

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Farkas, Ileana

Date of interview: 4/14/1999

Summary: Ileana Farkas was born Ileana Marmustein on 2-26-1929 in Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti), Transylvania, Romania, near the border of Hungary. Prior to the Hungarian invasion in 1940, Ileana remembers a calm life with her parents and as the youngest of a family of four - which included her siblings Jenő, Ági, and Malke. She came from a religious Jewish Orthodox family and attended a public school with both Jewish and non-Jewish students. Her father ran two stores, previously owned by her grandfather, which sold magazines, newspapers, tobacco, and stamps. The first incidents of Anti-Semitism Ileana remembered occurred after the Hungarians invaded Romania on September 5, 1940.

When the Hungarians entered, all the Jewish businesses were taken away from the Jewish owners. Although anti-Semitic harassment occurred, the Jews were mostly ignored and the synagogue was left intact allowing Ileana's family to continue to attend services. In 1941, her older brother fled to Budapest using Gentile papers. Because they had lost their business, Ileana's brother sent goods from Budapest for their father to sell. During 1943, the harassment of the Jews increased. Ileana remembers having to wear a Jewish star and having a curfew imposed on the Jews. In 1944, her brother returned from Budapest to convince his younger sisters to flee. Ileana was very willing to go and her father bought her Gentile papers. She fled to Budapest in April of 1944 and went by the name of Elizabeth. Her sister, who also used Gentile papers to travel, joined her but her brother was caught en route from Satu Mare to Budapest and sent to Auschwitz. Ileana's other sister decided to stay in Satu Mare and was taken to Auschwitz with their parents.

In Budapest, Ileana, her sister, and two of their cousins (who were also using false papers) lived in a small apartment together and worked in a factory that produced cigarette holders. However, one day her supervisor warned her that she had been found out as a Jew and she and her sister left their jobs and apartment. Ileana then took a job as a salesperson in a department store and she and her sister rented a room in the house of a Hungarian, non-Jewish family. She and her sister moved about freely as Gentiles for about 8 months until bombing began in Budapest in December. They then hid in the basement for about 6 weeks until the Russians liberated Budapest on Jan. 18, 1945. Ileana and her sister returned to Satu Mare in April to find their brother and sister. Their parents died in Auschwitz. Even though the remaining family was reunited, Ileana wanted to return to Budapest to marry the Gentile boy whose family had housed her, but her brother refused to allow the marriage. Ileana later met her husband, who was Jewish and from Satu Mare, in 1946 and they married that same year.

Ileana, her husband, and her young son left Romania in 1962 because

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they had a rough life in the Russian controlled communist Romania. It took them many years to get passports, but they eventually immigrated to the United States. They came to the Bay Area because Ileana's brother-in-law lived here and owned a shoe store. At first her life in the United States was very difficult because she didn't speak English and had to work hard to help support her family, but she expressed her love of America. Towards the end of the interview, Ileana described the vast influence her Holocaust experience has on her current life and she shared photographs she had of her family.