

1 INTERVIEW WITH: MIRJAM MAGDADUNST

2 INTERVIEWER: KEN ROTHCHILD

3 TRANSCRIBER: LINDA M. CRAFT

4 Q This is Ken Rothchild interviewing Mirjam  
5 Magdadunst, survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, who will speak  
6 about her experiences. What can you remember as the earliest  
7 sign to you that something was wrong, that, that your life  
8 was in danger, and something was going to happen to you?

9 A I remember- in 1935 I had relatives in Germany  
10 and they called up- I mean, we had messages they were beaten  
11 on the streets already in '36. As a very little girl- and  
12 that's what is my first remember, what-

13 Q -Where were you living?

14 A We were in Caechoslovakia in the border of Hungary.  
15 My father was Hungarian, and my mother was Czechoslovakian,  
16 and in 1938 the Hungarians came into Czechoslovakia and we had  
17 to run away from home in 1939.

18 Q What? You ran away from home in 1939?

19 A (inaudible) our clothes and they took away all our-

20 Q Where did you run to?

21 A To Budapest, Hungary.

22 Q Why don't you just give me your experiences as they  
23 happened, and tell me what happened from that point from where  
24 you ran away?

25 A In Budapest, Hungary, I was a very little girl, and  
that was, of course, before the concentration went on in '40-  
we were working like little girls, working in a manufacturing  
place in Hungary, coming from a different country. And, in

1 1942- my parents was there also, then- in 1942 my parents went  
2 back home to Czechoslovakia to visit my grandmother, and they  
3 took them to the concentration, and they left me in Budapest  
4 because we didn't have the money to go back to Czechoslovakia,  
5 and they left me in Budapest, like a little girl, already  
6 working- it's not even fourteen- and somehow they put them in  
7 the concentration- I never saw them again, my parents. And, so,  
8 from this on I was running all over.

9 Q Did you have other- just parents? Any brothers or  
10 sisters?

11 A I have a brother. I have one brother who also was  
12 taken to Germany, and he came back. Yes, he was in a concen-  
13 tration camp, my brother.

14 Q You have been able to locate him since?

15 A Yes, yes.

16 Q What did you do during the worst points of your  
17 experience?

18 A During the war there was really already the German  
19 and the Hungarian was fighting, there was a ghetto, you know,  
20 and I was running away. They put me in the ghetto, and  
21 somehow- I really don't even remember how- I went out from the  
22 ghetto. And we were running. I was sleeping under cars, in  
23 their houses, in unbelievable places. I don't know how, but  
24 I survived in this big city. I was working for people, you  
25 know what I mean, for bread, you know, and that's the way I  
was living all those years until they came in there- Russians.

Q How many years was that?

A From- they came in '45, I think, '45, in December,  
if I remember good, in wintertime, and this time I was living

1 with a not-Jewish family. They didn't know I am not Jewish,  
2 and I was working for them, and we were in the basements then,  
3 you know. I wasn't the family, so they didn't give me eat,  
4 and everyday between the Russians and the Germans I was  
5 running out between the guns to get some water or something,  
6 and people just fell out next to me, dying, and we didn't even-  
7 it was nothing- just to survive. It was a-

8 Q -So you were never put in a prison camp, or-

9 A -I was never put in. I was in an organization- go  
10 in- and was, never was in a prison, no, just in a ghetto.

11 Q What kind of relationships did you have with people  
12 over- how many years was that, five years? Five years you  
13 lived like that?

14 A Lived like this. I even was not too much contact  
15 with them. I understood after the war there was a Mizrachi.  
16 There was all kinds of organizations that would put you a  
17 place. Once they told me, they were going to take me over to  
18 the border, and it was arranged for me to go to Rumania, and  
19 a man picked me up to take me to the border somewhere with the  
20 train, we went with the train to go over this, so many boys  
21 and girls could go, and, somewhere on the border- I don't  
22 know where was it- the man told me, next to me, they were  
23 watching us, "Don't come with me anymore. Just go down from  
24 the train and forget about me," and they let me, and he left  
25 me in this town, in the border town, and I had the money to  
come back to Budapest again.

Q I'm sorry. Explain the part where that man in the  
train- you said what?

A When we arrived to the place where we would go over,

1 they recognized him, somebody recognized him, and he just told  
2 me, you know, slowly-

3 Q -"Stay away from me."

4 A "Stay away from me. We're not going to go anywhere."

5 Q Uh huh.

6 A And I was not taken away on the border.

7 Q So you were never picked up? You just had to live  
8 in your own careful way for five years to avoid any problems?

9 A Avoid, yes.

10 Q What were some of the things that went through your  
11 mind? What was your thinking that, that- what did you think  
12 about life?

13 A Food. Lot of food. Crying, eating my tears. Food  
14 was very important.

15 Q How about sickness? Did you ever get sick? Did  
16 you ever get ill? How did you take care of yourself?

17 A Okay. I was a very young girl, between, pub- I  
18 don't know how you call that- to have puberty- and it just  
19 didn't work, and I was blown up. Some people got very skinny.  
20 I got opposite. Blown up, like unbelievable, and, uh-

21 Q From what? Just your reaction, your nerves, or  
22 your-

23 A -I don't know. They said because I didn't, you  
24 know-

25 Q -Oh. Okay.

Q And I went to the doctor-somehow I found out a  
hospital left to go, and- but it was in the last of the war.  
I was not taken care. Just after the war.

Q Okay. What did you- how did you spend your time?

1 What did you do during the day? What was your day like? Give  
2 me a description of the day. You'd get up in the morning, and  
3 what would you do?

4 A We were worried about water. We'd get up in the  
5 morning in the worst times, you know, we were worried about  
6 water, so we went where to steal, where to get, you know-

7 Q -water?

8 A Ya. And most of the time we were in the basement,  
9 you know, people were sitting in the- it was bombing- and  
10 people sitting in the basement. One times I was ina basement  
11 with a very old Jewish lady- she told me- we were sleeping in  
12 one bed, bunk, when she told me she's a librarian. She was  
13 all hurt. She knows seven languages, and she talked to me all  
14 day. She says, "Don't get afraid, don't"- you know, we were  
15 just thinking, and I went out and get food for her, she couldn't  
16 go out. I mean, I don't even remember too much.

17 Q Were you angry that you had to live like this? Were  
18 you just fearful? Did you just think day-to-day?- Of how to  
19 survive?

20 A Day-to-day. Day-to-day. I saw a lot of killing.  
21 Jewish children were under the ground next to me- didn't know'  
22 I am Jewish, nobody knew. One day we heard boom, boom, boom,  
23 you know, the guns. I go out, and from the sewer I see children  
24 coming up, you know, at the stairs there, and the children  
25 coming up, and they just shooting- how they coming out they  
just shooting them- one, two hundred- from the sewer they were  
hiding next to us. I didn't even know they are, you know,  
comebody's on the street. And they shoot all of them down,  
(inaudible) and they was standing there and looking at. We

1 saw so much dead on the streets even, not just like Jewish,  
2 even, everybody was killed. Horses was all on the street from  
3 the bombs, from the Russians and the Germans, and in Budapest  
4 this was the way, hiding, you see. Budapest was not a  
5 concentration camp. People hide- was hiding all around, and  
6 those children. One day, is very interesting, two of my  
7 friends was picked up somewhere. I didn't found it out. Just  
8 after the war I met him and I went to Cyprus, to Israel, and  
9 they took him too- there is a war there -Day-doo-na-, in  
10 Budapest, and they told them, "Undress yourself," and they  
11 shoot them to the water, all of them. From the children-  
12 because we all really children running. We met, you know, and  
13 I met him and he got epilepsy. I met him on the water, and  
14 went to Israel. It was good friend of mine says, " Oh, you  
15 survived. I survived," he says. "When they shoot us down,  
16 to go to the water, shoot us in-" he was not shot.

15 Q But he went into the water?

16 A And he went in the water and he got epilepsy, you  
17 know epileptic? Sickness from this. He came out naked in the  
18 night, went somewhere and he got clothes, and he got since  
19 then epileptic, you know-

20 Q -How long was he in the water?

21 A I don't remember. Until they went away and they  
22 thought everybody's- it was December, it was win- you know-  
23 cold, ice.

24 Q Were there any special people that you can remember  
25 that helped you, or any special event?

A I don't remember the names. I really don't.

Q Describe 'em. Describe what they did to help you,

1 and your relationship to these people.

2 A Okay. I was introduced to a lady who was in the-  
3 like a 'white house' here- how you call this- in Budapest  
4 there. The President there was lived. She used to be working  
5 for them, and she took me in the last where I already got  
6 liberated, you know, the last minute, she took me to her home,  
7 and she, this woman knew I am Jewish. This was the last one,  
8 and already the American came in and she really helped me, you  
9 know, be there for the last minute. But I don't remember  
nothing, names, you know, to be grateful.

10 Q How long did she help you, and what did she do?

11 A Maybe one month, you know, that was, but I don't  
12 remember no names. She wouldn't live. She was very old.

13 Q But- one month. That was a long period for  
14 somebody to help you.

15 A To help you not to die.

16 Q So most of the time you didn't even have anybody  
17 even for a month?

18 A No. No. You know, there was a camp for the soldiers,  
19 regular soldiers, and one gentleman helped me in there to go  
20 to have a job, because there girls had jobs to clean up after  
21 the rebels, you know, what was - not Jewish girls, they were  
22 strong girls. I was a little small, and was helping them  
23 every night. The man told me which truck's not going to go  
24 out from their camp. I could go to sleep under it. He was  
25 so nice, you know, he told me where you could sleep tonight.  
Because in the night they could take it out, those trucks,  
and you are out of luck. They would see you. You're not  
supposed to- a girl- to sleep in a camp for soldiers. After

1 so many hours everybody had to leave the camp, and I was  
2 sleeping under trucks like a long time.

3 Q Were there lots of little people like this that  
4 helped you along the way?

5 A I survived because they did, maybe. Maybe, you  
6 know, lot of things happen, but I can't remember. You know,  
7 I remember when I talk about it a lot, you know, lot of help,  
8 ya. One day I went with my yellow star on the street-

9 Q -Why did you have a yellow star?

10 A Oh, I had it a time. There was a star, you had to  
11 have a yellow star. It was a little period, then we run away  
12 we took it off, and somehow the star had a mark on it, and two  
13 guys came and they said, "Look, this is a Jew. She had a  
14 yellow star because the mark left all that," and I was running  
15 and they didn't catch me.

16 Q So you had the star on? Did Jews have the stars on?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And how did you happen to have the star on?

19 A In the beginning they gave you a star. They  
20 wanted to take us away, that's why we were running. They put  
21 them together in the ghetto. I went to the ghetto, but I ran  
22 out from the ghetto. Yes, that-

23 Q -And you got the star off, but not completely?

24 A The star left a mark because of the sun or something  
25 on mine, this particular clothes, and I got something, you  
26 know, I let- Sure, I wore star in the beginning. Everybody  
27 wore in Budapest.

28 Q What did people talk about in the ghetto? When  
29 they were in the ghetto?



1           A     Terribly frightened. They had, you know, I wasn't  
2 there long time, not long time, because, somehow - I don't  
3 know how - but I went out, and we were always, "Where is mother,  
4 father?" You know, just - when you are young it's different,  
5 you know.

6           Q     How- how have you survived after all this? What  
7 has been the thing that's given you the strength to get your  
8 life going, and, you know, realize that there are other things  
9 than running, after five years of running?

10          A     It's running. It's very interesting. We had rela-  
11 tives in Budapest. We did have relatives. They were - one  
12 was taken away, you know. I had relatives, aunts and uncles,  
13 and not long after we already got my brother came back - he  
14 knew where my aunt lived, and I knew where my aunt lived - and  
15 we met in this place with my brother, and then we were not  
16 Hungarian. See, we were Czechoslovakian really, and we came  
17 together - then already we came together with people. And we  
18 wanted to go back home to Czechoslovakia. After the war we  
19 went back, but we didn't find my parents- nobody. So, there  
20 was already organized to go to Palestine. It was Palestine  
21 then, and we went to the organization and were organized, went  
22 to Cyprus, you know we were taken to the concentration camp  
23 in Cyprus. You know about Cyprus, no?

24          Q     No, the Island of Cyprus?

25          A     Oh, you don't know what -

          Q     No.

          A     Okay. After the war my brother was already twenty-  
one. He's supposed to go to the army, so the Jewish organi-  
zation took together all those boys to take to Israel,

1 and I went with my brother. We went to Italy in the American  
2 Joints, or something. They took us there. We went through  
3 the Russians. We went through all hell until we got there.  
4 Through the Ow-tuk we went by foot from Italy, Salzburg - no,  
5 from Germany, Salzburg to Italy we were walking.

6 Q How far is that?

7 A Very far. I don't know how far. You know, we  
8 didn't even have shoes, just stolen shoes.

9 Q This is after, when -

10 A -After, we took in the part. We were running for  
11 long time after, all of us. And so we were running through  
12 the hills to get out and get to Israel, to palestine. And  
13 one point they captured us, and they sended us back again.  
14 And again we walked through Italy. In Italy for three months.  
15 We already got food we got from the American Jointings, and  
16 then they put us on a boat. It was not a boat. It was a ship  
17 for animals. It was no room in it. Nothing, just wires. It  
18 was - and then we were a whole week on the sea without food,  
19 without facility, something they give us - a little tuna was  
20 there , but we couldn't eat it- but no toilet, not nothing,  
21 everybody sick. And after a week they captured us before  
22 Israel, the English people. And they were not good to us at  
23 all, the English.

24 Q No? What happened?

25 A They did very bad for us. We were children. I  
wasn't already a child child, but we were children on this  
boat, and they put us in a bery big ship like a soldier ship,  
just like you see here in this place. And they had wire on  
the top. And the soldiers at the top was running to this corner

1 and threw chewing gum. For the children. And the children  
2 were running to, you know, to get something. After, they said,  
3 throwing in the other corner, and the children like animal  
4 were running because we were hungry, you know. We were all  
5 sick. Very sick people. And then we went to Cyprus. We  
6 had there, just , you know, everyone knows what was went.  
7 The concentration camp with wires. We were closed in a whole  
8 year.

8 Q Who was running that?

9 A The English.

10 Q No, I didn't know about that.

11 A You didn't? The English people running this  
12 concentration camp because they didn't want us to go to Israel.  
13 And, maybe pain of our friends who were together got crazy.  
14 They had to take them to the crazy house, because they  
15 couldn't bear - after this - what they went through. They  
16 came from the concentration camp. We were all different.  
17 Anyway, after the Queen, the boy was born to the Queen of  
18 England, she gave thousand children to go out, because she had  
19 a baby or something, I don't know how you call that. So, I was  
20 between them and they let me out. My brother stayed there,  
21 all my friends, but somehow I was between all those thousand  
22 children to go to Israel. So that's why I went into Israel.

21 Q How come you didn't go crazy?

22 A Some people was more stronger. Some people less  
23 stronger.

24 Q What makes some people stronger?

25 A I don't know. I don't know what makes some people  
stronger, but some people have, you know, take it. I didn't

1 realize this whole story was so stupid, you know. Missed my  
2 parents after everything I said or done already. We were still  
3 running so- self, you know- to get-

4 Q Survive?

5 A Survive. Then we know what happened to us. For a  
6 long time we didn't find- went home. Nobody, you know.

7 Q Why did some people- what happened to the people who  
8 did go crazy? What happened to the-

9 A -I don't know. They took them to a hospital some-  
10 where. I think they took them to Israel, to Palestine. They  
11 had, you know, Cyprus and Israel not so far, they- I heard  
12 they were in Israel- you know. They took them there to the  
13 hospitals. First to Nicosia, and then they transferred them  
14 to Israel. Yes, they did.

15 Q And, how has your life been affected now? I mean,  
16 how have you managed to get back into a regular routine?

17 A I have family. I married, you know. I met my  
18 husband in Cyprus and lot of nice (inaudible), believe me.  
19 My mother was a short lady, and they told me when she went to  
20 the concentration camp the short people died the last, because  
21 the gas go down, everytime. Every minute I think, "My mother  
22 was there," you know- believe me, because we were unbelievable-  
23 nightmares. I cannot see on the tele- if I see even a uniform  
24 on the television, any German, my children says, "How come  
25 you close the T.V.?" I'm just dying everytime one uniform  
would come on. We were on the street in Budapest and I said  
to myself, if I would be a beautiful girl maybe I would go to  
him, he would take me maybe, you know, I was thinking, you

1 know, I didn't - how should I tell you? I wouldn't go- there  
2 was the thinking. Maybe they would save me.

3 Q Who? Who would save you?

4 A The German. The uniform. They were for the  
5 Germans. When I see a German uniform, I could die. I could  
6 die.

7 Q Did you ever have any problems with soldiers at  
8 any time, or did you ever, was it- were you always just run-  
9 ning or did you ever-

10 A -No, I didn't have no problems with the soldiers  
11 because we- we were pretty shrewdish kids to run. You learn  
12 your survivor.

13 Q Tell me about being shrewd. Tell me about running.  
14 Tell me about the things that went in your mind, the little  
15 things you used to think to do.

16 A Used to connive bread-

17 Q -Tell me some of those things.

18 A They closed the city certain hour in the evening.  
19 You know, they close it so nobody could go out, because is a  
20 war. In the morning we already had to - where we going to be  
21 that evening? Where you be in the evening? And where are  
22 you going to have your bread? And - very hard.

23 Q So, what would you - say I was coming to you, say  
24 I was, say I was another child, and I was coming to you, and  
25 I was asking you, "What can I do? How can I survive? Where  
do you go at night? What do you do? Tell me what to do?"  
What would you tell me?

A Listen. One night I met a girl. I was running,

1 and it was almost the hour to get somewhere, and I met a girl  
2 who used to live somewhere - when she's from Czechoslovakia -  
3 used to live by my aunt. I met on the street, I says, "I  
4 don't have where to go tonight. Would you help me? Just for  
5 tonight?" And she was already older, she had a -somebody-  
6 boyfriend or something, and she did took me there for the  
7 night, and she put me in the closet to sleep. I slept all  
8 night in the closet. And she, this was a help, for one night.  
9 So, in the morning I went again, and we went, and it was hard.

10 Q Did you find any happiness at all? What made you  
11 happy during - I mean, any pleasure, any moments that you can  
12 remember when you - I mean life changes from day-to-day  
13 sometimes . Some days your're happy, some days youre not,  
14 but can you remember any things that made you happy?

15 A No.

16 Q You never remember laughing, joking, dancing,  
17 singing-

18 A -No, no. Where could we dance or sing?

19 Q Never remember a friendship, or somebody that you  
20 could-

21 A Ya. When this lady I was live with her for a long  
22 time, you know, in this place. Once she gave me chocolate.  
23 I am a chocolate eater. I remember that. And once I am in  
24 this place that I was in the last times, I was so crying, I  
25 was so hungry. I will never forget this. My tears. I eat my  
tears and it was salty, and it was so good. You know. It was  
sometimes come out lot of tears, sometimes you don't. Like  
last night, I had a lot of tears coming, and it's really- I

1 wasn't hungry after.

2 Q How about now? What do you think of life? I mean,  
3 how has this affected the way you think life is, and the way  
4 you think of people?

5 A Now? I give everything for my children. Everybody  
6 knows. And I am not saving. I'm working to - we were working  
7 there. I have a business. I'm not a hard-working persons, my-  
8 Thank God - we are okay now, and I think everything you should  
9 use it and go and use your life good. Lot of charity. Every-  
10 think what we feel it has to do with anything, you know, with  
11 our people, always give. Everything for Israel.

12 Q What sort of business do you have now?

13 A I have a little gift shop. My husband is a - we  
14 have a cabinet shop, my husband (inaudible) in Los Angelos.

15 Q Do you every think about the things that Israel is  
16 doing to the Palestinians, and do you every worry that Israel  
17 is doing to the Palestinians- that Jewish people would do the  
18 same things that were done to you, to other people?

19 A I don't think so. I do not think so. I lived ten  
20 years in Israel, after when we came there. I don't think so.  
21 No. The Jewish - today children are different when I lived  
22 there, you know, they are more - they have to be aggressive  
23 or they wouldn't survive it, you know. There is a war. But,  
24 I don't think so they would that what they did to us. Nobody  
25 would do that. I do not think so.

26 Q Okay. Are there any other things you can think of  
27 that you would like to tell me before we end the interview?

28 A There are lots of things. What do you mean, how?

29 Q Yeah-

1 A No.

2 Q Anything that comes to mind that you think is very  
3 important, that really -

4 A - I thought it very important. I was not in the  
5 concentration camp, but I was - I felt it was very important  
6 for me to come in because I was - I think I am a survivor.

7 Q Sure. It's interesting to know how everybody  
8 survived.

9 A Yes. And my mother, my father, my old grandparents  
10 was - my grandparents was in the seventies, and they were all  
11 taken in my city where I was born. I don't have maybe twenty,  
12 thirty people. Nobody's here from my city, and -

13 Q - I'm sorry. Did you say what business you did now?

14 A I have a little gift shop.

15 Q In California?

16 A In California, yes.

17 Q Okay. I'd like to thank you very much, and that  
18 ends the interview with Mirjam Dunst. This has been Ken  
19 Rothchild. There's a little bit more.

20 A Ya. After the war when we already were sick from  
21 the Russian people when they came in, we were so hungry. We  
22 didn't have much to eat. We were afraid to go on the street  
23 because the Russian soldiers, if they see a barishnya - they  
24 called the girls 'barishnya' - they were taken away. They  
25 would take them and rape them, anywhere. I had my aunt came-  
I met my aunt in one point on the street- my aunt says, "She"-  
because we understood the Russian, we are from Czechoslovakia -  
she overheard one of the soldiers says, "Take this little



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barishnya in the car", and my aunt overheard, and we ran away, because we are asking, "Daime klepl", "Give me bread." We went everywhere just for a piéce of bread, and we, you know, we had shawls on our head, and just anything that you would see you are a young girl, or any pretty you have on your face, after the war.

Q     Okay.