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[INAUDIBLE]. Today is Tuesday, July 9, 1991. I'm Judith Backover with the Holocaust Oral History Project interviewing Viola Dubov at Congregation Beth Shalom in San Francisco. With us today also is Fabian Cooperman. Good evening, Viola.

Good evening.

I'd like to ask you to begin your story by telling us where and when you were born.

I was born in Czechoslovakia in 1920, the 29th of August, in the city of Valkysevlush Ornasulush.

And can you describe what your early memories and early life were like in Czechoslovakia?

Well, I will start that I was born free, and I was growing up in a very happy, hard-working, loving family. And then, the Holocaust actually started for me in 1938, when Hungary occupied Czechoslovakia. They came in with their own Gestapo. And at once, the most vicious, most terrible antisemitism took place.

And it took us by surprise as we weren't accustomed to antisemitism. As I said, I was born in a free country. I was born and growing up in democracy. And this was a terrible, terrible shock, a terrible experience.

And I resented it very much, and I spoke up for it. And within days, my parents and I-- my mother and father and I-- were taken as hostages by the Hungarian freedom fighters. That's what they called themselves. But they were freedom fighters. They had their own freedom, which meant complete attachment to Nazi Germany.

And we were spared due to the fact that my father was a prominent person. He was in agriculture. He managed the estate of a Hungarian baron for many, many years. And we were freed. We weren't killed that time.

But from then on, we were dying slowly. And life went on. We worked hard. We heard whispers of terrible things going on in Europe, in Germany, later in the Sudeten, in Poland. And we tried to get out, but there was no place to go.

Nobody wanted us. It didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter how talented you were. It didn't matter how beautiful you were. There was no way out. We were trapped.

But we hoped. We hoped that things will change. And we really trusted that the Allies will come, and in victory. We hoped.

It was Hungary. The war took a turn for the better for us. And we hoped we will be spared. But we weren't.

In 1944, April, it was Passover. Matter of fact, we were in the middle of Passover when Germany occupied Czechoslovakia-- Hungary, excuse me. And there was no Hungarian government anymore, and we were completely surrounded by the Germans.

They worked so perfectly together, the Hungarian police, officials, the Germans. They worked absolutely to perfection to eliminate us. Within 24 hours, every Jew was asked to get a few belongings together and report to a place called the ghetto in BeregszÃ¡sz.

And this was in a brick factory where there were over 10,000 Jewish people-- men, women, children, families-- gathered together. While this was going on, I decided to go underground, to disappear, because I knew that I'll never come back alive. And I took matters to my hand.

And I took up to Budapest, which was about 600 miles-- 600 or 800 miles from our town. And it was absolutely not possible for a Jew to travel. You had to have identification.

You had to be a Christian. You had to have papers that you are a Christian. You are accepted as a Christian.

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And I had no papers, nothing. But the only thing I had that I was owner of a bicycle with a little picture on. And with that, and with a few belongings-- my toothbrush and my nightgown and very little money-- I took off to Budapest.

I didn't realize that time that the Hungarian government was already in exile, going into exile, during this time, because the Germans worked so carefully not to leave anybody behind in Hungary or in the Hungarian government who would even try to help a Jew. Anybody who had these kind of feelings, they knew it. And they were eliminated from the picture.

So when I came in into Budapest, that's what I found. Due to the fact that I knew people in government, I knew people in high places, and due to my father's connection due to his employ, I came to know society in Hungary, in Budapest. And I reached out.

And this took me about, oh, about seven to 10 days. I was searching for something, for help. Well, there was no help to be gotten-- no way, no way.

But simply, there was not a person who could help, because if you helped, you were threatened. If you were a Jew, you will be killed. And if you are Christian, if you try to help a Jew, you will be killed also.

So there was no place to go. There was absolutely-- the situation was absolutely hopeless. And after trying for about 10 days or so, I broke down, and I was completely exhausted. And I found refuge in a hospital, in a big hospital, where I knew the head doctor of the hospital.

And they gave me refuge in the hospital due to the fact that I was already dehydrated and I was in terrible shape physically and mentally, emotionally. So I was in the hospital for about a week, put in the back bed as a patient. I was bedded in like a patient in a ward. About 30 people were in the hospital.

And while I was laying in bed, a lady was brought in. And she was placed very close to my bed. And she kept looking at me, watching me. Her son came in to visit her, brought her strawberries. And she sent me strawberries with her son.

And then, a few days later, she followed me to the ladies' room. And she says to me, just like that, she says, are you a little Jewish girl? You're having bad dreams.

So I didn't answer. But she was a heavy smoker. And then, somehow, I had a package of Camel cigarettes. So I offered her the cigarettes, and we kind of started a French ship.

Really, after all, I had nothing much to lose anymore. So somehow I confided in her. And she says to me, well, don't be afraid of me. My husband was Jewish, and he was taken to Germany.

And when I went to say goodbye to my husband, I saw that their belongings were detached from them. And that upset me so much that I started to scream and call these people murderers and everything on Earth. And I broke down, she says, and they brought me with the ambulance.

And they brought her in the room where I was, about second from my bed. And she could see me, watch me, because we were situated like she could see my face. She could hear me.

So she says, trust me, she says. I am Christian, but my husband was Jewish and that.

And then, she followed me to the ladies' room, the only place we could talk. We felt we are safe to talk. And she saw nobody else was there present.

So she talked again, and she wanted to know what my plans are. Where am I going to go from there? What happened to us?

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And she wanted to as much as I could possibly at the time tell her. And I told her I was Jewish. And she says, well, she says, I like you so much. She says, I just can't let them kill you. I just can't.

And she says, you know, I'm a Christian. And as a Christian, I would like to save one Jewish life. And like that, she says, that will be you. And she says, I don't care what will happen to us. She says, we'll do it.

So then, I had about 10 more days. I was taken in the hospital for three weeks. And I had about 10 more days' stay in the hospital.

So she said she's going to send her son. He's on military leave. Her son was Christian from a first marriage. So she says, I'm going to send my son Leslie, and he's going to escort you to my home.

Now, Julia's home was in the suburb of Budapest, about a half an hour ride on the train. But you had to go with a train to a big station. And there was no way to go to get to the station without proper identification.

Well, Leslie came for me, and he took me to their home, where I found Julia was living with her mother and a dog. And Leslie was taken into the army.

By then, I didn't know anything what happened to my parents and my family. I did write them one letter to a friend of mine, who took the letter into the ghetto and gave words that they heard from me, that I was in Budapest and I was alive.

And that was the last time that I knew about my parents. And this was sometimes in May, in middle of May. I believe in the end of May or in June, they were taken to Germany.

And, well, here came my-- I was being hidden. And here came the big problem. People were very watching the house. They were watching Julia. They knew she had a Jewish husband, and they hated her for it.

She was married to a Jew. This was a terrible sin in the neighbors' eyes as a Christian woman, due to the fact that her Jewish husband raised her, took her, married her with a mother and a child and gave home for Julia's mother and Julia's child.

That was not acknowledged. He was a Jew. And therefore, Julia was a terrible person, a very sinful person.

So anyhow, friends would come in. Then was the big problem-- where to hide me? So usually, she had Sunday dinners, and her very, very best friends would come for dinner.

So the outhouse, we were thinking, at night, maybe the outhouse. She had an outhouse. Then she had a cellar. But the cellar was full of mice and crawling things and rats. But we had no choice.

We hardly knew that she can have those rats. Probably, they had for the rats-- later I saw a little contraption to catching them. But I was terrified.

The cellar was damp, cold, and the rats and the mice had a million eyes. They had little eyes like beads, beads. And all you see is little eyes looking at you and crawling at you. And I was terrified. I was terrified. But there's nothing I could do, nothing they could do.

We tried to make me a little place and put beddings there, pillows. But the rats or the mice, they certainly didn't care. So anyhow, we were very lucky.

We had a few close calls when the police knocked on the door at one occasion. And we thought, well, this was it. They are coming for me, for all of us.

So the police came. Somebody was cutting out the tree. They were like summer homes in the suburbs, and somebody

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had a summer home nearby. And they were cutting-- somebody was stealing the tree for the fireplace. So they were cutting out the tree, and the police came, knocked on the door. And they wanted to know from Julia if she knows who the people who are the owners of the place.

And at one time, a child came in from the neighbors' and ran up. And I was hiding-- they had upstairs a little room like an attic. And he ran up to the attic, and there I was.

So we thought this was it now, because a little boy-- so Julia made up stories that the son's bringing girls to the house constantly. And he again brought a girl. She didn't know what to do with this girl. So this was the story, that the son is bringing the girls to the house, and she kind of complies with it and such.

So we managed to eat unbelievable from the garden and from I don't-- our was-- Julia's money was running out, and we were near starvation when the war was coming to an end. We even saved the potato peels and anything edible. And we ate very little, just to note that.

And meantime, we did listen to BBC on and off. Meantime, our life was really-- it was such a big chance to take. But we did listen to BBC, and we knew how the war was going on.

This was sometimes in the late fall. We heard the bombings. The Allies came bombing us. And, of course, we welcomed. I was very happy to see those silver wings. It was a beautiful sight.

And the bombings came. And then, again, the big problem started. I had to-- Julia and her mother were assigned to a shelter. And, of course, they couldn't take me to the shelters.

And those bombings were falling. I can tell you. I saw bombs. Just with my bare eyes, I see the bombs falling.

They were falling all around me, and the dog went wild. The dog almost killed me. The dog got scared. They didn't take the dog with them.

They thought they were going to leave me with the dog. The dog is going to protect me. So finally, they had to take the dog with them to the shelter.

But nobody wanted the dog in the shelter either. They told that they're not supposed to bring the dogs. So I was stuck with the dog.

So we didn't know what to do. So the only thing we could do is to go down to the cellar again because of the dog, because the dog was just ready to kill me. The dog jumped on me and-- the dog became very frightened. So I was in the cellar on and off while the bombing was going on. And sometimes I slept there in the cellar.

And at one night, we decided-- it was heavy rain-- I should come up from the cellar. And I would have died in the cellar because by the morning, the cellar was completely flooded, completely, that the water was coming out. So I had many miracles happen to me, absolute miracles.

Because just 24 hours before we decided that I shouldn't stay in the cellar anymore-- combat may come, but they thought I shouldn't stay in the cellar anymore. And I was coughing by then. And I was afraid I'm going to get ill, and I couldn't get medical help.

So about meantime, we thought-- we never we never doubted that we're going to win the war. That kept us going, that our faith was so strong, even in the darkest hours, we knew that we will win the war. It was the most remarkable thing, what kept us going, the victory, that some miracle, that we just can't lose this. Even in the darkest hours, we still hoped. We never gave up hope.

And the end of December, the Russians came in. I saw the first Russian. They were the Russian-- they called them the Russian partisans, very young men. Most of them were very young men.

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They came in, and it was-- we were rejoiced. We were very lucky because I spoke Czech, and Julia, the mother, spoke Slavish. Actually, they were born in Slovakia, both of them. And so we had some communication with the Russians.

At this point, had you heard anything more from your family or of them? What were you thinking about what happened?

I feared the worst of my family. I did not know. I just cried myself to sleep every night. And I didn't hear from them.

And after the war, I started to go home. We were about 600 or 800 miles from my hometown, I was. And I took a flour sack with my belongings, I put it on my back, and I started to go home by walking.

So a truck picked me up, Russian soldiers. I hitchhiked. I started to go home.

And then, I got on a freight train. Just like that, I finally found myself on a freight train. And I seen here and there people, survivors, people who were in the war. We just kind of found each other.

And I was in the freight train. And I had on the red, white, and blue, the colors of Czechoslovakia. And somehow I managed to make an armband for myself. And while I was on the freight train-- I'm going off another subject.

But while I was on the freight train, a person tells me that you are not going to Czechoslovakia. You are going to the Soviet Union. And that was a very big shock to me, a very big shock to me.

So I came in the end of January, after the war. I think it was 19-- now, the years, I have to look up the years. I came into my city, BeregszÃ¡sz. And I knocked on a window, 5 o'clock in the morning, of a Christian family we were friendly with. And my father, I knew, was a confidant to him.

And I knocked on the window. They let me in. And then, they told me that my family was taken to Germany. And by this time, they don't know what happened to them.

So we had no newspapers. We had no communications. But people, one by one, they were coming home, the survivors.

And I learned what happened to my parents. Until you know it, until you hear it, you don't want to believe it. You still have hope. Even if you fear the worst, you still have hope. There is a ray of hope.

So then I was told-- a man met me. I started to pick up the pieces and put my home together and wait for my loved one with some comfort. The windows were broken. I found nothing but four walls. Everything, everything was taken away from our home.

So I had the windows fixed, and I went house to house to get some of our belongings. Not one person came and volunteered to bring back a pillow or a bed or something. So I went to the head of our small town. We lived in a very small town-- just 300, 400 population, near to a big city.

So I went to the head of the town, and I asked him if he could give me permission to look for my belongings, for our belongings. And he gave me the permission. And then, I went, and I found I recognized certain things. So I was able to put together a bed and a few things to start our life, start something, some furnishings.

So then a man came, finally, who was with my father in Dachau. And he told me I shouldn't have worked so hard, I should just take it easy, that my father wasn't coming back.

Then he told me that he lived 24 hours before the British, I believe, came into Dachau, that my father was alive 24 hours before liberation. Just what [CRIES].

Then-- it was terrible news, of course. Then I was told that my mother turned-- my mother was 42 years old. She was

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very beautiful. And she turned snow white overnight.

As she was getting up the steps, it was visible that she was turning snow white. And in the Germans' eyes, anybody with white hair-- of course, she turned more white on the way going to Auschwitz-- she became a very old person, and she was taken at once, chosen to be eliminated.

And my 14-year-old-- we were five sisters, and I had four sisters went with my parents. So the youngest sister, 14-year-old-- her name was Judith-- she volunteered to go with my mother. And I was very lucky in spite of that that I have three sisters who came home.

One of my sisters were taken to Sweden. She was in the worst concentration camp. She was in the concentration camp where they use human skins for lampshades. This was a most terrible woman who carried out this style.

But she was blonde and blue-eyed. And this terrible SS woman thought that she might have some German origin. And some of the reasons that my sisters survived, they were all blonde and blue-eyed. They looked very Aryan, including myself.

And my sister Heddy, she was in Sweden for seven years to recuperate. She had tuberculosis. She was taken with typhoid fever to Sweden.

And my two sisters came home. They heard already in Prague that I was alive. So we had this verbal communication between us. It went over many borders, this verbal-- this communication.

So they came home. My two sisters came home, and I stayed home for a while. And I tried-- we didn't know for a while. We just didn't know but we are going to do.

It was the Soviet Union we were-- and by then, everything was confiscated from us by the Soviet Union. We were left in our home. And I was advised to leave.

Beside, my father left for us a message with his friends, to whom I went-- I knocked on their window when I came into Barracsas-- that if any of us comes home alive, we should leave. He somehow knew. He knew more about politics than I did. He had a feeling that the Bear-- that's what they said-- that the big Bear will move.

And he knew what was coming, the time for us. So he very wisely said we should leave for the United States due to the fact that my grandmother lived in the United States. I never knew my grandmother.

My grandparents came to the United States before the turn of the century, and my father's sisters and brothers So everybody lived in the United States. My grandparents are buried in Long Island. I visited their graves.

So this was the big problem, to get out of the Soviet Union. Well, my two sisters were able to get out. The borders weren't closed completely. But I stayed on. And I thought, well, I am going to sell some of our belongings and have something for our future.

We were left alone without any kind of help. Our education wasn't complete. So I thought, maybe I can make enough money and send my sisters to school. They were younger than I.

I assumed the responsibilities, and I stayed behind, which was a very big mistake-- very big. Well, the biggest mistakes in my life I'd--

I went for a passport. I was so naive. And I was told that there is no passport. And if I were a bird-- I never forget this. They showed me like this-- fly, fly-- if I were a bird, I could never leave.

So here I was, stuck in the Soviet Union. My sisters were in Prague. And from Prague, they were taken to the displaced persons camps in Germany. They called them the DP camps.

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And I was in the Soviet Union. And my sister Heddy was in Sweden. I didn't know at the time yet that she was alive. I learned later from the American Red Cross that she was alive.

So I had no way to get out of the Soviet Union. But somebody had to walk me across the border. So my first attempt failed. I was caught. And I lost everything. Whatever I tried to bring across and help my sisters and myself, I lost. Everything was taken away from me.

So the second attempt came about two or three months later. I was able to get together, like, $10,000-- or $15,000 that time. It was the cost for a guide to walk me across the Carpathian Mountains. And that is a big mountain.

And I did it. We walked-- there were several other people with us, two or three, I think-- a mother, a woman, her husband, and a daughter and I. And this was going on for big money. They walked you across the Carpathian Mountains.

Well, I came into the camp 5 o'clock in the morning or so, or 4 o'clock in the morning, I was arrested by the Slovakian police and taken into jail. So I was threatened that I will be sent back to the Soviet Union. And I put up a tremendous fight-- verbal, of course, fight-- that they cannot do that to me. And I told them the reasons, and I begged them. And it took hours and hours. And finally, they gave in.

Meantime, the local rabbi heard in Slovakia there were people taken into custody. And they were able, with the Haganah-- I didn't know the time anything about Haganah-- but with the help of the Haganah, they were helping people who were able to escape. So they put me on the express, on the train, in a compartment, with a sleeping compartment. And I was told not to open the door or open my mouth, and especially not to speak Hungarian.

So I arrived to Prague. And I didn't find my sisters anymore in Prague. But I was told-- I found some of the refugees in coffeehouses and sitting around. And I was told that my two sisters are in Bavaria, somewhere in Bavaria, in the DP camp.

They had no money to support themselves, and the Red Cross couldn't keep them anymore. And they volunteered to go into Germany. So I started out to go to Germany on foot and find my two sisters.

I don't know where I had money for-- A day that I got on a train in Germany. I spoke a little bit German. And I saw people-- I heard people speaking Hungarian in the city of Munich. I got somehow to Bavaria, Munich.

And I hear people talking. I went to-- they call it the [NON-ENGLISH] that all the refugees came in. So I heard them talking that I was a name at home, that so-and-so had gotten away from the Soviet Union, and she's looking for the sisters.

So I grabbed this person, and I says, you're talking about me. I says, this is-- I says, I'm looking for my sisters. Well, he says, I don't know if they are in Foehrenwald or they are in-- they had several DP camps, displaced persons camp.

So I went to one camp. I didn't find them. But there was a girl who had a sister in Foehrenwald. This was the camp. And she says, yeah, there are two sisters. And one is Klare and one is Kate, Kitty. She says, I don't know their name. But I know they are two sisters, and they are bunking in one room. And they're ready to be taken to Israel. They are going to go to Israel because-- I don't know for-- that's all the information she could give me.

So I did come into Foehrenwald, and I found my two sisters. So we had a reunion. But by that time, I was about 90 pounds, maybe less. I was just skin and bones. I was blue, black and blue, and I was skin and bones. I was completely run down.

So I didn't tell you that in between this time, I did go in Prague from the Soviet Union while the borders weren't closed yet, and I sent a telegram to my family, as I remembered their address in my head. My Aunt Helen lived in Los Angeles, and I sent it-- please prepare papers, affidavits, for four persons.

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So the affidavits came into Prague, and my sisters took them with them to Germany. So I came into-- but they didn't know. They didn't know what to do, my two sisters. They had no money, and they had no food. They had no clothes.

So the only way to survive, they went into a kibbutz. And they got shelter there, and they were fed. And if anything comes bad for them, they cannot go to America. They will go to Israel.

But they all wanted to see the family. And my gra-- [NON-ENGLISH] grandma, what we never knew before, was one of the reasons, really, we were planning to come to America. So in the meantime, my papers were lost at the HIAS in Munich.

We found our papers. They were misfiled. It took us an utter months and months until they finally found our papers. They were misfiled.

And finally, we did come-- the three of us came to the United States in-- if you want dates, I have to tell you the dates. I should remember-- in February 1944, we came to-- we arrived to New York.

1944?

Was it 19--

Uh, '46?

Oh, right. You see? I have to look it up. No, I am wrong. I am wrong there. Of course, I'm wrong. I had made so many notes, and here I'm talking.

[PAGES SHUFFLING]

Yikes, it was in 1947, February. Yeah, February 1947, I came to the United States.

I'll take off the glasses.

How many of you came together--

Three of us.

--to the United States?

Three sisters. It was really a miracle to see three sisters together.

So there was still one--

One in Sweden.

Mm-hmm.

Did she join you later?

Yes. Yes. For many years, we waited for-- I think it took seven years for us to get her out of Sweden due to the fact that she had tuberculosis, and it was very difficult to get her out of Sweden, for her to be released. At that time, they were treating her. They didn't have the treatments like today.

Where did you enter the United States?

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In New York.

And your relatives were there?

Yeah, my Aunt Sylvia, sitting on our luggage, waiting for us.

So what happened then?

Well, we came to Los Angeles from New York. We flew to Los Angeles, and we stayed with my family. And we went to work in a factory, in a garment factory. And all three of us, we were quite a sight. I never saw a factory, ever. And we couldn't speak English, very little.

And we had to buy a needle and a scissor. And this was a major undertaking for us. The foreman sent us out to buy a scissor and buy needles because we were sewing on buttons on garments.

So we had no idea where to find in downtown Los Angeles needles and scissors. And we couldn't speak English. We went into bars. We went into restaurants. Wherever we saw an open door, we tried to find it.

Finally, finally, we got to the May Company. But then you had to go to a department. They said we should go to notions. We had no idea what notions were. And we tried to tell that-- to show that we are looking and scissor. And my one sister said, you're going to say needle, and I'm going to say scissors. And we shouldn't forget it until we get to the store, and-- until we find a store.

Well, finally, at the May Company, it took us hours. We lost-- we were earning $0.75 an hour. So we lost-- it cost us probably $1.50, two hours' work, to find a needle and the scissors. In the meantime, we were very unhappy to start a new life. It was very difficult. We went to school at night.

And it was very difficult. After all, my family were actually strangers to us. They never met us. We never met them. We were taught at home of loving them and anticipation one day we're going to reunite with the family.

As my father stayed in Europe, he was caught in the First World War. And he was in school, agricultural school. Then he was caught in the First World War, and then he got married.

Then I was born. Then depression hit the United States. By then, we were five. He had five daughters. And nobody comes to America with five children during the Depression.

And my father was very successful. He was a man in the making in agriculture, was the finest man in the country of agriculture. President Benes called him by his first name. And he wanted him to serve in the Ministry of Agriculture. He was very well thought of, my father.

And so it was very difficult for us to adjust. To see downtown Los Angeles was a very big cultural shock to us because we come from the wheat fields and the vineyards and the mountains and the forests. And suddenly, we were hit with a family we never met before. We didn't speak the language. Somehow we didn't learn English. We spoke just a few words.

So we went to work. Our family found us the job in the factory. And we went to go to school. We went to school at night. And we learned English.

And meantime, my family was very eager for us to get married. And I was already an old maid. I was 24 years old. And so my husband's mother, actually, was the one who made the date for me and my husband. My mother-in-law and my aunt knew each other, and it came to my mother in law's attention that my and her three nieces who came-- survived and came, and they were living with the family.

So my mother-in-law arranged a date with three of her sons to meet three of the sisters. Can you believe it? So we did

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meet. And my husband, my god, the minute we saw each other, it was love at first sight, it was like.

And he called me next night. At next evening, I came home from school. And my aunt told me there is a telephone call for me from Harold. And my other sisters didn't do so well with the other brothers. But I did.

And my god, we had three or four dates, and my husband asked me to marry him. And it was kind of very fast. Meantime, I had a few other dates. But I liked my husband the most, of course.

And I came in in February. And by the 3rd of August, I married. I married my husband.

And he's so particular about me. He didn't want to sit in. He was afraid I might talk some nonsense, and he might be very critical. He gets a little critical of me at times. And so that's what happened.

In the meantime, what was going on with your sisters?

My sisters, they also married. The same year, we all married. All three of us were married. And they live in-- one divorced. My younger sister divorced. She had a very bad marriage.

And my other sister has a very successful marriage, has two wonderful children. One of them is a writer, Robert Kaplan. You might have heard of him. I have to plug him. He wrote several books, and he's a fine young man.

And my other sister married in Sweden. My sister Heddy married in Sweden. And she came with her husband and their daughter Ann to the United States.

I hope I wasn't too fast for you. I didn't even give you a chance to ask me anything.

I'm going to ask you to go back. You said to me before this interview started that you wanted to stress some aspects of the relationships between Jews and Christians--

Yes, very much so.

--over the course of--

Very much so.

So I was wondering if you could address that point, starting with when you were a child in BeregszÃ¡sz and what the relationships were in your school, in your little neighborhood, between the Christian families and the Jewish families.

Well, we had a very good relationship, absolutely. Sometimes I worshiped with my Christian friends. I knew the rosaries, though I was taught-- I come from a Jewish home. I was taught Hebrew.

And later on, I was continuing. I had a Jewish education, and I had a Hungarian education. Due to that we lived in Czechoslovakia, we had complete freedom as Hungarians, Hungarian Jews. And I went to Hungarian schools. And I had also a Jewish education, a fine Jewish education.

I knew how to read and write Hebrew at a very young age. We had a special person who came to our home and taught us. And my friends were-- we had about 10 Jewish families in our small town. We lived about two miles from the biggest town, or BeregszÃ¡sz. And we were kind of a suburb and an agricultural community. And we had a wonderful relationship.

The only time I felt that I was really-- the difference, Christmastime, because we didn't have a Christmas tree. And that was the really only thing that would make me unhappy, though we had Hanukkah, and we received presents, and it was a joyous occasion because we loved oranges. And most of the time, we got one, and they smelled so good, oranges. I still can smell them.

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But Christmas came, and I was envious. I saw the beautiful tree with all the goodies on the tree. And I just wondered, why don't we have a tree?

So I would give a little questioning to my parents why we don't have a tree. So I was kind of pacified. And this went by until next Christmas.

When I was about four years old, we had a little neighbor, and his name was little Paul. And every Sunday, he would tell me, the bells are tolling, we are going to church. And you are not going to church, but we are. And that upset me terribly.

And I would run to my mother, and I would tell my mother, is that true that the bells are not tolling for us? Why the bells are tolling for us? Because we are Jews.

So it was very difficult for my mother at that time-- my mother was so very young when I was born-- to explain to a four-year-old why the bells are not tolling for us. And it bothered me. Until then, I was growing up, and I'd kind of forgotten all about this business of religion. And I knew very little of antisemitism. And I thought, at that time, we had a wonderful relationship in our small town between Christians and Jews until the trouble started, until Hungary occupied us.

And then, antisemitism blew like fire. And our best friend, my best girlfriend, who lives in Vienna now, she was my very dear, very best friend, suddenly wouldn't have nothing to do with me. And slow by slow, we knew what antisemitism was.

But then I was growing up, I believed what I started to-- as I had a very good religious education. And I remember the Rabbi Hillel and the sages saying this in my the teaching of the Torah, when I was learning all, I was learning of love, loving each other. I never learned anything of hatred.

I simply did not know. And up till this day, I don't know what is the difference and why Christians and Jews couldn't get along. And I probably will never understand it. Do you?

I think it's one of those questions that if anyone can answer, they can only answer for themselves. But it seems like this pattern was shifting throughout your life--

Yes.

--because when you were a very small child, you got the first taste--

Yes, I did get the first taste.

--of spite from this little boy.

Yes, yes, yes. But then you went back to what you had been trained in, which was something the Christians called the Golden Rule.

Yes.

And then, you said the trouble started when antisemitism blew way out of proportion--

Yes.

--to anything you had known.

And yet, later on, found yourself saved--

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By a Christian.

--by a Christian.

In between all of these shifts, how did the situation manifest itself? As things started to gradually change, beginning, you said, around 1938-- I think it was probably September 1938?

Yes.

What were the first things you saw or heard or felt that showed you that people that you thought were your best friends maybe weren't and that you were being singled out because you were Jewish?

Well, I was searching. I was searching for an answer. I was trying very hard to find out why. I was searching, and I had sleepless nights. I was very troubled.

And matter of fact, I was so troubled that I asked my parents many times just to take off and go someplace-- Madagascar or Africa or someplace in the jungle someplace because I could not believe it. I could not accept it.

I simply was searching. I took several trips to Hungary. I came to know many of the Nazis. I was trying to have a breakthrough. I was trying to find out what is it they want. Why are they hating us?

And some of them became my friends. I befriended some of these people. And I became perhaps their favorite Jew.

I wanted to prove that I am just as good as anybody else. But that was I who was searching. And this situation was bigger than I. Then I realized that antisemitism is taught in the home, that a child, when you are bringing up a child-- that's why I'm quoting this four-year-old child, that this child wasn't born antisemitic.

We are all born good and loving. That's what I believe up till this day. And I felt that this is being taught in the home or in the church or in somewhere. But these children learn to hate somebody.

They don't hate because they're born. A baby is a baby. A baby is innocent. So that's what I believe. So I don't know if I'm right or wrong, but that's what I was trying to find out. That's what I was searching.

I was criticized for this very much because young women just didn't make friends with people, undesirable people. Young women didn't travel alone. I did. I took off, and I made several trips to Budapest.

I brought together these people with very wealthy Jews. My father's ex-boss's partner was one of the wealthiest men in Hungary, who was also killed by the Germans, by the Hungarian Gestapo. And I tried to find out why.

Now, I did find some of these people, they wanted-- Hungary was a feudal society, still, and some of these people wanted a way out of life, of succeed. So we became the pawn of their success because actually, Hungary was-- speaking of Hungary-- ruled by the aristocracy. And it was just getting out of feudalism.

And these people, the Germans, many of these Hungarians volunteered for the Gestapo. It was patriotic for some of them because they were promised a big Hungary, and they were promised success. They were promised land, of course, the land and the property of the Jews.

So all they had to do-- join the Axis, and they will have a big, happy Hungary. They're going to have big jobs. They're going to have land. They're going to have businesses. They were promised the world.

So all they had to do to cooperate-- and some of them, I came across were intellectuals, quite fine people who never met Jews. They simply did not know what Jews were. They were taught that Jews are people, some kind of-- I don't know what they were exactly-- how they exactly pictured us.

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But it was easy for them to hate us, and later, kill us. They were trained. They were being trained, many of them, to do so.

And some of them, when they realized what they were doing, they were already-- it was too late for them. They were too deep in their guilt. They were too involved.

When the Nazi-led Hungarians came to power in your region, what were you doing exactly? Were you still in school?

I was in school up to the Hungarian occupation. And then, I could not attend school. I wasn't accepted in school anymore.

And besides, I was the oldest daughter, and I was helping-- I was learning all about the vineyards. I was very interested in the vineyards and agriculture. And I was terribly interested in winemaking, and I was kind of the right hand to my father.

And I just voluntarily also quit school. I didn't like antisemitism. And besides, I thought I'd be more useful to be at home and help out.

What do you remember of the antisemitism in school? How did it show itself?

Well, suddenly, we were seated separately. Other Jewish students had to sit in the-- we would sit always together in-- we would sit, about two or three of them-- we had different seating arrangements than now.

And we would sit two or three. And boys and girls went to the same class. And it was a very fine school, and we had wonderful professors, a wonderful education. And we were seated separate.

Then we were deprived of our religious education. The first thing we did have, in Czechoslovakia, you received your religious education within the school system. And every religious came in. So we had a Jewish professor who came in and taught the Jewish children. The Catholics went with their group. And the others, they have-- I think we were in three groups.

And slow by slow, we were just treated badly. Nobody wanted to associate with us, the Christian friends-- it was very unpleasant, unpleasant.

What about out in the street, in the community? Were similar things happening?

Yes, yes. We were, slow by slow, we were-- it was amazing how systematically we were demoralized. Slow by slow, it started academically. It started in the schools.

Businesses were taken away from Jews. Slow by slow, everything was done to perfection. It was unbelievable. Everything, slow by slow, we were dying slowly.

By when the Germans came in, we were completely demoralized. We hardly-- we were already very poor. Most Jews were already poor. Most Jews lost already their businesses.

We couldn't continue going to school. Universities, of course, weren't open for Jews. And we had all kinds of squeezes, all kinds of problems. And we were just completely demoralized.

The thing that stands out in my mind that I remember you saying just a little while ago, though, was that you still had a bicycle.

Yes, I had a bicycle. Yes, I did have a bicycle.

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Were things like bicycles and radios supposed to be turned in?

Radios, radios. All the radios had to be turned in. Due to the fact, we didn't receive newspapers, and we had no communication with the outside world. The radios were all confiscated.

But, no, bicycles-- I cannot remember. Maybe we might have had to give them our bicycles. But I had a little-- to own a bicycle, you had to have, like, a picture, a permit, a little permit. You had to register your little bicycle.

And I was very proud of this bicycle. For a young person to have a bicycle, a nice bicycle, it was really a wonderful treat. And, no, I don't remember what happened to my bicycle, but I did have my little picture.

And I have it somewhere. I was looking for it. I was going to bring it in, which really saved me-- helped me save myself, because when I was going to Julia, I pulled out from my pocket-- I was so brave.

My god, I was shaking. But I was so-- and I put it right into the face of the person who was looking for the papers. And they just said, go away. Just go.

Did you have discussions at home about the changing situation? What did your parents talk about?

Yes, yes. I was very rebellious, and I had begged my parents to leave. But it's very difficult for a family with five children to go anywhere, anywhere, any place. And we were kind of miscalculating the situations. As the Russians stopped short of the Carpathian Mountains, they were 150 miles from us when the Germans came in-- 150 kilometers. I don't know how many miles. That's what I heard. I don't know.

But they stopped short. And we thought that we will be saved. We really thought that we will be saved. But unfortunately, time ran out on us.

How and when did the word of the start of the deportations come to your family?

The deportation was in-- from the ghetto of BeregszÃ¡sz in, I think it was-- they came in April, the Germans. At the end of May, or sometimes-- in the end of May or June. Yes.

When your parents were taken to the ghetto, when your family went to the ghetto, you did not go.

I did not go. No, no, no.

When did they first how did they first hear that they were going to be segregated in the ghetto? What kind of notice did they get?

I think the Hungarian police came out to every Jewish home and told them, 24 hours, be ready, take some belongings-- like nightgown, toothbrushes, some such-- combs and such, and you have to report to the ghetto in [BeregszÃ¡sz we are assigned.

Everything went very fast-- very, very fast, and very thorough, very systematically. It was not to be believed how they complied the Hungarians.

You were already in your early 20s--

Yes.

--at this point.

Yes.

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And so you were an adult.

Yes.

But still, how did you explain to your parents, or what kind of arrangement did you make with your family that you were not going to go with them? You were not going to go into the ghetto?

Well, I felt that-- I don't know-- I was an adult. And I was also naive. I believed that there must be some help, that I must try. Somebody should try. Somebody should help.

So I thought that I might send a truck for them and get them out of the ghetto. Due to the fact that my father said that everybody has to go, if he's being helped, he told me, he says, I am not going, just me and my wife and your mother and your sisters, if I go-- there were over 10,000 people there-- everybody has to go.

So there my begging started out going into wherever I could knock on the door to do something about the ghetto, to try to delay, try to hold the transports back, do something. But the Hungarian government fell while this was going on. And I had no way to turn but Adolf Eichmann. And I was advised not to try. As bold I was, and I was so-- I wanted to help so much. And I was told, no, don't do that. I was advised, no, please don't do that because this man will kill you right.

You might get in to see him. But he's going to take his pistol and shoot you down right there the minute you open your mouth. So then, when I decided to go underground, into hiding.

You didn't stay hidden, really, for very long, though.

Well, I believe six months. It was long, too, to worry about for the life of two other people that they volunteered because if they catch me, they might be killed, deported, too. So it was very much on my conscience.

Did you feel you were in hiding when you lived with them? Was it physically like being in hiding most of the time?

Yes, yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Were there any times when you were with them that you could-- that it almost seemed like-- normal is the wrong word, but a more normal wartime existence. Where there are ever any times when you could freely move about the house or have a meal with them?

Very seldom because of the windows, the shadows. We were afraid somebody-- they didn't have window shades per se or such. They had some sort of wall coverings.

But this was one of the problems, that they didn't want that the neighbors to see extra movements in the house. So most of the time, food was brought to me. I very, very seldom, maybe in the evenings at nights-- late night, like, 8, 9 o'clock in the evening, I was able to sit down at the table with them.

Was there ever any discussion of creating a new identity for you?

Yes. We constantly-- they were trying to find papers for me or take me into the Swedish house. It came to our knowledge that Raoul Wallenberg was saving Jewish lives.

But the big problem was to get into to those homes, because they were catching the people right at the door. They're all over. It had to be done with a special car, with a special guide, with a special guard to get in there. This was the big problem.

So Julia says, no, we cannot take a chance. They're going to catch you. We went already this far. We're can't go.

So daily, we were discussing, if they catch me, I just came there in this moment. They never met me. They don't even

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know who I was. So they were constantly changing identity and figuring it out. What are they going to say if, say, somebody knocks on the door?

Before we go any further, what was the family name of your protectors?

Piper, Julia Piper. And by the way, she was given the Righteous Christian-- Medal of the Righteous Christian by Yad Vashem.

Did you ever talk-- while you were there in hiding or afterwards, did you ever talk with her about this idea of why it was that she could do this, and yet all around her, her neighbors would not? There were so few people helping Jews, and yet she took it upon herself to help you.

Actually, no. Actually, she was very hurt to see the behavior of the people.

In that house, during those last few months of the war, what were the conditions like? What did you have to eat?

Well, by then, we were very poor as there was no provider for us. And we managed. From the garden, there were potatoes saved.

And Julia canned. She had many fruit trees, and she canned-- loved the fruits and vegetables. And she was just a miracle woman. She was able to prepare a meal from-- out of almost from nothing.

Slow by slow, she was selling. They had quite a modest home. And slow by slow, she would sell their camera. Whatever she was able to sell, she would, slow by slow, sell for food.

Did you ever go outdoors?

No.

You were inside--

Yes.

--for those entire six months?

Yes.

What did you do while you were hidden? How did you spend the time?

I crocheted, and I did needlepoint, and I read a great deal. Then I read the Bible when the grandma came in the attic. When I was up in the attic, she came up, and she loved the Bible. And I think I was crying a great deal.

What kept you going?

I don't know. I often think hope. Perhaps that's all. And it was very important for me that I had this feeling that we will win the-- I was brought up in Czechoslovakia, and they had the saying, [CZECH], and that means "the truth should prevail," something like this.

And somehow I believed that the truth-- I believed that freedom will come. I truly believed in freedom.

What was it like when you decided that you had to leave that home and that hiding place? Was there time to make any sort of a preparation? What did you tell--

Yes. They were very reluctant to let me go, very reluctant, because first, they didn't have-- trains weren't running. They

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had no communication. They had no transportation. They had no government.

They were very reluctant. And I felt that I am taking their food. Maybe if I go home, I can help them.

I was torn, actually, between them and the hope that I will hear from my family. And, of course, winning the war, it was a shot in the arm. At that point, my pain somehow dissipated, just the thought that we overcame, just the thought that we made it. It was a tremendous satisfaction to me.

So you decided to try to make it to your house--

Yes.

--to find out what had become of your family. When you found yourself on this freight train, and you were advised this train was going to the Soviet Union, what happened? What did you--

I was bewildered. I was disappointed. But on the other hand, I was very appreciative because don't forget, those partisans brought me freedom. They fought for me.

So I was even between some disappointments and between appreciation for them for fighting for me. So I had, actually, mixed emotion. Of course, I was disappointed. I was disappointed.

How long were you on that train?

I don't remember. It took me a week to go home.

Which way were you headed, exactly? Do you remember the names of any of the places where the train stopped?

No, I don't remember. I don't remember.

How were you treated on that train?

Nobody actually bothered us. We were together, several survivors. I didn't know if they were Jewish or-- I had no idea. Somehow, we were so happy to be alive at that point, and we won the war. And we are going home.

I don't think we were hungry. I don't think we were tired. I could not recall time. Time had no meaning anymore.

But what did you do about things like food?

I don't think I was ever hungry at that point. I think my adrenaline was working overtime or something. I remember some Russian soldiers giving me food. I ate with them pork and whatever they cooked for.

Mostly, the Russian soldiers, they provided for themselves at that time. And I remember a few times giving me food. And I have no idea. I cannot recall if we ate or when or if we slept. I just remember huddling, all of us together, keeping each other warm with our hopes. That's all.

And so did the train finally got you to BeregszÃ¡sz?

Yes, the train stopped. The freight train stopped at BeregszÃ¡sz. Of course, I always questioned, where are we? Where are we? It made several stops in between.

And I got off. It was, like, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. And those cobblestones made a lots of noise. I was walking all by myself.

Nobody even stopped me. I didn't see anybody. I wasn't afraid of anybody. My heart was just pounding. And I just

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wanted to find that home.

I remembered where my friends lived. And I knocked on the window. And they let me in. And they were amazed. I must have looked emaciated in rags with a sack on my back. So I made it.

What did you think when you saw that your parents' house lay virtually in ruins and had been sacked, and you knew that the people who had been your neighbors when you were growing up had your possessions? What went through your mind at that point?

Well, at that point, I suffered so much emotionally that it was a way of life for me. I didn't even expect anything. I truly had not too much expectation of the people.

I was hurt, and I was-- they quite-- some of them took a look just like they saw ghost. Instead of being happy to see me, they would tell me, oh, you are alive? That's how I was greeted.

And so how long did you remain there?

I remained at home for almost a year, almost a year.

During this time, what was happening?

During this time, everything was confiscated from me. I tried to put the vineyard into shape, and I was able to-- I was told that I can have it for one season. I can have the vineyard for one season. And whatever we harvest from the vineyard, I can keep.

Who told you this?

The local officials.

And they were speaking on the authority of whom?

For the USSR.

And so what kind of plans were you thinking of making at this point?

At this point, I wanted to liquidate and get out. At this point, I advised my sisters to go to Prague. And I will stay behind, and I wait for our harvest, what I did. I sell. And whatever I can, I convert it into some kind of something, some valuables, and I will join them in Prague, where I had friends and I had family.

But instead, you found yourself, at this time, trapped by the [CROSS TALK]

Yes, I was trapped. Yes.

Did you have any communication with your sisters while they were in Prague and you were--

No, no, no. Absolutely not. There was no meal coming, no meal service or any such.

Did you know-- by this time, though, you did know that your sister in Sweden was there recovering.

I learned about it when I came up to Prague. And I had an aunt who told me she saw her name at the American Red Cross. She checked with the Red Cross, and she saw my sister's name.

When you arrived in the United States and had some time to get a routine established in Los Angeles, what kinds of conversations did you have with your American relatives about what they knew during the war?

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Well, they did try to avoid conversations somehow. Perhaps they resented the fact that my father didn't join the family, because they sent us, several occasion, papers, even tickets, for transportation. And things-- the depression, as I said, came in. And somehow-- I don't know why. I don't have the answer why. We didn't join the family.

So they did resent that a little bit. They felt, of course, they felt very bad. They lost their brother. They felt very bad.

And they tried to avoid. They tried to-- I had the feelings that they didn't want her to accept the fact that we were hurt so much.

They felt, at the time, just like they didn't want to hear about it. It's not possible. And it hurt us very much that we couldn't cry when we wanted to cry. We had to hold back.

What kinds of things did you and your sisters talk about about this time amongst yourselves?

Well, our struggle to start a new life. Shall we go to school? Shall we go start to work in a factory or wherever we could get a job? We had difficulty to establish ourselves.

Meantime, our family was very much for us to get married. Of course, this was the old school. My family they thought a girl should get married and raise a family, and that was the most important thing. And they really meant well.

What were the circumstances of your aunt and uncle's life in Los Angeles? What did they do for a living, and what kind of neighborhood did you live in?

I became into a very nice family, a beautiful family, a very successful family. My aunt and uncles were pioneers in the furniture business in Los Angeles. My aunt and uncle owned the Vermont Furniture Company. My other aunt also was an auctioneer in antiques and such.

And my uncles all were hardworking, very hardworking men. One, I believe, was in the produce business, and the other one had a restaurant. And they all worked very hard, my aunts and uncles. They were very successful, and they were very hardworking people.

When did you first feel like maybe you fit in in the United States and the war years were receding a little bit from your life?

I felt very comfortable being in the United States. Maybe I was a little bit-- the lost years, the time I lost, that I couldn't be productive, and that kind of bothered me that I couldn't finish my education. And I felt very good, very, very, very comfortable in the United States. I did.

But even my accent bothered me. My English, even up to this day, I hear myself. And more I hear myself, worse my accent becomes. And I did read a lot, and I tried to study.

And I write pretty good English. I learned. I went to school, and I studied to write and read properly.

And meantime, I got married, and I had a family. I raised three children. So I felt always very happy to be in the United States, except I felt, all my life, terrible that my parents couldn't be part of it.

What business did you and your husband go into?

My husband was in the insurance business, and I became a homemaker. I worked in the garment industry. Then I worked as a saleslady in Los Angeles in part time after I had my children for many years. But my husband really wanted me to be a homemaker. So I obeyed.

Did you raise your family in Los Angeles?

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We moved here 24 years ago, and I started out raising. My husband had a promotion in management, and he was transferred to San Francisco. And we moved to Burlingame. I lived for 24 years in the same address. I lived one year in Westlake.

It will be 25 years in December that I moved here.

And can you tell us a little bit about your children?

I have three daughters. The oldest daughter is Judy, named after my youngest sister. And she is 42 years old. She's getting married-- first time.

And our second daughter is Ann, named after my mother. And she was married for 10 years to an optometrist, and she divorced. She has two children, two wonderful children-- a girl, 18, and a boy, 14, going on 15.

And our youngest daughter Linda, she is also divorced after 10 years marriage. She also has two children, two girls, age 11 and 7. And she will be getting married sometime in the new year. So our girls are doing very well.

What and when did you start telling them about your experiences as a survivor?

All along they knew, all along. Whenever they asked me a question, I tried to answer them. Per se, I didn't bring it up. I didn't want that.

I wanted to be just a normal mother. I didn't want to be pitied or get special treatments or such. And whenever they asked me, I tried to tell them as much as I was able to.

Do you remember about how old they were when they first started asking questions?

Well, I couldn't tell exactly. I couldn't tell exactly.

Do you remember what kinds of questions they would first ask?

Oh, the first things they ask me, how come we don't have grandparents? Most children, I think it's very typical. What happened to your mother and father? What happened to-- they knew already my-- then I told them about my mother and my youngest sister.

And then, they just didn't ask too many questions. They felt they might hurt me if they asked too many questions. And they, perhaps even my own husband, they kind of let the past rest.

What kinds of things do you ask yourself the most about this time in your life?

Well, I am in a new phase of life. I was 70 years old in August, last August. And somehow I know this, that I am stepping into a different phase in my life. I am aware of the future, and I am taking now one day at a time.

The crying is over except today. I accepting-- no, I never accepted it. I just learned to live with it.

When you say that this is a new phase in your life, that suggests that there was a point when you did rehash things at the time.

Yes, yes, yes.

Can you talk about that a little bit, about what kinds of things you would try to resolve?

Actually, I didn't try to resolve because it was bigger than I. I just hoped that mankind will learn from these past terrible

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tragedies. And there must be a reason that this happened. I was looking, looking, and searching for a reason.

Now, why would I be punished, and so many others, in such a horrible, terrible way? Is there a reason for it? Are we going to be ever given some kind of a clue, even a clue?

I don't even have a clue. If you ask me this question, I don't even have a clue. As to my mind, it is not to be accepted. It's not to be-- it's just above my above my capability to answer you this question.

Have you traveled back to Europe at the time?

I did go to see-- I have family in Belgium, and I went to visit with them a couple of occasions. My mother's sister's children live in Belgium and France, and we had a wonderful reunion. It's a lovely, lovely family I have there.

And they came to visit with us many times. But they were spared during the war. They were hidden, the whole family of nine children-- nine sisters and brothers-- and they were all spared.

You've never gone back to Czechoslovakia--

No.

--or Hungary.

No, no, no, no. And as much as my husband would like to go, he would like to see a little bit of my background-- more people are slowly going back to their hometowns. And I don't know. I would like to please my husband.

And I don't know if I am emotionally ready for it. I am kind of numb at this point right now. I cannot answer you.

Do you have-- do you know other survivors, and do you have contact with them?

Of course. Yes, I know a lot of survivors.

What kinds of things do you talk about when we get together?

Sometimes-- as a rule, we don't talk about the Holocaust. We talk about our family or children or husbands or whatever.

Only time, when I meet people whom I haven't seen in, like, 20 or 30 years or longer, or I come across with a new survivor, like I came across now with a couple, the Jacobys, and we found out that we are related-- distant, him, Martin, is related to my mother's family.

So we could talk for 20-- 48 hours wouldn't be enough for us to talk. Then we rehash everything again. What did you do, and where were you and all? But per se, we don't entertain each other with-- because we all carry the same pain. So we don't entertain each other with our pain.

What kinds of questions do you remember your husband ever asking you about your experience?

Well, my husband somehow felt that I should start a new life, and I should leave the past behind. And he says he took me for today and for tomorrow, not for yesterday. And one of the reasons he doesn't want to sit in on this conversation-- perhaps it would be too painful for him.

What would you like someone who hears your story to learn from it?

I really don't know how it will be received. It depends how it will be received. I don't know if I'm able to come across.

I don't know. I just really don't know. I just try to be a human being, I presume.

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What finally motivated you to come forward and tell your story?

Actually, it was my children, my children. They always feel that I am holding out on them, perhaps. I have this feeling, and maybe I'm wrong, but my children.

They want that, and I hope maybe there is a reason. Maybe there is something that my children, my grandchildren-- there is a reason I stayed alive. I don't know.

I'm not a hero. I'm just an ordinary person. And that's all.

And the people you've referred to as the heroes in your story, the Pipers.

Yes.

What's the postscript to your contact with them?

I had a lifelong friendship, relationship with them. My husband and I helped them for many, many years while they were alive, the grandmother and the mother and daughter. We sent them packages.

And she visited here twice in the United States, Julia. I asked her to stay with me after her mother passed away. But she said she couldn't be uprooted. She was too old, and she wasn't well.

And she thought it wasn't fair. It wouldn't be fair to me due to the condition. She never recuperated over the loss of her husband, never. And she felt that-- she wanted to be buried near her mother, but she is.

But we brought her son, Leslie, when the Hungarian Revolution was. Leslie, her only son, Leslie, only child, came. We sponsored him, and he's our friend. He just visited us.

And so this was wonderful that he knows that-- he said to me last time that the prayers of his mother and grandmother was heard because he can live in the United States and retire here. And he enjoys living in the United States.

To continue, we're all set, Judith.

[PERSONAL NAME] do you have any questions?

Well, I've scratched through all of them. They're almost all answered. But I did have one question. You say you're an ordinary person, but I hear someone who's very brave and defiant, even as a young girl, and you wanted to know why is this so. And I wondered if you had heard of any resistance movements during the ghettoization that was never an option for you to--

I wasn't involved in the ghetto, and there was very little resistance in Hungary. I was approached while I was in the hospital. I never know how, but a little crippled young man-- he was crippled on one leg. He came to my bed, and he said-- he gave me a gold coin.

But I didn't mention-- we lived on for many months. He said he was sorry that he couldn't help me anymore. And he told me that the underground-- how did he know of me or how did he know about me, I have no idea-- but he said that the underground is almost nil in Hungary.

There is only one man. They were talking about the Swedish diplomat who did unbelievable things in Hungary. But he said he's going to disappear himself. He's going into hiding.

I didn't know his name. I didn't know where he came from. So there were many miracles that did happen to me. So this was one of the miracles. And thank you for asking.

I wondered if-- you said that you worked at your father's vineyard and helped to run that business after the war. And I wondered if you ever carried that interest into your current life. Do you garden, or do you--

I wanted very much, very much. I was very interested in the vineyards. As a matter of fact, when I came to this country, I was very good at it.

But I didn't have the strength due to the fact of my health. I wasn't in good health. And besides that I wasn't in good health, I had a gallstone which bothered me all my adult life which just was removed two months ago.

And one of the reasons that I couldn't be more productive, that I wasn't feeling well. And my stomach problems-- of course, I got ulcers. As soon as the Hungarians occupied us, I developed ulcers.

And I did not have the physical strength to continue. And still, when I see the vineyards, my heart breaks, as much as we go there, as often as we can. But I couldn't go on continuing.

I think those were two lingering questions.

OK, I had one question. You mentioned that you experienced many miracles. Are there any other miracles that you experienced that you didn't mention on the tape that you might tell us about?

Well, one of the miracles was to visit in the state of Israel. That was one of the miracles. It was somehow maybe one of the rewards of my pains to see freedom, democracy in the making.

I saw brave people. I saw very productive people. And it warmed my heart.

I saw the vineyards. And I knew that my father trained many young men for agriculture or also for the working in the winery. In the early-- I was a young girl at that time, maybe 10 years old, these men were intellectuals getting out of Germany who were wise enough to get out.

And they came to Czechoslovakia. They were taught for agriculture, for the winery, and they were the halutzim. And my father sent several transport out. He had the opportunity, and he did it, sent several transport of them to Israel.

Of course, I had miracles having my-- each time I had a child and having a wonderful husband. And I'm here alive and talking to you.

I want to thank you very much.

You're very welcome.

Five seconds, and then start.

OK, yeah, can you tell us what year the picture was taken and where this is and who the people are?

The picture was taken in 1934 in Beregardo, near the city of BeregszÃ¡sz. And this is my mother, my father.

In the middle there?

The middle, and I'm sitting up on the-- between them.

OK.

And there is my-- to my right is my sister, Heddy.

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That would be this way, you mean, or--

That way.

OK, so to our right, looking at the picture--

Yeah, is my sister Heddy, my sister Kitty.

OK.

And--

To the left of you--

--my sister Judy.

To the left of your mother?

That other little one is Judy.

OK.

And this is my sister Klare.

OK. And who's that gentleman on the other [CROSS TALK]

The gentleman is my father's secretary.

OK, and in the background there?

One of the employee.

OK.

Could you tell us your parents' names and your name?

Yeah, my maiden name is Viola Leba Weiss and my father's name was Paul, and my mother's name was Ann.

How did you manage to hold on to this photo?

This photo was given to me by my best girlfriend, who still I correspond with in my hometown. And she saved some of the photos.

Oh, nice.

OK, tell us about this.

This was taken in Budapest on my 21st birthday.

OK.

When I had a new hairdo.

All right.

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OK, tell us about this picture, please.

This is one day we decided, all five of us, we're going to walk-- it was about a 30-minutes walk for us to go in the city. And we're going to take our picture.

So we all had Scottish plaid-- except me-- all had new dresses made, all Scottish plaid dresses. And we all dressed up, and there we marched in the city to take a photograph and surprised our parents.

And you are the top left?

Yes, yes.

And my sister Heddy.

She's top right?

Top right.

Then my sister Klare.

Which one is she?

Right under me.

Under you, bottom left?

Yeah, bottom left, and middle is Judy. And the other one is Kitty.

OK.

And that was about when?

I was about 20, around 21, 20, around 20 years old or so, sometimes in 1939 or 1940, sometimes in 1940.

Will you ask the question, Judith, to start it up?

You said you had a few things you'd like to add about other family members, your grandchildren.

Well, speaking of miracles, we have four grandchildren, one boy and three girls. And they are lovely, and I'm very, very happy with them.

Have they asked you any questions about the war or where you came from?

Not too many questions. They probably heard enough, I presume, at home. They know what happened to my parents, and they very seldom question me.

Was there something else that you wanted to add about anybody else in your family?

No.

No more questions.

OK.

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Thank you.

Thank you again.

You're very welcome.

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