

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Allison, Agnes

Date of interview: 5/19/1994, 8/22/1994

Summary: Two interviews: the first covers birth to June 1944, and the second covers the period after June 1944.

Ágnes Allison was born in Budapest, Hungary 10/ 28/1926. Her name was Ágnes Suzannah Halász. She was the elder of two daughters, her sister, Judy, five years younger. Her mother was named Ilona Gero and was a housewife. Her father's name was Robert Halász and his parents were Maurice and Flora Hochstader and were probably from Austria originally. Agnes' parents were married in 1924. The family was not religious. Robert and his brother worked in the family business, manufacturing clothing for women and children. The name of the business was Maurice Hochstader and Sons, and Robert was a traveling salesman.

Agnes grew up in a comfortable apartment, the family had a nanny and a kitchen maid, and later a German tutor. Agnes attended a private German school established for the children of diplomats. The school had both Jewish and non-Jewish students and had an excellent reputation.

When war broke out in September 1939, the nanny was dismissed for promoting National Socialism. Agnes describes being aware of Polish refugees arriving in Budapest and the Hitler Youth Movement at school. The German children would be excused from classes to march and sing Nazi songs, wearing uniforms of the movement. She says that there was no anti-Semitism displayed by the German students, but some of the Hungarian students taunted the Jewish children. In 1941 Agnes left the German school went to a private Hungarian school. Agnes became aware of "Jewish laws" in Hungary in 1941 and 1942, and remembers quotas for admission to the university, intermarriage forbidden and other restrictions.

Agnes tells of her family converting to Catholicism in 1939 and although she disapproved, her parents felt that in order to survive this was necessary. She attended mass and went to confession until she was 18 years old, and liked her new religion but felt she was Jewish. The Nazi occupation of Hungary occurred March 19, 1944 and although there were no announcements, she was aware of the German activity in Budapest. In early April 1944 further restrictions were imposed on Jews, yellow stars were to be worn and curfews were imposed. Jewish students were not allowed to continue at school and Agnes was still considered Jewish, although the family had converted. Telephone lines were disconnected in Jewish homes, and the family had to turn over jewelry to the Germans. At this time Jewish boys were being forced into labor camps.

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In June 1944 the family had to leave their apartment and for ten days stayed in a warehouse belonging to Agnes' uncle. From there, the family moved to an apartment owned by Agnes' aunt Illie who had two children, Eva and Georgie. About 30 people were hiding in the apartment. Downstairs was a coffee shop owned by her aunt and uncle, and on the floor below the apartment, the Germans had a large workshop. The Germans required that some of the family work for them and Agnes was a receptionist there. They received no pay but the Nazis did protect them and treated them well.

During the period that Agnes worked for the Germans in the workshop, she lived upstairs with her family and about thirty others in her aunt's apartment. Agnes became friendly with a German officer's chauffeur, Fritz, who told her that the German soldiers kept watch at night to protect everyone in the apartment from the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow Cross.

October 15, 1944 Hungary surrendered and the Arrow Cross came into power. Until then, Jews were relatively safe and there had been no mass deportations. She describes how afraid they had all become, there were arrests and Jews were lined up along the river and shot.

In mid- November 1944 they heard that the Russians were approaching and instructions were given to the Germans in the workshop to leave Budapest. Agnes recalls taking a telephone call from Eichmann at this time. The Germans offered to take the Jewish group in their convoy and accompany them to the Swiss border. Approximately ten of the people accepted the offer and they reached Switzerland safely.

In early December 1944 Agnes and her family had arranged to be hidden by a priest, Father Reile. Nuns who ran a school dormitory had taken in Hungarian women and children seeking refuge from the approaching Russians, as well as Jewish women and children attempting to hide. Agnes' father and the other men were across the road protected by the priests and Father Reile. The nuns arranged activities for the children and the women were kept busy working with the nuns. They were told on December 24, 1944 that the Russians had surrounded Budapest and because of air raids and shelling everyone had to move into the basement of the building. By mid- January 1945 the group could not leave the basement at all and the Russians were taking over Budapest block by block. The Nazis had blown up the bridges as they left Pest and took refuge in the Buda hills. The group remained in hiding until April 1945.

Agnes relates that it was only then that they heard what had happened to European Jews, and that was when she and her family saw the devastation of Budapest. The families who remained in the apartment were shot and killed by the Arrow Cross. She believes that the Hungarian people helped many Jews survive and that it was the Arrow Cross who was responsible for the death of

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Budapest Jews.

Agnes concludes her interview by saying that she heard about the concentration camps after she was liberated in 1945, and discovered that many of her relatives and friends were murdered.