you went to Switzerland and returned and then...

AA: And returned, and he came, 'cause I was still his child.

NL: His child. And, may we ask now what experiences you had in Budapest, let's say, '40, '41, '42?

AA: Well, '40, '41, '42 we still didn't have anything. On the end of '42 it started.

NL: Were you working in Budapest?

AA: I was working. I was working, first I was working in a big hotel where I wanted to learn everything about running a hotel, the same place that was the Hotel Ritz. It doesn't exist anymore. That's where Mr. Hilton learned himself. This was the famous hotel where the king, the English king, met Mrs. Simpson. And that's in my book. And that I was learning and in there, and...

NL: You didn't feel any antisemitism there?

AA: I didn't feel any antisemitism, maybe because the man who ran the place was a Yugoslavian gentleman who was a very magnificent personality. He spoke 16 languages, but not like me, he *spoke* them, without an accent, whichever, and he was a great gentleman. And he ran his place like that.

NL: He knew you were the child of a Jewish family?

AA: Oh yes, he did know that.

NL: It didn't matter to him. And the other employees didn't trouble you?

AA: Nobody. Actually it was a Christian who brought me in, and her boyfriend was the only one who tried to do the bad things to me, but he couldn't, because he would have lost his job, at the moment.

NL: And...

AA: And so, anyways, how in '42 the first time I figured out that now we are in trouble and I went, there's a very famous restaurant in Hungary, it was Gundo [phonetic]. I don't know how many people were in Budapest, but that was out, way out of the city, and I went with a very dear friend of mine who was a great farmer, a gentleman farmer they called them, and he was a Jew, and we went into this restaurant, and the waiter came over and says, "I don't serve Jews."

NL: That was the first experience.

AA: And it was the first experience, and I felt that they might shoot at us, and we just got up and walked out. And that was the end of going out.

NL: This was '42.

AA: That was the end of '42.

NL: The end of '42.

AA: Then, when in '43, I remember that morning that one very excited neighbor of ours running, and he says, "Arnold, open your radio, the BBC" (but we were not allowed to listen) "the BBC just announced that Hungary is going with the Allied forces!"

NL: The Allied forces?

AA: The Allied forces. And, "Horthy's coming!" Horthy was our admiral...

NL: Regent.

AA: Without a seat. He was the Regent of Hungary. "And he will come on the radio and say so!" And my father ran and brought out the champagne, and I said, "Papa, don't drink. I don't believe in it." And my father says, "You are too young!" That's how it was that time. We were too young, we couldn't say anything. And he sure enough put in all the champagne, and Horthy came on the radio, and all he said, "My fellow members, I am announcing now that we are going with the Allies." And then you heard the German *Horst Wessel* [song] playing, the radio goes dead, I dropped my glass, and I ran out. It was the most gorgeous day, like today, even nicer, it was blue sky, and I get out in the street—I had to go to the hotel—and it was blackened by airplanes. And I was so naive, I said, "Ah! The Americans are here! Finally, the Americans and the British!" And I ran all the way to the hotel, and as I walk in, the porter says, "Go to Mr. Marenchic's desk." The manager that was there, the gentleman, and I walked in, and he turned to me and he said to me in French, "Child, go home. It was a *putsch*. Horthy's already taken. These are the Germans, not the Americans." And he kissed me, he says, "Go home. I don't want you to be taken from here." I got home and we were not taken from home either. For a couple of weeks we didn't even have the stars on. Then, of course, it came. We had to be like a pig, you know, have the star on. And they didn't take us from the house.

NL: Excuse me, but my impression was that the Germans didn't come in until '44, March.

AA: They came in '43, March.

NL: '43 March.

AA: Yah, I think so, we have to look in my book. [March 19, 1944.]

NL: Well, we can check that. But, were these, airplanes in the...

AA: They were Germans.

NL: Germans. Now, was father's business affected at that time?

AA: Oh, yes. That was already before that. He gave that up.

NL: Ah. Could you step back a little and tell us what happened to his business?

AA: Well, it begin to slow down, because people did not want to buy textiles from a Jew. And that was very clear, but he was expecting that.

NL: Was some of his property confiscated?

AA: No, we didn't have any property.

NL: Didn't have, were any of his...

AA: The store was already, he was a partner with a Christian, and he of course took over without asking.

NL: He took over. Was Father still able to function in the store, or was it in effect...

AA: Yes, he was.

NL: He was.

AA: He was a very well-loved person.

NL: He was well-respected.

AA: And his employees loved him. But he was, he was sort of expecting this, you know. And all he said to me that time, he says, "You were right, child." Cause I said, "Don't drink the champagne." And then of course it became terrible, because my father was taken away by the Hungarian Nazi party, and he worked as a...

NL: This is the Arrow Cross?

AA: The Arrow Cross. The Arrow Cross was far, ten times worse, than the Eichmann group.

NL: That's what I have read.

AA: Because Eichmann felt they know better how to do it, he don't have to do a thing. And they were, because they were young, they couldn't read or write, because in Hungary there were a lot of un-alphabets. You see, in Germany there weren't any, but in Hungary there were. But they told these children how to use the guns, and which child of 12 isn't happy to get the gun and say, "Hey, when you see someone in the yellow star, shoot." They did it. Happily and gladly.

NL: But prior to the attacks on the Jews in Budapest as I understand it, there was a division of Hungary into six zones, and each of the zones was to be, the Jews in those zones, were to be deported. Were you aware of any of those activities...



AA: No.

NL: Outside of Budapest? No.

AA: Outside of Budapest, we heard that...

NL: You heard. Can you tell us what you heard?

AA: I tell you *how* we heard it, not through BBC or radios, but we had two French men who were friends of my friends who, after the war we found out, they were in the French underground, and they were parachuted down in Hungary. Now, later on we found out they really came from Romania to kill Germans and to kill Nazis. And they brought us the news that Eichmann's troops are taking the people from the countryside.

NL: I see.

AA: But in Budapest we were not collected.

NL: Now, did you,

AA: But was amazing.

NL: Of course there was a plan, because Budapest was still within one of the zones.

AA: Oh, it was a big plan.

NL: Did you have any information from the Jewish Council, from for instance, Freudinger, Philip, you know that name?

AA: No one.

NL: Philip Freudinger, who was...

AA: Yes, I know the name.

NL: Yes.

AA: No one.

NL: No one.

AA: No one. What happened after we were still in our apartment what was Christian house, I don't know if you know that what the Hungarian Nazis decided, after a while when the Germans were in, that every second house in Budapest have to be one with a star, and people have to get out of their Christian apartment and move in, because the Americans will not bomb because they don't want to bomb the Jews. Well, of course the Americans knew better, they bombed anyhow, and it happened to go on Jewish houses, but mostly they blew up the headquarters of the Nazi parties on both sides. But, we were still in our apartment.

NL: Through '43?

AA: Through '43, and almost into '44. Now in '44, as you know, Raoul Wallenberg arrived, but before that, in May of, let's see now, when I get my dates right, '43, '44, July he came, so you may be right but I will have to look at the book. In, around end of March or end of April I got a letter, small letter. In our Christian house where we still lived we had the yellow star on but we didn't go out much. We, I got a letter from the Swedish government to please visit them, the Swedish Embassy.

NL: Had you had any contact with the Embassy?

AA: I had a correspondence with a Swedish man for the past ten years, because as a girl scout with knowledge of languages we used to be guides for tourists, and one year I was guiding Swedish tourists and this young man kept on writing letters to me, and I answered, and I had huge correspondence. But I had no idea what the letter is, they just said, "Please come and visit us." And of course, that was already dangerous, to go in to a foreign embassy, especially with a star. And my cousin had a very wonderful Christian boyfriend who said, "There is no problem. I have a Mercedes Benz. I'll put on a German flag, and I will put on a Nazi uniform and I'll take you." I said, "Wonderful!" And he did.

NL: And he did.

AA: And, I went up to the Embassy, and he was waiting for, no, he was waiting for awhile. And, the Ambassador then told me what was amazing to me. The first time I heard about the Danish king who put on the yellow band and he says, "I don't have Jews in my country; I only have Danes." And also the first time I heard that the Swedish king, Gustav V, who is dead of course, that he placarded all over Sweden to say that, "Anyone who has any connections with Hungary and wants to save the people, whether they're Christians or Jews, please come to the Foreign Department." "And, therefore, your fiancé," the Ambassador says to me, "has come to us, come to the Foreign Department, and said that if the war wouldn't be there then she already would be my wife, and therefore she would be Swedish, so please help her." And, I looked at the Ambassador. "My fiancé?" He said, "Yes, Toto Harburg [phonetic]." And I just looked, you know, I have a fiancé. I didn't know, inside me, you know. And he said, "And therefore, we would like to ask you to be our guest and stay at the Embassy. We will notify your parents." And I was actually frozen, and I said, My God, here comes the Reformed Church's priest and tells me that he will make me a Christian so that he can save me, and now, a young man whom I correspond for ten years says that I am his wife, or I will be his wife, and he saved my life, I can't believe it! And I said, "Yes, but I have to go back to my parents." And he said, "No, now the Swedish government is responsible for you, and we will send somebody to your parents." What they did, they sent down and asked them to send some soap and clothing and whatnot, and then I found out I wasn't the only guest at the Swedish Embassy.

NL: There were others.

AA: Oh, there were others. There was a very famous Nobel Prize winner, Szent-Györgyi, who found a vitamin, who was not a Jew, but he was a great arch anti-Nazi. And they had to put him away, otherwise he would have been taken. Later on he had to be disfigured and all that and he was taken somewhere else because he wasn't safe at the Swedish Embassy. Anyhow, I had a wonderful and soul-searching because I felt terrible that I am alive and my parents are down there. And I wanted to call them.

NL: They were still in your apartment?

AA: Oh yes, they were in the apartment until a point. And...

NL: Could you communicate with them?

AA: No, I did not, but this secretary went down once a week to tell them that I was fine, because their telephone I think was taken, but they were still in the apartment. And when you are young, maybe one should have said, "No, no, no, I have to go back," but I wanted so badly to live.

NL: Of course.

AA: And it was terrible. But after three weeks, the Mercedes, with the uniformed friend of mine, arrived, and he said, "Get home. They took your, your parents had to leave the house because that's now a Christian house, and they moved into your grandmother's place what became a Jewish house, and you have to come back." So they had a little fight with the Ambassador. The Ambassador said, "No, because we are responsible." But he said, "Yes, she has to come back because [inaudible] her parents, because they still have a lease, and Aggie's name is still on the lease."

NL: So the baptism didn't save you?

AA: No, of course not.

NL: Yah, that was...

AA: Nothing would saved you, but people tried to save people.

NL: Yeah, I understand.

AA: Anne Frank, didn't they try their best? It doesn't work! But still, it was a miracle, OK? So, in any case, the Ambassador said, "All right, she can go down, not with you. I want her to go on in a street car, and we have one of our secretaries sit there, because we want to know exactly where she goes." So he said, "Fine." And he went with his little Mercedes, and I went down, and when we got to the house, my grandmother's house, I saw the secretary looking, and then he winked at me and then he disappeared, with the promise that, I mean, the Ambassador said the Jews were allowed out two hours a day onto the street and telephones were still working. So that we were bound to give them a call if possible, daily. And I was hardly down there for three weeks when a very excited Ambassador says, "Please come back. Ask your friend to bring you back. There is a big surprise for you here." So I went down on my knees, "Micki, Micki, please take me just once more." He says, "But you're not going to stay." I said, "I'm not going to stay, just take me there."

NL: Excuse me, could I interrupt? What—how did you spend your time in those three weeks, Mrs. Adachi, do you remember how it was living with your beleaguered parents and grandmother?

AA: Well, it was, first of all, when I arrived there, I mean, the whole family was there, thanks God. My grandmother wasn't alive anymore, so, but it was her house.

NL: Was she deported, or did she die of natural...

AA: No, no, no, no, she died of natural causes a couple of years before, but it was her house, because my aunt lived there with her daughter. And they had some Sal—San Salvadorian papers.

NL: I see.

AA: They were still there. Then, her, her best friend moved in there with her Christian boyfriend, and they lived there, and then my parents came, and now I came. And I felt pretty miserable when I arrived. I felt that they hate me all because of my heaven of three weeks I had, and they had all their rights to do that. But what we did, believe it or not, we were listening to Gigli recordings, because he sang those beautiful songs of "Mama". And, we listened to the BBC, and we were reading...

NL: Did you have enough to eat?

AA: Yes, because our two Christian boyfriends have supplied us with quite a lot. They went to burned-out places where they brought us coffee in sacks, what you won't believe it. And, whatever they could find, they brought. Beans, I had never eaten so many beans in my life, and I can't look at them today, but that's what they brought. But in any case, I asked him, and he said, "Would you please just take me once more?" So, we went up and there was Raoul Wallenberg.

NL: You were introduced to him?

AA: And, I was the first, because I already had a Swedish passport. Now you see, there is two things...

NL: I see.

AA: As you know, there was a passport what they gave to 800 people, and there were also Swedish people who were without a passport and they got it and it was not hard covered. And I got that one Swedish passport, because I was "married" to a Swede.

NL: You were married to a Swede.

AA: I thought, or at least I was engaged to the man. Then, I had that passport, and Raoul Wallenberg turned to me and he said, "Would you work with me and the Swedish Red Cross?" And I said, "Yes, sir. I will, but I still have the star." So they all started to laugh. I said, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "Cause that star won't stay on." "Oh," I said, "O.K." So, to be short, the star had been removed.

NL: What was your impression of him?

AA: It was very strange, because he is not a "typical" Swede. He's not a tall blond, he was already a little bit receding hair, the most wonderful eyes, you know. In those eyes was a whole heart and soul in it. And the handshake, too.

NL: Strong.

AA: You felt that you had someone there who's unusual. And I really didn't know what he came to do. No idea why he was sent or who he was. The name didn't mean a thing to me at that time. So the next day already I went down with [unclear] paper to the, and you will read this in the book, I went down to the police station, and the police chief must have been bribed, pretty greatly, because he was one of the greatest Nazis, and he cried and took me in his arms, how proud he was to cut off the star himself.

NL: You were asked to go to the police station to have that done?

AA: Oh yes, by myself.

NL: Why was that necessary?

AA: Well, because I can't run around with the star.

NL: Couldn't Wallenberg have cut it off?

AA: No, they wanted them very precisely. And they...

NL: Do you think it was a deal of some kind?

AA: Oh, I am sure it was.

NL: Oh, I see.

AA: And, of course the police chief turned to me, and I don't even know his name to the end, he said, "And you will tell the forces who liberate us what a great man I am." And I looked at him, I said, "Sure, I will." And I think I, I did like this, you know; I'm sure Raoul did the same thing. Anyways, when I walked out, I heard somebody say, "And there goes another bloody Jew." But I made it home!

NL: You made it home.

AA: Without the star. Now, Raoul said next day, "Here is another paper. Now you go to the House Commission and get your apartment back." Now, you read that already, I guess. Ah, House Commission, you see, what happened in Hungary as soon as the Hungarian Nazis took over, they just ransacked the Jewish apartments, and now suddenly they made a House Commission and gave up.

*Tape one, side two:*

NL: Mrs. Adachi, side two of tape one. And so, you had to approach a house authority.

AA: So, I had to go to the house authority with this little paper which said that I am employed by the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish Red Cross, and I want this apartment back. And I never even thought of it that the apartment was actually written on my father's name, not on mine. And I walk up to this horrible looking, uniformed individual.

NL: This was an Arrow Cross man.

AA: An Arrow Cross man, of course, and inside, I think, my stomach went *whut whut whut*, but with a big *chutzpah*, and like Raoul Wallenberg, you know, I put my nose up, I was very elegantly dressed, and I shoved that paper to him and says, "I want my apartment back." And I thought that the way he looked at me that he either will shoot me or somebody will. And he looked at me, and without a word, he signed and gave it back. I made one turn and I heard again somebody exclaim, "There is another bloody Jew go." But nobody shot. I walked out on the street with a smile, I says, "Hey, now I am going for my apartment."

NL: So he was bribed too, apparently.

AA: Oh, they all were.

NL: They all were.

AA: And that's why Raoul needed so much money. Because they don't, you see, he bribed them with alcohol, 'cause the Hungarians are great drinkers, and with cigars, and cigarettes and food.

NL: He had done that prior to your having met him, I suppose?

AA: Well, I guess so, I had no idea what they'd done beforehand or whatnot. But I was his first non-paid employee, because nobody was paid, because constantly you hear and see that he said oh he had paid employees. He didn't *have* any paid employees. *No one* was paid, not a Christian, not the Jews, we were all volunteers. No body was paid.

NL: It's important to know that.

AA: And I wish that people would listen to it. Also that he never gave out fake passports. He never gave out passports. He never gave out visas. I still hear people go around saying, "Oh, Raoul Wallenberg, he let people go." He didn't let them go, because he couldn't. We were already surrounded. So those are all lies. So, anyways, now I had, I go back to my house, and the super, who was really a leech, lived on my father for years, he hated the guts of me that I walked in, and I said, "I'd like to have Papa's apartment back." And he says, "Oh, no, my daughter already has it." Well, but his wife said—and I'm surprised that the wife was still alive after—she said, "Oh but our daughter has another apartment already, so give it to Agnes." So, he, he, he spoke perfect Russian, so he almost killed me two times after that. But anyways, to be short, he said I should go to the lawyer of the house

and it's up to him. So I went all the way to the lawyer with the same little *chutzpah* and I said, "I want my apartment back." And he said, "Well, I'll give it back to you if you promise that when the Allied forces coming you will tell them what a wonderful man I am." And I said, "Sure I will, *jah*, just give it to me." And I walked out, and I walked back and the super was very surprised. And I will go upstairs, and, only one room was closed. And I figured what will I find? Probably everything was stolen. And on my great surprise when we opened the door that was the maid's room, in the old times, old homes, that's what they had, *everything was there—all our furniture from the whole apartment*. All our paintings. And for a moment, I thought, gee, he isn't as bad as I thought. Until he said, "I'll get even with you yet." But anyhow he handed me the keys and I had the apartment. Then in the meantime Raoul started to give out these *Schutzpasses*, what are just protec...

NL: Protective.

AA: Protective passes. And of course my parents got two of them. And I went back to the Jewish house, and I said, "Out!" And my father said, "But we don't have the papers." I said, "Out! You come back to the apartment." I took them back, took the stars off.

NL: You took the stars off.

AA: And nothing happened. Why? I can't explain.

NL: Well, you were protected. Sweden was a neutral country.

AA: Protected, my parents weren't. O.K.? They would have been protected if they are in the houses what later on also Raoul didn't *buy*, he was *given* by the Jewish community and by the aristocrats. That's why we had 60 houses on the two sides of the Danube, because they were *given*, and we had the Swedish flag going out. And we put these people who had these passes in there. But I didn't let my parents go in there. Neither did I let my cousin with her San Salvadorian thing. I said, "You come home to us too." We all went home to my house.

NL: You thought they would be safer there?

AA: I, I, I just played God, O.K.?

NL: Well, it was your home. It was your home.

AA: It was our home, but we could have been killed any moment.

NL: Of course, of course.

AA: And it was very interesting to see the change in the house. There was no more of our old neighbors, only one.

NL: What had happened to them?

AA: I don't know. But probably most of the people down there were Jewish people with Christian papers.

NL: I see.

AA: And they just moved in. But I won't tell you the whole story, because you have to read the book, and then you will know who was there and what was there. It was very interesting people. A very interesting man was there. So in any case, somehow we

survived. I went every day to the Swedish Embassy. I was, all kinds, I was not his secretary, but I was a hostess. So that the people who came up there to ask for the pass we could give, they brought their pictures and we gave them the pass and, the Ambassador was signing each of them.

NL: How did people find out that this was happening? Word of mouth?

AA: You know, Budapest is a small, word of mouth.

NL: Word of mouth. And such good news and desperate news, you...

AA: There was a Jewish community of course...

NL: Yes.

AA: And through them...

NL: Did they, did they...

AA: But it was...

NL: Circularize this information?

AA: No, no, no, it was just mouth by mouth. They couldn't have. It was impossible. Because in the meantime—you think that all of us lived with Raoul? Many of us were killed. Why I wasn't killed I don't know. Today I say maybe the reason was so that I can go around the world telling about this wonderful man.

NL: Yah. Indeed.

AA: But we were not all that lucky.

NL: So the Arrow Cross was still rampaging on the streets?

AA: Oh, the Arrow Cross, they rampaged all the time. They killed little kids of, of two or three years old because they had the star on, and they, they, they were terrible.

NL: Yes, I've read about the atrocities. Worse than the Nazis.

AA: They, they were, they were incredible! They, they, you know and the only way you could fight them was to lie or to, to...

NL: Bribe.

AA: Do anything, to bribe.

NL: Bribe.

AA: And you know, Raoul's mind was so fast. He could do things like nobody ever would think. And of course it was dangerous. You see his great mind was that he learned names very fast, and he never forgot a name. Once he learned, he would not make a mistake to call me Ava when I am Agnes. It didn't happen. I, I can't do that. Even today I forget somebody's name five minutes after, but not him. So he learned every Hungarian Nazi party officer, these Arrow Cross, who were running the several offices around, and one of these officers was right by his hospital, because by that time he had a hospital. And, he came one day to this hospital in a very snowy and cold day, because it was the coldest winter of the, in 50 years in Hungary. And he arrived then and he finds these little punks, 12-, 13-year-old kids with a gun, want to shoot the doctor and the patients. And he walks in, and all he could do is hit them right across the face. The guns fell down, and he kicked



the gun. And he couldn't speak Hungarian, only a couple of words, "Get out of here and bring me your officer!"

NL: Well!

AA: And the kids were so frightened from him, because he was an authority when he wanted to be, y'know? The kids went out, and in about three minutes this Hungarian Nazi officer walks in, and Raoul looks at his watch and he says, "Simon, what took you three minutes to get here?" And the man was so surprised. He knew who he was, and he said, "Mr. Wallenberg, how do you know my name?" So, one go for Raoul. He said, "I know everybody's name, and I really don't understand what you're doing, because it's outrageous that you're sending on this *Swedish* territory three kids to *kill* my people instead of me bringing the *medicine* I was asking. Now *get out* and bring me the medication! And then maybe I can help you." And the officer says, "Why do you want to help me?" He said, "Because I just heard that by mistake you killed a Gestapo officer, and they're looking for you."

NL: Oh my goodness.

AA: And the guy says, "I never did!" He says, "Oh yes, you did, because he died here in our hospital! But before he died he sent your name up to the authorities." So the man turned and went, and the doctor stops there and he says, "Raoul, what did you just do?" And our friend starts to laugh. He says, "I didn't do anything. Look outside. It's snowing, not a speck of snow on anyone!" He says, "All right, but how did you know he was Simon?" He said, "Well, because that's the officer's name who runs this office next to us, and we were lucky it was Simon. It could have been no Simon, all right?"

NL: Of course.

AA: And he says, "But, Raoul, that's all fine. But I don't remember having a Gestapo officer here in our hospital." So what is Raoul doing? Another person would say, "No?" No, he said, he sat down on the floor, starts laughing. He said, "Of course not, but this guy killed so many people; one of them could have been a Gestapo officer."

NL: Oh my.

AA: But you see, you needed luck too, to luck, and the wit. The wit.

NL: The wit, to respond so quickly.

AA: You think, it could have been not Simon. It could have been that the officer takes out and shoots him.

NL: Yes.

AA: But he had to try. He had to save the hospital. He had to save the people. He had to save his doctors.

NL: Amazing. Amazing.

AA: And he did that all the time. For him, a human life like, like our friend whom you didn't hear yet, Dr. Goodkin, it was the same thing. He had to think, how can I, he went, he sent out if he couldn't go, he sent his records people to these camps where they already kept people and he would ask the mothers who would give up their children, to

give it to the Red Cross. And this friend of mine was the only one whose mother shoved her up. She couldn't understand why. She was only ten year old, why mother would shove her, but mother wanted her to live. And in the car going back to Budapest he heard about Raoul, "Raoul would be so glad we bring another child." And he says, "Who is Raoul?" He says, "Raoul Wallenberg. He's a Swede." Then she—was saved second time and then somehow it's an whole miracle. But, you know...

NL: Who was Dr. Goodkin?

AA: Dr. Goodkin—and you should interview her—she, right now she has a lyme disease, so you can't. She is, Professor of Languages and Humanities at Mercer College, Dr. Vera Goodkin.

NL: Oh, I've heard her name.

AA: Well, she's wonderful. And her story is magnificent.

NL: And this is the doctor? Doctor, or was it her husband or brother that's a doctor?

AA: No, she—is the doctor.

NL: It was she who saved the children.

AA: No, no, no, her *mother* who pushed her out and she was saved.

NL: She was saved. But who was the doctor who came to fetch her?

AA: No, the Red Cross, the Red Cross came.

NL: Oh, the Red Cross came.

AA: I'm sorry.

NL: Yah.

AA: But you have to hear her story yourself. I, I don't want to tell her story.

NL: Yes, all right, I, I, yes.

AA: It's a wonderful story.

NL: Yes, yes, I'm sorry I, I, interrupted.

AA: We are the only two who really work very hard to let the young people of the world know.

NL: She lectures also?

AA: Oh yes, and we were on the radio together, and we would love to go back to television together. We were on television, too.

NL: You were on television.

AA: Because I thought first I wanted only me, and I said, no, I think it is much more powerful if you have someone who was saved by him and someone who worked with him.

NL: Excellent. Surely. Makes it more dramatic.

AA: Makes it more dramatic, you know, because it really shows what...

NL: Dimensions of that whole project, yes. So, if I could just interrupt for another minute, Mrs. Adachi. Were you able to learn anything at all about the fate of those

of who were deported? Did you understand what Auschwitz was while you were working with Raoul, with Wallenberg?

AA: No.

NL: What did you think...

AA: First time I really found out what Auschwitz is when I hit Romania. And there was something...

NL: *After* the war?

AA: No, it was still the war, but some people who did escape from Auschwitz and Belsen-Bergen and so on--That was the first time I heard.

NL: But now while you were working with Wallenberg, there were, of course, many, many hundreds of thousands of Jews from Hungary who were deported, some 400,000 in a matter of 44 days.

AA: Four hundred [unclear] thousand.

NL: Yes. Did you, did you hear the word "Auschwitz" at all?

AA: Never.

NL: Never.

AA: None of us.

NL: Wallenberg didn't mention that word either to you?

AA: He might have, but we didn't have time. We didn't have time.

NL: So you were totally unaware.

AA: All we were to try to save...

NL: Save.

AA: Those Jews who are still in Budapest.

NL: Did you know that those Jews who were being deported were being killed?

AA: That we heard.

NL: You heard.

AA: Yes.

NL: But, not, not verifiable news.

AA: Not verifiable.

NL: And you never heard from those people.

AA: No, because the BBC never talked about it either.

NL: So...

AA: And that was the only one we listened to.

NL: Yah. And so, as far as you knew, then, as far as you recall, no one in the Budapest area understood that the deportations were to a death camp?

AA: Oh, that we knew. But only after already 400,000 people were taken.

NL: It was after the fact. But as they were being...

AA: That's why Raoul went after the trains and stopped them, so that they can't take those people.

NL: Yah. So, you knew that they were, they might perish...

AA: Oh yes.

NL: But you didn't know exactly how.

AA: No, we didn't.

NL: Yah.

AA: And why we all survived we don't know either.

NL: All right, now, let's go back. You were snatching people literally from houses and from the streets.

AA: We were, yes.

NL: Giving them these *Schutzpasses*.

AA: Yes. What, what we did, for instance, one night, you, you, as you know probably that we all who worked for him and the Red Cross, every night we slept somewhere else. I didn't always sleep home either. And I had to lie to my parents. I said we were sleeping at the Embassy, which was a lie, because we had to go from one house to the other, because *they were after us*, all of us, especially after Raoul they were. And the one morning again on the radio they said that all women between the age of 15 and 25 have to go to such and such a sports palace and then they will have to clean up Budapest. What because the bombings were on and it was really shattered, and we knew that they will not clean, but they will put in a wagon and, now by that time we knew that they taking them out and we didn't know the, the names of these gas chamber places like Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen, and, and Treblinka and what not. And of course Raoul immediately said to the whole crew, "All of you must have young sisters, and aunts and what not. Let's get the pictures." So we collected pictures for a whole day. And then we went to Buda.

NL: Photos?

AA: Photos from what we put on the *Schutzpass*.

NL: The *Schutzpass*, yes.

AA: And, then we, asked them to sign, and then we have to collect all these and take it to— We were that time over in Buda in a beautiful villa, not far from the bridge. It was an icy, icy cold but beautiful moon-lit night, and we couldn't figure out *why* they don't bombing us on a day because we *wanted* the Americans to bomb, you know, so that we can get over it. And, nothing, no bombing, and there was a curfew also. We were not allowed out, nobody, Christians neither, from 9:00 in the evening until 7:00 in the morning. So, it was sort of dead, and we're sitting there in this beautiful place writing these life-saving passes. The Ambassador sat there, he signed every one, we put the pictures on. Around midnight Raoul arrives, unshaven, hungry, who knows where he was saving other people, and he says, "How're you doing?" And we said, "We are almost finished." And he said, "Well you better hurry, because by 3:00 we have to deliver each one of these passes." Nobody ever talked about curfew, you know, we were not allowed out. And then, as a joke he says to us, "Just keep on working, but I just want to tell you we have new neighbors in the next villa." And of course we all looked up. He says, "Don't look up. It's only the German headquarters."

NL: Oh my.

AA: And being like Raoul, who cares? So it's the German headquarters. So I remember I was the lucky one who was first ready, and I had to deliver my [inaudible] to the Pest side. Five hundred of these life-saving papers. And I walked out. And when you are young and you see a moonlight and stars, you forget about war, like Raoul Wallenberg, and I smiled to myself, and all I heard is my footsteps. And I crossed the bridge and I went from one house to the other with the addresses I knew. Several of them were good friends of mine, and then I rang the bell and they opened the door. "Aggie! What you doing out on the street!?" And all I could say with tears in my eyes, I said, "I am nothing. Here is a paper an angel sent you, and I hope it will save you. Goodbye." And I kissed and went. And only when I got home, finally, around I think it must have been 2:00, 2:30 in the morning, and I sat down on the bed, and suddenly it dawned to me what I'd just done. And I said, "Oh, my God, I could have been killed!"

NL: Indeed!

AA: There was a curfew! And then, suddenly I says, "What am I talking about? Raoul Wallenberg wouldn't like to hear that. Of course they wouldn't kill us, because the Germans and the Hungarians are great cowards. They wouldn't dare to be out in a moonlit night." And I went to sleep. And 6:00 in the morning I woke up. My two best girlfriends were kicked out from that camp. And they, they were born in Hungary, but they were brought up in Germany, so the German officer told them in German what they can do with the paper, but the kids turned around and he never shot after them. So they ran all the way to our house.

NL: Oh my.

AA: And they are in this country today. They're both grandmothers. But we are alive!

NL: Remarkable story.

AA: So, you see, Raoul gave us such a strength that I think nothing was impossible.

NL: How many people worked with you and him?

AA: About 350 altogether, that was it.

NL: 350.

AA: Yah.

NL: That was his core, rescue.

AA: And a few, maybe there was ten of the Red Cross people, and they were magnificent.

NL: This was the Hungarian Red Cross?

AA: No.

NL: I wouldn't think so.

AA: The Hungarian Red Cross were Nazis like the rest of it.

NL: Swedish Red Cross.

AA: Oh, the Swedish Red Cross. And later on the Swiss helped.  
NL: The Swiss Red Cross.  
AA: Yes.  
NL: Or the Swiss...  
AA: Swiss Red Cross.  
NL: Swiss, Swiss Red Cross.  
AA: And the Swiss Consul too.  
NL: Swiss Consul.  
AA: Yes.  
NL: That's important to record.  
AA: For whom they're making, making now big deal for him. They have a Lutz, that was his name, Consul Lutz, they're having a Lutz Committee in Switzerland. And when I asked my family could I sell my book in Switzerland, they said, "Nobody would be interested in Wallenberg." But Lutz only did it because Raoul asked him to.  
NL: He inspired him. Undoubtedly.  
AA: And he was taken to Russia too, but the Swiss, they called up and they said, "We have three Russians here. If you want them, give us Lutz back." And Lutz was home within a week—Raoul Wallenberg, still in jail 44 years after.  
NL: If not worse.  
AA: If not worse.  
NL: Not worse. Were a number of these 350 or so non-Jews, Mrs. Adachi, or were...  
AA: Mixed.  
NL: Mixed.  
AA: Lot of Jews, a lot of non-Jews.  
NL: And mostly young, would you say?  
AA: No.  
NL: Not necessarily.  
AA: I wouldn't say that, necessarily.  
NL: Not necessarily. Yes.  
AA: Not necessarily. There were quite a few men who were in their late forties.  
NL: How did he pick them? The way he picked...  
AA: They picked themselves. He didn't pick. He picked me, because he...  
NL: He picked you.  
AA: Knew that I was the girl...  
NL: That you were very [both talking; inaudible for a few seconds] and were engaged to his...  
AA: Yah, so he picked me, but the rest of it was the Jewish Community came up and they offered to help.  
NL: Offered themselves.

AA: And the rest of it too, and I think it, probably through all these people he, he picked his two secretaries. One was a Christian, one was a Jew. And that was it.

NL: So, he...

AA: So he really didn't pick anyone. He, he got them.

NL: He got the very people whom he needed.

AA: Yah, they actually made a joke about it, because the Embassy was only 12 people and we were 350.

NL: An enlarged...

AA: And they were...

NL: An enlarged number.

AA: They were so, rather, I mean they didn't like, the Ambassador didn't like all the things Raoul did, what was very natural. See, Raoul Wallenberg was not a diplomat.

NL: No, he was doing illegal things, in the name of Sweden.

AA: He, but he said to the Ambassador, he said, "If you go, you speak like a diplomat. And I am not." And that's why he could do what he had done. And he became a diplomat overnight.

NL: But not officially.

AA: It's like me. I became a Swede overnight. I mean it's ridiculous.

NL: Yah.

AA: And then I became a Romanian overnight, because I had to help the Swedish government. But, this happened, and, and something I think you didn't hear either and I heard that three weeks ago, and I am still shocked about it, because we didn't know that. The question is always, why they took him, O.K.? Why they took Raoul Wallenberg. After all, he was a diplomat. A Swedish gentleman, who is now the head of the Chicago Wallenberg Committee, a wonderful young man, he was just told that Raoul's diplomatic immunity ran out three days before the Soviets arrived to Hungary. Therefore, the Russians knew this exactly. And when the...

NL: Who, who...

AA: Red Cross asked the government to please reinstate him immediately, they said that cannot be done.

NL: So the Swedish *government* removed his immunity? Oh my, what a scandal. Do you think that's true?

AA: I think it is, yes.

NL: And this is why the Swedish government didn't act quickly to try to save him. Oh my.

AA: So it is a lot of...

NL: What a scandal.

AA: Betrayal. They betrayed Raoul Wallenberg all the way. And this was this young man, and he is to me, I mean young man, he was 32, full of dreams. He loved children. The young people were his life. What a father he would have made. He was an

incredible person, with his talent for theater and for singing and for, for dramatic things what he didn't have to do, you know.

NL: To keep your spirit up.

AA: To keep our spirits, and I'm sure his too...

NL: His spirit.

AA: But you see, he probably, when he came to Hungary first he thought this will be just a little adventure, but then he became like a great chess player. Now, I step, and I can win! And he was an excellent chess player. He could do it with the Germans. He was not a good chess player with the Soviets.

NL: With the Russians, or with his own government.

AA: And with his own government. And...

NL: Ah, so tragic.

AA: It is tragic, because we're not talking about the saints. I don't think he would ever like, he was also not speaking about the hero, because this wasn't his idea. His idea was just, "I have to save the people." He didn't care if somebody was a Jew or a Christian. "The people needed help, I help." Because there were thousands, especially in Budapest, mixed marriages. What he didn't say that, "Hey, I won't save you because you're the Christian part." What did he care? "As long as I save the people." And those people who were in his safe houses, and we had, thirty or fifty or sixty of it; they were crowded, but they had Raoul Wallenberg who came every day when he could, just to see how everybody is. He sent them food, he sent them medication. He sent them a doctor, he sent them a nurse. He was *there*. You felt it.

NL: His presence.

AA: My mother's friend, who, I think, just died last year, she's, she was 100 when she died, she was outside Budapest in a, a mason factory. And you probably heard the name of, Susan Tabor [phonetic]?

NL: No.

AA: Well, she was one of the survivors, who also, she worked at Yeshiva University, library I believe. She died, unfortunately, last year in cancer, or two years ago. Now, she was there with her mother and her husband, and they had, also some Salvadorian paper or something which was really nothing good. And my mother's friend was there, and this was like a gas chamber. It was a mason factory where they, in the dark, they made trenches so that people fell in and they died. They had no food, no water, no toilets. And Raoul heard about it suddenly, and he went out there with the Red Cross and with hot soup and bread, and he screamed at those people. She, she told me, "How *dare* you are to do what you're doing? How *dare*! These are Swedish people!" And he had papers in his pocket, and my mother's friend said that he walked in in this cold place where they were sitting for weeks already, and there were 300 old people in there. And he would suddenly change his whole voice. And he would touch everyone, including my friend, and he said, "Please do not worry. I will come back. I'll bring you hot soup and medicine. But you have



to wait, because first I have to save the young. But I'll come back for each one of you." And nobody was angry with him for saying that. They said, "Who is this angel?" And as he walked out, Susan went up and she said, "Sir,"—she didn't know who he was—she said, "We don't have your paper." He said, "Never mind, just walk out, walk out with me." And he walked them right out of the camp. O.K.? And the German just stood there, because he was so powerful. He said, "You will be hanged! Because I am a diplomat!" And...

NL: They were, they were intimidated.

AA: And he came back and saved those 300 people. She came out here with her husband eventually. But people don't believe that these things really happened.

NL: Well, I think they do.

AA: And...

NL: It's just that it's, it's so incredible.

AA: It is incredible...

NL: It's so incredible.

AA: Like it was incredible for us too.

NL: Yah.

AA: You believe it that in Budapest we didn't believe it when these people came and told us the story?NL: Yah.

AA: We said, "Nah, nobody can do things like this."

NL: Yes. He was so clever and sharp-witted.

AA: But you see the problem that, that, the terrible thing is that people don't believe. In '45, now the war was over in May, in September I was in Switzerland. June, July, August, September, four months, O.K.? It was still, the whole world was in a tumult. And I have a big family there, and I thought, "This is such a wonderful story. This has to be told. If the Swiss didn't listen to the people who came out of the camps, maybe I can understand, because how can you even, you know, imagine this? I mean, for young people too this must be something, how, how can you do this to people?" But I thought, "This is a story. It's, it's so gorgeous, it's so wonderful."

NL: So fresh.

AA: My uncle, who was a Russian Jew, who came out in 1960 and turned to my aunt and said in German—he forgot that I speak perfect German—he said, "I think we better take her to a psychiatrist. Her mind must have gotten crazy in the war. She is *lying*." I was devastated. So I tried to go to newspaper people. They laughed in my face. And I did the mistake, I think, that I stopped talking about Wallenberg, because nobody believed me. I should have *never* stopped talking.

NL: When did you start talking again?

AA: Eight years ago, nine years ago.

NL: So late.

AA: Because, I got to Sweden in October. Nobody talked about Raoul Wallenberg. I met the Embassy again, and I said, "Where is Raoul?" "Raoul didn't make it

home. We don't know where he is." I said, "What do you mean, you don't know where he is!? You went through Russia, didn't you pick him up?" He said, "No, they told us there not to speak about him." So, then I got a job through the Swedish government, a wonderful job; the other great Swede, Count Bernadotte, you know, he went through Bergen-Belsen and he brought the people in to rehabilitate them. And they needed someone who would go and speak in three languages. I couldn't speak Polish, but German, French and Hungarian, and tell them about Sweden and Swedish culture and literature. And so, I was very lucky. I had the key to the royal library, because the books were there in German. And I was sent out. And I asked them, this is the Svenska Institute, the Swedish Institute, who beforehand they had exchange student programs. [Tape ends abruptly.]

Postscript: In a follow-up conversation, Mrs. Adachi expresses her belief that Wallenberg is still alive, that she does not believe the statement of Soviet officials that he died in prison.