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see
w/ A
Charles

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW - MAY 19, 1994

Agnes Allison
PT. 1 (only
part of 2)

Q: Where and when were you born?

I was born in Budapest Hungary on October 28, 1926 in a little clique. My maiden name..I was named by my parents Agnes Zsuzsana Halasz, and I dropped the Zsuzsanna because I do not like it. OK, I was the first child, my parents had been married only 2 years, and I have a younger sister Judy, and she is about 5 years 3 months younger, but when she gets mad she says she's 7 years younger. My mother in Ilona, and her maiden name is Gero. My father's name is Robert, and his name was Halasz ever since I can remember, but his father's name was Hochstadter. I think that that part of the family must have come from or through Austria because they're blonde and blue-eyed, and that's an Austrian name, Austrian-Jewish. I don't know much about his family because he never talked about it, but I know that his parents were first cousins. His mother's name was Flora...Flora Hochstadter, and that was her maiden name, and then she married Maurice Hochstadter. And beyond that I don't know. I remember both my grandparents on his side, um, my grandfather died when I was fairly young, maybe about 6 or 7...and he was a...not very tall, but very erect, straight-standing man with a mustache, impressive mustache somewhere there are pictures of him, I just don't know where they are...My family photos are in total disarray. He was a nice man, and my mother who doesn't have much nice to say much about anybody called him a gentleman. And my grandmother who I remember very well, because she was alive until the middle of the Nazi occupation in Budapest, and, uh, then she started hemorrhaging and she was carted off and G-d only knows what happened, I mean we were living in hiding and she probably passed away because I don't think she was getting medical care. She used to come for dinner every Sunday and she really didn't interact much with us. She usually sat and crocheted, she crocheted miles and miles, I still have doilies and table covers that she crocheted, very nice ones, but she sat there and crocheted, and gave us big wet kisses, and then my father would come home, wherever he was Sunday mornings, and we would have family dinner and then she would sit some more in a ?Rugchair? and then she would go home. And my mother fiercely resented this, because my father only came home just for the dinner hour, and it felt to her, to entertain her mother-in-law and I don't think there was much love lost there. So that's my grandparents on that side.

And my father was born in Keszthely, which is a small resort place on the southern tip of the Lake Balaton. And he took me there once, I was very young and I don't much remember but Keszthely is a fairly excitable community, and it's next to another resort place called Hades(?) which is a spa with hot springs. And my father used to go there for his rheumatoid arthritis, and take the hot bath and the sulfur bath, and all I remember is it smelled awful and I didn't want to go back.

And, OK, on my mother's side, it's more complex, and it goes back further, because she used to talk about her family. My mother's father, Sandor Gero, I think was raised in what is probably now Czechoslovakia/Poland in the northeastern corner of Hungary. And he was orphaned at a fairly young age, and was raised by an older brother, and then they came to Budapest. And my mother's mother was, her maiden name was Rosenfeld, and they came from a small town, a very small town in southeastern Hungary. I know the name of the town, it's very long, it's not important bothering to spell it out. But, amazingly enough, my mother who's still alive at age 94, and in a fog, because she's lost all her memory, and she's pretty much mentally gone, but one day she just came up with the name, which I had forgotten, and...anyway that's the side of the family my red hair comes from...

um, my father was blond and blue-eyed, so was my grandmother Flora, so was my father's older brother Karl, they called him Kari, and so that was the blond, blue-eyed side, and my little granddaughter is blond, blue-eyed, so that's how it went.

On my mother's side, my mother's mother, whom I never met, she died long before I was born, came from a family from that small town and there were, if I remember correctly, three girls, and one brother, and the brother was red-headed and freckled, and his name was Arthur, and the girls were Bertha, and Hermine, that was my grandmother, and Kate, and she was the youngest. And Bertha, she

was the legend in the family. She had flaming red hair down to her waist, and she was supposed to have been very beautiful. And in the little town there was a military garrison, and every noon, Bertha would take her little sister Kate by the hand, and take her for a walk up and down the main street, and all the young officers would be hanging out the windows to look at beautiful red-haired Bertha parading up and down. Well, that's the family legend, this was told to me by Kate, who was my great-aunt, and who passed away only about three years ago. She was near 90. And that's where my red hair comes from. And then I have two...a red-headed niece and a red-headed nephew. They are my uncle's, my mother's brother's children, both of whom are red-headed.

So, anyway, my mother's mother Hermine died when my mother was 9 months old. I was told, over and over again that she died of a pneumonia, leaving this 9-month old infant and a 2 1/2 year old little boy, that was my uncle, Steve Bishnoff(?). It wasn't until I came to this country at the age of 20 and we went to visit my Aunt Kate in Detroit, that she said, oh, you know what Hermine died of, my sister Hermine, and I said sure, pneumonia, my mother never got through telling me. She says, "that's not true", and I said, "it isn't?" "No, she died of a self-inflicted abortion." So that was the big family secret. I do not know, because I never dared ask my mother, if she believed that or that if that what she was fed and never knew any better. But, my mother never forgave the world for having robbed her of her mother. She never forgave her father and manipulated him with guilt-trips up and down to where he pretty much had to give in or she would have temper tantrums, and it then went into our family and on and on.

Anyway, she grew up without a mother and at first there were housekeepers. My grandfather was running two small movie houses which were in their infancy in Budapest. And so he spent many hours in the office. And the children, the 2 little ones were cared for by housekeepers, and eventually he remarried, and from what I gather, my mother was about 3 or 4, my uncle was 2 1/2 years older, and according to my mother, at the wedding, she had a screaming fit, she didn't want her daddy to be belonging to another woman. Well, that sort of set the stage, because life thereafter became pretty bad. The young wife didn't care much for the children, and the children didn't like her. I remember my step-grandmother. I didn't see much of her for obvious reasons and she was a little dumpling of a woman, very heavy, small and heavy, roly-poly with frizzy brown hair and, she was a diabetic, and that's what she eventually died of, I'm not sure when. But from my mother told me many, many times, and my sister, we'd listen to these stories of just endless chaos, and fights in the family that got very nasty and very ugly and especially as she grew into young womanhood, and my uncle got to be a teenager. The one of the things that I thought to be funny at the time, um, there will be pitched arguments at the dinner table between my step-grandmother and my uncle, and whenever she'd get real mad, she'd take a glass of water and throw it at him so he used to come to the dinner table in a raincoat with his collar turned up and with an umbrella. And so when the arguments started he'd pop the umbrella up. So he left home as soon as he could. My mother stayed home, she didn't marry until she was 24. But, things would happen, and I don't know how much of that to believe, because my mother had a way of emphasizing her victim hood and she never got over being a victim. That was her life's theme, of being a victim. And of decrying everybody else's...being mean.

Undoubtedly, she did suffer, undoubtedly, my step-grandmother did mean things to her especially after she had a child of her own. And, so, this was her baby. Unfortunately, my uncle, Laci, never amounted to a hill of beans. He, uh, tried the movie business, and wasn't successful, and, all I remember is somebody who was a very heavy smoker, and was continually coughing, and whoever he married, they were not welcome in our house, anyway. They came once or twice, but, it wasn't a family relationship. His wife also coughed, they were smokers. I think that he lived through the Holocaust, ended up in Vienna, and I think that's where he passed away.

So, my Uncle Steve also went into the movie business, my mother's brother, and he made it rich. He inherited the 2 movie houses left to them by my grandfather, and built that up into quite a little empire. He was a very ruthless businessman who was not very well liked. And, he was the authority figure.

My mother married my father in 1924. She said she had a lot of suitors, and I believe that. In fact just recently, I met somebody who said oh, we could've been sisters because my father courted your mother...among other people.

And, uh, anyway, she married Robert Halasz, who was 12 years her senior, because she said what she liked about him was that he got out and he went places, he traveled and he went to the opera and concerts; she never did or could get out that much as an unescorted young woman, and my father apparently had the reputation of being the young man about town. He was quite nice-looking, with his blond hair and his blue eyes and I don't know if you remember a movie star from the 30s and 40's named Cottlesockle(SP?) Well my father eventually got to be a dead-ringer for him. And he's in Casablanca, he has a minor role, so the next time you see Casablanca look for him. And, anyway, he was a comic actor who came to the States. And, in Hungarian, his name is blond beard, but here they call him Cottle...sockle is the name for beard. And, so, anyway, my father turned out to be a dead ringer for him, which was very funny in its own way. But after they got married, you know my mother's admiration for my father's knowing where to go and whatever didn't carry over. She didn't want to go. She thought that he was gallivanting all over the place, and...in Europe, men sit around in coffeehouses, and he wanted her to go with him. And she said, "that's not an appropriate place for me, those are cheap people who are there, or your...your traveling salesman friends." You know, she had nothing but contempt, and apparently her father didn't think much of my father, either. Because he said, "he's a poor excuse for a man...businessman."

Q:What did your father do?

My father and his brothers had a business. My grandfather Hochstadter established this little firm called Hochstadter and Sons, Maurice Hochstadter and Sons, which was a very small only family-run manufacturing place for children's clothing and women's clothing so they had maybe 6 seamstresses max. And so they would buy the fabric and they would make up blouses and children's clothing and whatever, mostly girl's things and women's blouses, nothing heavy like suits, you know, but mostly light garments. And then my father became the traveling salesman for the family business and he'd hit the road by train on Monday mornings, he'd be gone most of the week going from town to town, small towns in Hungary, and, you know showing the samples, and when an order came in, well, he'd relay that back to the shop. And they would then fulfill those orders. And he had a million jokes to tell, a million stories to tell, and he was the punster, which I inherited, and my middle son inherited that from me...so, um...

Q:What did your mother do?

She was a housewife...she...well, we lived a pretty comfortable middle-class existence. We had a nice apartment in Budapest near the City Park. It was a four-plex, and so there were just four families living there. And so, there were trees around and the City Park was five minutes away, and so I grew up playing in the City Park.

And I had a nanny, and my mother had a kitchen helper, usually a young girl from some village who came and she got room and board and a modest salary, and for that, she cleaned and washed the dishes, and did all sorts of things for long hours. And the nanny, at first it was a Hungarian nanny, named Margot, and I remembered her, and I liked her very much. And then I was, about oh, I don't know, maybe about 5, and at that point, Margot either left, on her own accord, or my family let her go, and it was decided that it was time for me to have a Fraulein, and that's a very Central European institution. Today we would call them au pairs, but it was usually a young woman from Austria, some from Germany, but most from Austria who came and lived with the family, took care of the children, and taught them German. Well, I know it was before I was six, because I absorbed German like a sponge, and within just a very short time I was prattling away in two languages. It was fun. It was easy. I had no problem at all.

And so, came time for me to go to first grade, (at that time there was no compulsory kindergarten in Hungary) my uncle, who is really, as I say, the authority figure, whatever my uncle said had weight, whatever my father said had no weight. He decided I should be going to a school that was better than the average Hungarian school now these were not state-run schools, almost all of them were private schools, but there were private schools, and there were **private schools**. So first he had my mother take me to something called a Scottish school, where the children learned English, and I remember that. She took me there and it was dark and gloomy and these elderly women walked around with their skirts down to the floor, and I just got scared, and I screamed and yelled, and I didn't want to go there, so that was that.

So then my uncle said, "well, let me try." And so he took me to the German School, it's called the Reichschule Bu...(SP) su Budapest. And it had been established some years before to give a place for the children of diplomatic personnel to go to school. Because for them to learn Hungarian, it was pointless, as it was difficult, but German was the current language in Europe, and so most of them spoke some German anyway, and so that's why it was established. But the school took in anybody and everybody, and its academic reputation was excellent, so my uncle and I went to the German school and we got there at recess time, whether he timed it or not I don't know. But, we went up the stairs and along this open walkway and I looked down and here were two yards full of kids screaming and running and yelling and it looked like fun. And we walked into this nice big light office and a very nice director, and I don't remember his name, asked me if I could count in German, and so I rattled off the numbers from one to 25, and then he asked me some other things in German. I had no problem, and he said to my uncle, "she'll do fine." So that's how I entered the Reichshule....(SP?), and this was 1932, and, uh, nobody had ever heard of Hitler. At least not right then.

Q: Were there other Jewish children in the school?

Yes, the school was a mixture of everybody. There were diplomatic children, there were Jewish children and non-Jewish children. And this went on for quite some years, and the curriculum was difficult. The language of instruction was German. So that from the time of first grade, I spoke as much or more German as I did Hungarian because there was my nanny, who spoke German, and there was school, and then my parents who spoke Hungarian. And the nanny sat at the dinner table with us so we spoke German at the dinner table. It was mixed, yeah. My parents spoke Hungarian to each other, but German to the nanny, whatever. And so it went. And I really didn't become aware of anything until I was about 10.

Q: That was 1936...?

Right about there, yeah, about, I was about fourth grade...and, uh the school celebrated Hungarian holidays by state law I think that had to be done. And March 15 is, Hungary's 4th of July, when they rose up against the Hapsburgs in 1848. And, what I remember to this day, very clearly, is this one girl...well, there were speeches, there were poems recited, there was, the director spoke and the Hungarian teachers spoke and you know there was commemoration, it was a school-wide holiday and so you wore little, what do you call those red, white, green things in your buttonhole, you know like the veterans hand out, pins, yeah, the national colors...anyway, this one girl in our class, blond, blue-eyed, cute little thing with 2 pigtails...she got to dance the Hungarian national dances in full Hungarian costume, red boots, and I love the folk costumes anyway, and, the sort of standard was Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody #2, which somebody played on the piano, and I envied her so much, I wanted so much to be doing that. And so one day, I asked my mother, "could you buy me a costume, because I'd like to dance that, too, maybe the next time March 15, I could do that. And my mother said, "**says it in German.**" Do you understand? It means, "our kind doesn't do that." And I was just dumbfounded, I didn't understand it and I kept saying, but why, but why, and she didn't want to explain. And of course, later I understood. But, that remained with me, you know, the envy of wanting to do the Hungarian dance, and I know that I used to dance to myself, you know, strike the poses and all that.

But, I couldn't do it like she did. The irony of it all is that this girl grew up to be a bio-chemist. When I was in Hungary in 1990, one of our classmates said, oh, did you know what happened to **Magley?(didn't get name)**, and I said, no, I haven't had any contact with anybody. Well she became a biochemist and had a good job, and then she became an alcoholic and she just went downhill, her marriage went, and the last that people knew of her, she was hanging around bars asking people to buy her drinks, and that's pretty sad, but who knew at the time...there she was dancing and me envying her.

And then somehow or other, mostly from dinner table conversations, and because my father was very politically aware, I started picking up things about the Jews and laws and things not being right. It was very gradual, and I was surprised to find reference to it in my diary when I was about 12. What was interesting also, is that in this German school there was religious instruction. And I think it was once a week, the class split. The Catholic children went here, and the Protestant children went there, and the Jewish children went there. And there was religious instruction for quite a long time. And, our teacher was called Herr Lederer, and he taught us how to read Hebrew and how to write Hebrew, and I remember, you know, we learned the Hagaddah and we learned some Jewish history. But my family was not observant at all, and my mother was fiercely anti-religious on every front. Her father apparently was quite an outspoken atheist, and my mother kept saying, "my father said 'there is no G-d'." I mean this came from up high, and she really believed that until ten years ago. She kept saying, "my father said there is no G-d." At one point she was a housekeeper, after she came to this country, and they had a little framed thing up on the wall somewhere saying "G-D BLESS THIS HOUSE" or some such thing, and my mother phoned me, highly incensed, saying "how can they, my father said there is no god", and I said, "well mother maybe her father didn't say that. And, you know I told her, just forget it and calm down, but she really believed that.

Now my father's parents, observed the holidays, and they observed the fast and all of that, because I remember once my father took me to temple, and I found it very interesting, and when my mother found about it, she hit the ceiling and she just through a fit, and she said, "no, she's not to go there and don't you ever dare!" So that was the end of that. And then another time, my father took me to his parent's house, Rosh Hoshanah, Yom Kippur, I don't know, and I remember the candles on the table, and my grandmother and grandfather doing the rituals and again my mother said, "no way!" So that was the end of that. So whatever Judaism I learned was from Herr Lederer in that class. And, because it was school, my mother didn't dare object. But there was no reinforcement or anything, and being Jewish became like having a curse upon your head. It was something that was being discussed. And at some point in this diary, I mention, you know, that there are Jewish Laws and it seems like Hitler is trying to chase the Jews out of the world. A typical childish exaggeration, but, yeah, that was sort of this dancing business, it was the first that I recall being even cognizant of that.

The anti-Semitism in school, or at least my awareness of it, started some time later. I was not a popular child anyway. It didn't matter whether I was or wasn't Jewish because the other Jewish children weren't ridden? as hard as I was. Why was that? Because I had no social skills. And my mother wasn't able to teach me any because she had none. And, so whatever she said well, if so-and-so tells you such-and-such, well then you say so-and-so, and it was always the wrong thing. It just alienated the kids, it made me cross, and it became a vicious circle. The more they hounded me, the angrier I got, and the least, the less I could cope with that. And, there were various times when the kids all stopped talking to me. And that usually stopped, you know. If something was to be told, if somebody snitched to the teacher, it was always about me...and so it went. I was not very happy as a child, it was not really because of the school. I did have friends, and then I started reading, and I mention these names, and I have no idea of who they are. Finally, I remember the last name of one of the girls, uh, but I don't know who Mary is, because I knew a lot of Marys. And, uh, as I say, I did have friends. Mostly, my friends were outside of school. See, these children that I played in City Park with, these became my real friends, and so I would see them on weekends, and, uh, just on weekends, because during the week I had so much schoolwork that nothing was done, and because even though I

had nanny, once the playing in the City Park stopped, she couldn't take us anywhere except to school and back. Because then I had English class, I had French class, I was tutored in Math...At the ice-skating rink in the winter, that's when I met my friends.

Oh, English class. Since I spoke such good German, and it was so easy, at age 7, I had my first private English lesson. There was a young woman named Annie. She came to the house, and after the first lesson where I learned spectacular things, like "this is a table" and "my name is," and so on, I was ecstatic. If there is such a thing as falling in love with a language, that was it. I remember so clearly I danced around the dining room table, which is where I had my lesson, and I clapped my hands, and I said I love it, I love it, I want to live somewhere where I can speak English all the time. And, of course, parents don't pay attention. Parents should pay attention. And the love affair never ceased. To this day, I love the language. I love languages, period, but the English language is very special. And English, too, came very easily. I just soaked it up. And within a very short time, I was reading little stories, and then reading other stories, and reading English books. Annie was replaced by another woman, who had some schooling in London. We just called her Missy, short for Mrs. and I don't even remember what her name was, but Missy came for years, and she was very good. She was not very pleasant, you know, as a person, but she was really good, and I stuck with her because I just loved what I got from her, and then later, when I was about 11, she started me on French, also. But French was the foreign language, I never caught on to it, like I did to English and German. I struggled with it. Eventually, when I got into University, I was English and French literature major, and I read French literature in the original, I mean, stuff that I couldn't read now. But, uh, French I never liked. And I think Missy and I came to the parting of the ways when I was resisting the French, as much as I went with it, with the flow with the English language, the French I was struggling against. But it really took a lot of time, and from the word go, we had homework, and we had lots of it.

The German school had a double curriculum. We studied German literature, German geography, Hungarian literature, Hungarian geography, German history, Hungarian history. You see we had to do the Hungarian because of the state laws, otherwise we couldn't have gotten our graduation certificate. So, here I was, absolutely fluent in German. In fact, more so than in Hungarian. I read all the great German literature in German. We studied math in German. To this day, when I need to go downstairs blind, you know when I was carrying something, I count the steps in German...automatically. However, I can, at this point, not carry on a German conversation. I can understand everything. I can pick up a German play, in the Gothic script, and read it like I would read The Chronicle. I did that one day at the antique shop. It was very quiet, and I just went looking for something to read, and one of the things I pulled out was William Tell, by Schiller, in the Gothic script in German and I sat down and read it, and I think maybe there were 2 or 3 words that I stumbled over. So, that remained. To put together a sentence is something else.

So, it went, and by the time I was about 14, you know, things were heating up in Europe. I remember the day the war broke out. We had inherited from my mother's father a little cottage by the Lake Balaton. He had bought that shortly after I was born, saying that my mother should have a place to bring the child in the summ..., the child. That was a Hungarian way of referring to the child because so many families only had one, in front of the child. It wasn't "Agnes this" or "Agnes that", or "Judy that," "the child." And then at some point, I said, "I'm not the child, I have a name." Which was just cause to laugh. They didn't understand that. But, anyway, when my grandfather died, my mother inherited this place, by the lake. Slowly, slowly, they fixed it up, and built it up. I loved being there. I just adored that place. Every summer, we went, right when school was out anywhere between the 15th and the 22nd...uh, we moved down lock, stock, and barrel. Siofok is about, Siofok is the name of the resort place where this house was. It's about, a little over an hour's drive by car, now, but, in those days, with the milk train, it took about 2 1/2-3 hours, stopping at all these little villages. It was a big adventure for the year, going down there. I know my family had these big baskets, packing baskets, and into it would go bedding and dishes, you know, everything you needed to run a household.

Eventually, gradually they accumulated it down there, too, so none of that had to be taken, just the clothing and the toys.

But, what I remember is, a few days before school was out, the baskets would appear in all the rooms, and there was just high excitement. And so we would move down there, and uh, the nanny and the country girl would go down with us, and my father would stay because he had to do his business. And he would come usually Friday evenings with the local train and stay through Sunday evening or sometimes Monday morning. And my sister and I would go up to the train station and meet him and anyway, um, that was the place where I was freer and happier and where I had real friends, and where life was...had a whole different quality to it. There was a big, big yard which was kept up by a professional gardener. My mother was no gardener. I mean other than window boxes with geraniums which we had all over the house, she really wasn't able to...there was a lot of yard there. But, it was all very nicely, and ???word groomed. There was a little fountain that we turned on that revolved and made spirals of water. It was a very lovely place, really, and we all adored it, and we stayed down there usually until about the first week of September, and then we came back, bringing all this stuff with us, and then school started again. So, that was the summer, and of course there was the lake and I learned to play tennis, and we went swimming, and eventually I got a bike, and my sister got a bike, so, you know it was really nice.

In the winter time, what was done for entertainment and exercise was...uh, we ice-skated. I was about four when they first took me. There's a little lake in the City Park which they freeze over in the winter, they have pipes underneath and it becomes a skating rink. And after I learned to skate, every other day, you could buy season tickets, you got them for...we were just talking about it in Hungary because so many of us grew up there. You got it for Monday, Friday, no, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and every other Sunday, or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, every other Sunday kind of thing, and so whatever suited your schedule, so there was the ice-skating, and there were all the different lessons so I really busy. There wasn't much free time to play. But as I say, in the winter time, all my real friends would be at the skating rink, and in the summer, they would be by the Lake. And so, that was my social life. And I didn't really start dating until I was 15. I had a difficult adolescence. I developed various crushes. One on my math teacher, who was quite a good-looking man. And, a lot of this diary is filled with my moonings over him. And, gradually, slowly, all this stuff started seeping in.

When the war broke out, when Germany invaded Poland, we were still in Siofok. And I remember going with my mother to the store, and then somebody there told us did you hear Germany invaded Poland? And everybody was just absolutely stunned and dumbfounded, and, of course, you know, I was just barely 13. My question was, "well, what's going to happen now?" And everybody says, "who knows?" And so reading the Winds of War, it was like that, really, i mean, it wasn't that they didn't tell me, because for two years, it was "who knows?" Because there was really no clear-cut anything. And so well, I was busy being a teenager, and you keep hearing these things, and my father would bring home news and of course there was a radio, but my mother's totally uninterested in politics and never really talked about it unless it was something that directly affected her or her household. You know, "the price of groceries or will we be able to get another girl from the country, will they want to come and work for a Jewish family and do we really want to get another girl from Austria, especially after the Anschluss and on and on. You know, whatever immediately affected our lives, you know, then she got involved. But my father was talking politics and talking what was happening in the world, and I was listening but I wasn't really taking it in too much. So, eventually, there came a time when the nanny was found to be unnecessary. I was old enough and my sister was old enough. And I'm sure it was not long after the Anschluss, because my father felt very strongly. At one point I know we had one girl from Germany and I liked her a lot. I had a lot of trouble with these girls because they were even more authoritarian than my mother and I was rebelling right and left, so after a while they got tired of fighting my mother and me, you know, one or the other or both of us, and they would leave. But this girl, Hilda, I liked her. She was authoritarian, but she was fun, too. And I remember she

would tell me all these that were going on in Germany, but from her point-of-view. And when I relayed this to my father he said, "she is a goddamn Nazi!" And I said, "what's that?" And pretty soon Hilda was gone.

Q: What were some of the stories she was telling you?

Well, she was explaining, I remember she was explaining National Socialism to me and how that was really a just and fair social order, and I took it all in, I don't know...12...13...why not? I had nothing to compare it to. And so my father had a little session with her, and the next thing she was gone.

Q: Did she talk about Hitler?

I don't remember that. Mainly, I remember her little presentation about National Socialism because the words stuck in my head, and I kept saying, "what does it mean?" And so she kept giving examples, and how it was to the best for Germany and how it created jobs, you know, the usual thing, and she really believed that, and I really liked her, and I hated losing her, and I wrote to her afterwards. I made a note in my diary that I wrote a letter to Hilda, but my father was very sensitive to those things. I also remember coming home one day from school...I was in the glee club...and singing the **Horst Vesselied(sp?)**, which of course is the anthem for the Nazis, but I didn't know that. And so I paraded around the house singing this **HV**, and my father said, "stop that, that's a Nazi song!" And I said, "what's wrong with it, we just learned it in school?" And so, he then explained but still in all when you were in the glee club, you learned it. We also learned *The Ode to Joy* from *Beethoven's 9th*. So, it was a mixture.

Well, by the time I was about 13, 14, things were pretty clear about what was going on in the world. In Siofok, I remember we started getting Polish refugees, and people would point out, see those people, they are Polish. Well, the Hungarians never had any love for the Poles, and vice versa, I'm sure. But, uh, my mother would say, "Poles" you know. And, but they looked like everybody else, I remember them on the tennis courts wearing, you know, tennis outfits, playing tennis like everybody else, and I said, "so they're Poles, so what?"

I remember the Hitler Jugend...in school, of course. The boys dressed in their khaki shirts or brown shirts with the leather strap and their short pants, and the girls in their black skirts and the white blouses. And they would be excused from class every so often, and they'd march around the courtyard singing all these Nazi songs.

Q: What did you think of that?

Not, you know, it was just something that happened in school. It didn't really enter my head until sometime later what the significance of that was, and the interesting thing was that when the anti-Semitism really started, it wasn't so much from them, it was from the Hungarian kids. They were the ones who were calling names, and they were the ones who, you know, sniffed at you, and said, "rotten Jew, or dirty Jew, or stinky Jew" or whatever. The German kids, I guess they didn't have a need to do that, or they were told not to because they were in a foreign country. I don't know, the teachers never did.

What turned out later...there was a school reunion in Hungary...oh, some years ago and they put out a newsletter and I got a copy of it, and a lot of the teachers wrote articles. And they said that one reason we were teaching in this school is we asked for this assignment to get out of Hitler's Germany. And I never knew this at the time, but when I was talking to my school friend when I was there in '90, she says, "why of course, didn't you know that?" I didn't know that. But, an interesting thing happened oh, maybe 3, 4, 5, years ago. I used to listen to KKH, and especially in the morning as I was getting dressed to go to work. And I listened to Keith Lockhart, who is sort of a buddy because every so often

I call him up and we chat. So, one morning, I stopped in the middle of getting dressed because what he was playing was this song about Erica And that song was very familiar and so Keith came on afterwards, and said chattily, "oh, that's a nice little marching song. It has to do with a little flower on the meadow called Erica." So, I picked up the phone, and I called, and I said, "you know Keith, yes that's true. But it was also the marching song of the Hitler Jugend when I was growing up. And he was just appalled. He says, "I didn't know that." I said, "well, why would you? But, I went to a German school and that's what they were singing, and they would march and slap, slap on the cobblestones of the courtyard: Erica. I said I will never forget it as long as I live." And so he sort of apologized. Never again did they play that song on the radio. But, that's what it was...and...Did you see Schindler's List? They're singing it there and they're marching to it, and my friend, Annie, afterward said, "what got to you in that movie?" And I said, "you won't believe it, but the music. First, when the movie opens, they played Gloomy Sunday, which was a song that was written by a Hungarian. And it went all over the world. He's a Hungarian Jew, who didn't know how to write music. Somebody else had to write the notes for him. And that just sort of grabbed me because I remember hearing that. I mean it has no particular connotations with the Nazis, but it was a depression-era?? song, and so many people committed suicide hearing that song, that eventually it was forbidden, I think in this country. It may have been in Hungary also, but, at a time of depression, you know, when people were gloomy anyway, and you hear this really mournful thing and, I think it was Itzhak Perlman that played it on the violin, and that was how it...it just really hit me right there. And then later, if you remember the scene, Schindler is in this nightclub with all these friends and they're drinking and over there, there are the Nazis. And so he and his friends are singing this German marching song, and it's a...it's innocuous, an innocent marching song having to do with wandering out in nature and enjoying it and i sang it in glee club and I used to like it and when we went on hikes and picnics, we'd always sing it...and that really shook me up, and then just very shortly thereafter, you see all these, helmeted-dressed Nazis and they're marching, and, it was just a second in the movie, but singing, "Erica," you know, the same song and so that, those three things got to me in the film...almost more than anything else. It's because I'm very close to music and music means a lot to me and so that just really sort of threw me into this whole mood.

So anyway, the Hitler Jugend...the kids that were in it weren't, to me anyway, any different from other kids. They just had this, it was like a special P.E., and it wasn't until much, much later that I understood what they were being groomed for. When I got to be 15, then I started dating, and then, the guys that I was dating...they would tell me more and teach me more about what was going on than my parents ever did...or I listened more because they were my age-mates, but I remember Johnny Geiringer had this one party, and this was, well, let's see, I started dating in '41, so this must have been late '41, maybe '42, somewhere...he came to this party with a little white mushroom, in his buttonhole...and there was a little red mushroom with the white dots, you know, except that one or two of the dots were black, and I said, "what's the meaning of this?" and he grinned, and this was at the time when the Africa campaign was going on against Rommel, he says, "this one is for **Tubruck**?" and that one is for, I forget what fell to the Allies right after that and he says when all the mushroom dots are black, then Rommel will be out of Africa, and so that is what I remember.

And as far for the Jewish laws in Hungary, they were sort of slow in coming. I remember one and I'm not sure just when it came, "Numerous Clauses" which meant that since Hungary's Jewish population was 6%, only 6% of the students entering the University were allowed to be Jewish. Well, this was kind of weird, because a large number of Jewish middle-class kids went on to University, where other kids didn't. Almost everybody that I dated was either in law school or was going into law school or medical school, mostly law school. I would say about 90%, and so when Numerous Clauses came out, you know, it was a real blow, because it meant that some of them will not get there, and I kept saying, don't worry, by the time you're ready, really to go, it'll be all over. Well, to an extent, that was true, but not entirely. Then that became "Numerous Nudos?" meaning zero students...zero Jewish students to be admitted but, uh...the Numerous Clauses I remember. The other thing I remember is at some point, it must have been about 1942 um, a law came out forbidding inter-marriage between Jews and

non-Jews, and again it was something, because I used to scan the papers, but, my father would bring home at least three daily papers. We got one in the morning and then he'd bring home about two evening papers. And I would look at the headlines, but, it was really wasn't something I was into a lot. But, uh, the young man I was going out with at that time, we were walking in the City Park, and, uh, dating was really different then, and in those circumstances, you didn't touch, you didn't have sex, you were very proper. So we were walking to, in City Park, going to someone's house, and he said, out of the blue, he says, "I'm glad you're Jewish and not Christian." And I said, "why?" And he says, "because then I couldn't do this." And he put his arms through mine, and sort of held my hand, and so I sort of snuggled up close to him, and so we laughed. And, then he sang this little ditty that they had made up in school about the poor innocent girl who is now protected by the constitution. That is how I got some of what was going on.

However, I have to back track, see that's where the chronology is important. In about 1939, my parents decided to convert to Christianity, to Catholicism. They never told me wordwise???. I was the child, and children don't need to be told until it's there, but I heard it because where I was sleeping was against the dining room wall, and they would sit in the dining room after we had gone to bed and they would talk. And they didn't realize I could hear everything, and I heard them talk about it, and I felt so bad because Herr Lederer, our religion teacher, had talked about people who were forsaking the faith and becoming Catholics, and he talked about them disapprovingly and I really felt that. And all of a sudden, we were doing it too, and I eventually, I think I brought it up and said, "I heard you were talking about this, but we can't do that, that's not right we are Jewish," and, uh, my mother said her usual, "don't argue, I, it's like that because I say so." But my Dad eventually explained that we need to have papers that say that we're Catholics instead of Jewish, for safekeepi...for safety's sake, and, uh, I still felt terrible about it, but, they had already done it themselves, and so now we had to go to catechism school, and uh, I was not quite 13, it was early '39 when this was going on. So there was this lady, whose name was Elizabeth, and she lived not far. And so once a week, my sister and I went, and we studied catechism and all the prayers and the Hail Marys and all of that, and I liked it. I really, she was so nice, Elizabeth, I don't know what her last name is, but she was really very sweet. And she made it seem so unthreatening. And we may have not been her first family, I'm sure. So, eventually the time came when we had to pass the exam. And uh, even though I really kind of knew the stuff, I just got so scared, I just, if they had graded me, I would've flunked, and my sister wasn't any better, she was a little girl, she, well when I was 13, she was 8, so...

The hard part was later. First of all, it was right about the time when they discontinued the Jewish instruction, maybe