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Summary

Irene (Klein) Boehm was born in 1919 in Olaszliszka, Hungary. She was born after her father returned from a prisoner of war camp in Siberia after having served in the Hungarian army. Her family was very religious and close knit. She discusses her siblings, including her brother and several sisters. Her eldest sister was already married and had two children. The family owned a bakery and all the children worked in the bakery. Ms. Boehm went to religious school until 4th grade but couldn't continue because of the expense.

The situation in Hungary got bad in 1938 with the government supporting fascism. Ms. Boehm stated that the Jews in Hungary could not believe the reports from Germany and Austria, and later from Poland, about what was happening to Jews. Life for Jews began to get especially worse in 1942. Jewish boys and men were sent to forced labor camps. Citizenship papers were now (1942) required for all Jews, even those living in Hungary for several generations. When she was 23 years old, she and her sisters went to work to be able to buy the papers so the family would not lose the bakery, but by the time they could buy the papers the bakery was taken away. She and her sisters then went to work as nannies in Budapest with wealthy Jewish families. In the meantime, her brother was sent to a forced labor camp and then on to Auschwitz and gassed. Her eldest sister, who was married with two children, was also sent to Auschwitz and murdered with her family. Her father was also sent to a labor camp and she never heard from her father or mother again.

Ms. Boehm's situation changed again in the spring of 1944. She was working as a nanny with another wealthy Jewish family and she was forced to wear the yellow star. She reports on her survival for the next several months during the Hungarian alliance with Germany and the German occupation. She was able to get "Christian" papers for herself and one sister, which was a very difficult choice for her. Both were able to survive. One of her sisters who was in the resistance was killed like her eldest sister and family. In December 1944 the Russians began "liberating" Hungary and the war came to Hungary. By then she was in a small town, Kulcs, many miles from Budapest. She was sexually assaulted three different times by Russian soldiers. Eventually, the war ended in Hungary and she returned to Budapest, where she met her husband and later married him. In May 1949 she was able to go to the United States with her husband and one child. They were brought over by an uncle who had a resort in the Catskills. She later moved to California and has been very happy (as of 1993 when the interview was conducted).