

Interviewee: Alice Himmel Ormai (?)

Interviewer: Marcela Stekel

September 14, 2009

Alice Himmel was born in Budapest on October 14, 1930. She was the only child of father, Jose, an employee, and a stay-at-home mother. Father was the only male of 4 children. When father was sent to a forced labor camp in 1942, mother went to work as a seamstress to support the family. Alice's was a middle class family, with a basic education. They lived in a mixed neighborhood until 1944, although the Jews and gentiles did not mix. Maternal grandmother lived with them. Paternal grandmother was very observant. She lived with a daughter. Alice visited with her every Saturday. Alice's family lit Shabbat candles, ate challah, observed all the holidays but did not observe kashrut. Anti-Semitism. Alice contracted scarlet fever and was hospitalized for 6 weeks at the age of 6. Trying to play with her bed neighbor she found out she couldn't because "the Jews killed Jesus".

Alice went to a Jewish school for the first four elementary grades. She was good in sports, and studied also English in school. Synagogue was attached to the school. Alice went to school until age 10. Family did not have money to pay for the continuation of Hebrew school afterwards so that she went to a public school.

The atmosphere in Alice's home was tense for most of her life because of the threat of war. Hitler speeches on the radio filled them with fear.

In 1940, father was dismissed from work. In September 1944, the family had to vacate their apartment and went to live with the paternal

grandmother in a home set aside for Jews. This was prior to the deportations.

Before 1939 father thought that they needed to leave Hungary but couldn't bring himself to go away with just the nuclear family. There was also no money to escape. No knowledge of what happened beyond Hungary's borders, except for what the radio informed.

Germans entered Hungary in March 19, 1944. Anti-Jewish laws. Danger from the bombardments. October 23, 1944, all women 16-45 of age were sent to forced labor. They were marched from the local soccer field to the border with Austria. Only grandmother, aunt and Alice were left in the apartment in Budapest They did not know about the deportation of the rest of the Jews of Hungary to Auschwitz. The shooting, killing and burning of 69 old women in Buda, in a nursing home.

Time came to abandon the house assigned to the Jews. Alice was 14 years old. She ended up in a Jewish orphanage of the Red Cross. She hardly survived the conditions there. One meal a day, no water, no electricity, no heat. She was one of the older children. Hostile atmosphere was prevalent. Fear. At one point, they were all taken to the Jewish ghetto in the city, near the main synagogue. After a couple of days, they were sent back to the orphanage. The older children, among them Alice, were taken to the Danube's shore to be shot. Alice managed to jump in the river before the bullet hit her, and survived. Trying to find refuge in a church to dry off, she was asked to leave by a priest telling her that otherwise she would endanger his whole community.

January 13, 1945, the Russians arrived. Saved from rape by an aunt. The war close by. Trying to survive by hiding in Russian little towns, behind the Russian lines. Alice's grandmother and aunt were killed. Mother was sent to Ravensbruck, Bergen-Belsen and Landsberg; father, to Dachau. End of April mother became very ill, but the Americans took her to a hospital where she spent 4 months. She returned home in August 31, 1945. No one knew she had survived.

Both parents died in Chile, of old age.