

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Breyer, Eva

**Date of interview:** 4/9 & 12/4/1996

**Summary:** Eva was born in Budapest, Hungary August 18, 1936. Her parents converted from Judaism to Catholicism after the death of her grandfather. Eva was christened Catholic. Her brother, who was born Jewish, converted when he was about a year old. They were brought up Catholic; attended Catholic religious classes but didn't view themselves as religious. A lot of people didn't know that they were once Jewish, but during the war the Germans started tracing people's ancestry. Religious Jews were looked down on by upper class Jews.

There was already anti-Semitism in Hungary before the Germans invaded.

During the 1930's Jewish laws were passed limiting the number of Jews who could attend university and limitations on jobs. Jewish laws became more severe close to W.W.II. For example, certain businesses needed to have a Christian business manager. Once Hungary entered war as ally of Germany, Jews couldn't bear arms. In 1941 the bombing started. Non-Jewish men were drafted for the army, Jewish men for the labor service. First, they took the young and single men, then those without children. Then her father got pulled in. He went late because he was Catholic, older and had kids. He was called up for the labor service near Budapest. He did office work and came home on weekends.

After 1943, during the siege of Leningrad, all battalions, Jewish and non-Jewish were sent by the Germans to the Russian front. Eva's mother took her father to the doctor and paid him to give her father an injection that would give him blood clots in his legs, so he wouldn't have to go to the front. If they were found out they would have been executed, including the doctor.

The Jewish laws had been getting more severe but when the Germans came the first declaration they made was that all Jews had to wear a yellow star. If you were any part Jewish you were considered a Jew. They had to move to Jewish houses, one family per room. The Jewish houses were mainly women and children because men were in the labor force.

In the summer of 1944, the Arrowcross and police started to round up the younger women, taking them to the brick factory in the countryside in Obuda and shipping them to concentration camps, mainly Auschwitz. Everyone was registered so they knew where everyone was. When they took Eva's mother, her aunt went to the Bishop. He went personally to get her out of the camp right before deportation, saving her life. She came back officially under Vatican protection.

The Arrowcross took over on October 15 and then the real terror started.

Everyone from Jewish houses had to move into the ghetto. The family moved into an apartment building that was under the protection of the Vatican. Only Catholic converted Jews were there. Her mother sent her brother to a monastery for extra protection. Eva was sent to the hospital where a nice doctor diagnosed her as sick. She was with terminally ill kids and they did painful medical tests on

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her to keep up with the ruse. There was the concern that a nurse might turn her in. They were starting to shoot children into the Danube at that time. The doctor's life was at stake too. After a week, Eva's Catholic au-pair, Maria, came to take her to a convent outside Buda. The Bishop had made the arrangements. Maria walked her there from one end of Pest to the other end of Buda. She saw people being shot into the Danube. She was 8 years old at the time. Maria brought her back to the safe house in December. After Christmas the Bishop told them there would be a raid. He sent someone dressed in an Arrowcross uniform to take them to the Swedish house, with papers from Wallenberg, since the Vatican could no longer protect them. They found the Swedish house empty. Everyone was taken to be shot. The Russians were at the city limit.

The family went to the ghetto. Everyone who was able bodied was put to work placing mines under the ghetto in order to blow it up. The hope was that the Russians would get there first. She discusses the fighting between the Nazis and the Soviets for the city.

One of her mother's sisters and family survived in the countryside because they had false papers. Her uncle committed suicide thinking he would be a burden to the family. They found Eva's grandmother in the ghetto they were in. Her aunt was in the hospital. Her father caught pneumonia and died in March soon after liberation. By April the Russians fully occupied Hungary.

At first the Russians were greeted as liberators but then they started taking all the men they could round up to Siberia. Most of those never returned. Young women were raped but they were good to the children. They broke open stores and people could take what they wanted. Standing in line became part of their lives. They were discriminated against by the Russians for being capitalists. Her mother had restarted the business and the Russians took it away. Everyone worked for the government. On the second tape, Eva discusses in detail what it was like under Russian occupation until the revolution and her escape to Austria and then to America in 1956.

Eva identifies herself as a Catholic today (2/05).