

**INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER RASCH**

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**TRANSCENDING TRAUMA PROJECT**  
**Council for Relationships**  
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## INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER RASCH

**INTERVIEWER:** This is an interview with a survivor. It is December 17th, 1995. I wonder if you could start by telling me your name, your age, and where you were born, please?

**ESTHER RASCH:** My name is Esther Rasch. My maiden name was Esther Fried. I come from Hungary. It was Romania. It is now Romania, but Hungary was 1,000 years, that area. So we were changing around, you know.

**INT:** Right. The border was always changing.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, we were coming and going. We never knew where, were we going to wake up to the Hungarians or to the Romanians. (laughs)

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** What town? What was the name of the town?

**ESTHER:** It was Sechel.

**INT:** Could you spell that?

**ESTHER:** Yes. (spells it) And that's it.

**INT:** And when were you born?

**ESTHER:** I was born in 1927. November, 1927.

**INT:** Are you married now?

**ESTHER:** No, I'm not married. I lost my husband two years ago.

**INT:** And how many years had you been married to him?

**ESTHER:** 46 years. 45 years.

**INT:** That's a long time. And how many children?

**ESTHER:** I have three children. I have a son. Steven Rasch is, he is a lawyer, and he is a certified public accountant. He has a very nice business office in New York, on Park Avenue.

**INT:** How old is he?

**ESTHER:** He's 44. And COSKRM.

**INT:** Is Steven married, does he have children?

**ESTHER:** Steven is married, and he has two children, two daughters. He has a daughter Faye Rasch, and Rebecca Rasch. They both go to Solomon Schechter School, and Faye is in college now. And Lonnie, my daughter-in-law is, what is she? A journalist. Yeah, a very nice person. And they live in Short Hills, New Jersey.

And COSKRM, she lives in Pennsylvania, in Merion. And she has five children. She is a, she went to school in Washington, and she has two Master's, and she's a certified public accountant, and she's a lawyer. And she clerked two years for a federal judge.

**INT:** And what does her husband do?

**ESTHER:** He's a doctor. He's a radiologist.

**INT:** Is COSKRM working now?

**ESTHER:** At the moment, she is not, but she does some work in the house a little, here and there.

**INT:** Well, she just had a baby, too.

**ESTHER:** She just had a baby, yes.

**INT:** And her children go to what kind of school?

**ESTHER:** They go to...

**INT:** Torah Academy.

**ESTHER:** Torah Academy, yes.

**INT:** That's an Orthodox day school.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And do you have another child?

**ESTHER:** And then I have COSRD. COSRD, he's 28 now. He's not married. And he graduated from Columbia University as an engineer, electrical engineer. And he is working as an engineer, but he's trying to do some other work now. He's lining up some different work. But he's not married. He's 28. Looking for a nice girl. (laughs)

**INT:** A nice Jewish girl. Okay. (laughs) Is he ready to get married?

**ESTHER:** Yes! Sure. He's 6'2".

**INT:** Wow. Well, you have a tall family.

**ESTHER:** Yes, yes. We are all tall.

**INT:** Are you working now? Are you employed now?

**ESTHER:** Yes, I'm still working.

**INT:** What do you do?

**ESTHER:** I did for forty years already, I'm doing hair replacements. You know, I do custom-made work, like prostheses, you know, for people who have no hair. People, like...

**INT:** Like cancer patients?

**ESTHER:** Cancer patients, and patients who have no cancer. They lose their hair, too, like (?), it's very specialized field. And then I do for men, where they are balding, I do hair weaving. And you know, you have to match up the hair, and put it in, like into a puzzle. It's not like you see these pieces running around. You know.

**INT:** So you make wigs.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I started to make myself, and then I started with help. And I have a business. I was in business for 39 years. So now I'm slowing down a little bit. But I'm still working.

**INT:** This is your own business?

**ESTHER:** That's my own business, yes.

**INT:** For all those years.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And where is it located?

**ESTHER:** And I raised the kids. But I worked from the house. I started my business from the house, because I didn't want my kids should run around, you know, go here, go there. And it worked, you know. We all worked very hard. The kids worked right since

they were little. I put them, they helped me. They always had to help. And it worked out. It was no problem.

My husband was an engineer, an electrical engineer. He had a steady job. He worked for 32 years in one job. And he was a survivor. In fact, I want to give that little thing I found. He didn't have the engraving in his hand, you know, like they had the tattoos, because he came a little later to that spot, to Auschwitz. He was in a different camp, in Lager 1. And they gave him like a triangle with a star, with a Jewish star into the triangle, and it is his number. You know, they called out, they called out these numbers. It's an original thing from the Germans that they gave it to him. You know, if he had to carry it on his lapel or some place.

**INT:** I see. So it wasn't tattooed on his hand.

**ESTHER:** It wasn't tattooed, no. But I found that, and I want to give it to the museum, because it's really a very interesting piece of identity. And as it turns out, his friend, with whom he was in the ghetto, who had a wife and a child. My husband had a wife and a child, too, and they didn't come back. They got killed, you know, in the concentration camp, in the crematoriums. And somehow they always kept together. By chance. It was, we were coming to the United States already, and they weren't there. You know, they were supposed to go to, I don't know, to California or some place, and we were supposed to go to Buffalo. And for some kind of a reason, we found each other in Newark. Because my husband had some relative in Newark, and when we came to the airport, they were asking, who has papers. You know, who has some relatives in this area. So my husband announced that he has relatives, and the other guy, his friend, announced too. He said, "Look, I have here a sister-in-law that just came." So they stopped us right here. So they placed the people here, and they took away our, how you call it...

**INT:** Passports.

**ESTHER:** Passports, and they gave it to other people to be able to come.

**INT:** Oh, I see.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, so we didn't go there. So we found each other. And as a matter of fact, we lived the whole time, also through chance, they are friends together.

**INT:** What is this man's name?

**ESTHER:** John Fisher. And he has, and I tell John, they live not far. I wanted to buy a house in a different area, because it would have been much better for my business, and for my location and everything. But my husband said, "Look. John bought a house here. The Fishers bought a house in Union, so I want to buy there."

**INT:** So they had to be together.

**ESTHER:** It wasn't only, but he felt, they didn't even see each other too much, because you know, you work, and you have to...

**INT:** You're busy.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and the kids are growing, and it's so much responsibility. But he felt kind of, it's a good location, because John lives here, you know, with Erica.

**INT:** So it's a connection with someone.

**ESTHER:** And he felt you know, like a little warmth shining into him from the past. And I told John that I found that triangle thing. I say, "John, do you know what that is?" He said, "Tell me something. What is the number?" And you know, the guy is now 83 years old. And he said, "Do you have this and this number?" He remembered. He said, "Because my number is first, and Albert's number was after me." You know, they gave out the numbers.

**INT:** He had the same one?

**ESTHER:** No, identity, but he has the triangle, and he remembers, without the triangle, he still remembers the number that he was having in the concentration camp. So he said, "Oh, it's a very important number," he says.

**INT:** Maybe you should put that in the museum.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because this was the way, and would you believe it, he never got restitution, my husband. He was five years in the concentration camp, in the ghetto, you know, and in all those death camps. Didn't get one cent, because I don't know. He didn't apply in the right time or something. I don't know. It was a little excuse. So they didn't recognize that he was there, you know what I mean? And here I found this little thing, which I'm sure the Germans have a registration of that emblem, I'm sure they have it.

**INT:** They kept very good records.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah.

**INT:** Well, let me just finish up this, before we go into the war. I wanted to ask you. So where is your business located, and where do you live now?

**ESTHER:** In Union (New Jersey). But I worked in New York for twenty years. But part-time. You know, I used to work there Sunday, Monday and Thursday. That's it.

**INT:** Do you still live in Union?

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** Okay. And how would you describe your economic level? Would you say you're lower class, middle class, upper class? Comfortable?

**ESTHER:** Well, at the beginning, it was...

**INT:** But today, just today.

**ESTHER:** Today? Thank G-d, very comfortable.

**INT:** You're comfortable. And the business is doing well, and you're still working.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My business is not, I'm not pushing, it's not doing like it was doing, but I'm doing well.

**INT:** Are you going to slow up a little bit? Or you like to work?

**ESTHER:** I don't like to slow...it's slowing up by **itself**. (laughs)

**INT:** Okay. It has nothing to do with you.

**ESTHER:** Because like now, I should be, before Christmas, I should be there, and really, it's on my mind that somebody has to come and pick up and this. But I figure, I don't have to...

**INT:** You need a little break.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. You know, my customers told me, the first thing, take care of your family. First, take care of me. You know, that's what the customers said. Take care of me. Finish up my work, and then do your own thing, because that's what stays with you. (Laughs) But everybody wanted to do their thing first. So when you have thirty people to do their thing first... (laughs)

**INT:** You don't have time to do your **own**. That's right. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** But now I learned that you have to do what you feel like it. Not what you feel. You can never do. If you really want to get someplace and be a human being, you cannot do what you want to do. You can't. It isn't such a thing. It's only, you know, you are blown in. Do what you want to do. It's not such a thing, if you want to be civil. That's my policy, that's my way of thinking. But I don't know. Maybe other people are, I come first, and it's my, it's me.

**INT:** Let me ask you. How would you describe your religious affiliation?

**ESTHER:** Well, I come from an exceptionally religious family. My grandfather was known, very much known. He had a, he taught big boys, and he taught them on a very

high level, and they used to have every year, you know, a Shas and celebrate, because they used to go learn...

**INT:** Go through the whole thing.

**ESTHER:** Go through the whole thing, and then they used to make a party, I remember.

**INT:** Was it a Hasidic background?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I would say so.

**INT:** Which one?

**ESTHER:** It was the Vizhnitz.

**INT:** But today, how would you identify yourself?

**ESTHER:** Think about it? I'm not...I mean, I lean towards the traditional. My sisters I'm accommodating. But I have a complete different view. Even though I sent my kids to Hebrew school. They all went to yeshivas. And COSKRM knows, I think, as much as a lot of other guys know, who are very, very religious. But I believed they have to know their background, they have tradition and things. But I got away from it because my husband was from Lithuania. Maybe I would have been stuck in that group a little more. But my husband didn't believe in it, and the fact that I was on Christian papers, and I saw the other world, you know, the...I didn't think it was all to be followed. (laughs)

**INT:** I see. But how would you describe today? Would you say you're traditional, or what about Shabbas? Do you keep Shabbas?

**ESTHER:** I keep a lot of Shabbas in the house. Like Friday night, I have all these...

**INT:** You light candles.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. I have Shabbas. I don't cook on Shabbas. But I drive on Shabbas. I go to shul on Shabbas. But I leave my car a lot away from the shul.

**INT:** What kind of shul do you go to?

**ESTHER:** I go to, it's an Orthodox shul.

**INT:** Okay, so you park your car a few blocks away.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and I walk. Mostly I walk, because I enjoy the walk. But not because....

**INT:** But not for any religious reasons. Okay.



**ESTHER:** No. And I belong to the shul. I mean, I'm a member. I try to support shuls, not the shul. And the yeshivas, and you know.

**INT:** I wanted to ask you, do you belong to any organizations? Are you active in any...

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. I belong to Hadassah. And AMIT. And Council of Jewish Women. I like them very much. I don't know if you know them.

**INT:** I don't know that group. What is that?

**ESTHER:** They are **tremendous**. They helped me a lot when I came to the United States. That's why I feel, they are a group that helped the newcomers, when they came. You know, the American people didn't open up a door to the refugees.

**INT:** That's what I hear, yeah.

**ESTHER:** They didn't want to know about them. They were like, you know, like outcasts. I don't blame them, because they had different ideas, and different backgrounds, and they were a little bit scared, you know. But as life was going on, we needed somebody, you know, to open up a door. I didn't have that problem, because my husband had a family there.

**INT:** He had family here.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Who was opening up the door for my husband, but not for me. (laughs) Because they had an old maid, and they thought he's going to come, and it's going to be a shidduch.

**INT:** Oh, so they were a little disappointed when he was married.

**ESTHER:** And he was a valuable boy. So when I came...

**INT:** They were a little upset about that?

**ESTHER:** They were upset, and they could never accept me, you know, that I was...I think it had to do a little bit with my husband, too, but it was okay. So this Council of Jewish Women, I would support them any time. Because they were the ones who organized that to take in all the refugees who are coming, and tell them the customs, the systems, what's proper in the United States. Because you know, you came, we were very young. I was only 22 when I came. And it was really very difficult to pick up the language and it was hard. Who wanted to put up with all these people? Who wanted to put up with all these people, you know, who didn't speak the proper language? I don't blame them. You know, the Europeans would have not been better, either, you know, because language was a very important thing, to speak it perfectly and correctly, and here they didn't speak at all. But they kind of got us all together, and they taught us. And they

said, "You have to do something now, while your children are small. You can't put your time all in the children. You have to organize...you have to do something." And that went into my head. "What can I do?" And you can't depend on your husbands, only.

**INT:** They told you all this. That's very good.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** So they were fostering your independence. They were trying to get you...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, for women. And what they did, which it was something, I still can't forget. They had a place for the children, so they organized toys for the children, and the children were pre-school, and who had money to send them to pre-schools to school? In those years they didn't have it anyhow, even American people didn't have it. So what they had, everything **beautiful** in a room with toys, with arranged, they put those little kids. And they had little songs for them. And the kids, once a week we used to meet. And the kids used to just get ready to go to the "meeting school." (laughs) That's what they called it.

**INT:** The meeting school. That's cute. Because you were having a meeting.

**ESTHER:** We had the meeting, and the kids were playing.

**INT:** Well, what would they teach you? What kinds of things?

**ESTHER:** They were just giving us ideas, you know, and kind of a little warmth, and showing us customs.

**INT:** That's wonderful. I never heard of this group.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And they showed us how to, how American customs are. And what else? Twice a year they had a ball, you know, organized, and everybody worked for it. But it was very important that we met each other, so that we had a support group from each other. I have my best friends that I have met through that group. My best friends.

**INT:** Were they all survivors?

**ESTHER:** Yes. They had recitals, and we had to do programs, and anybody who knew something to say, or you know, something culturally.

**INT:** How often would you go? Once a week?

**ESTHER:** Once a week. While the kids were small. Pre-schoolers.

**INT:** That's wonderful. So you belong to that organization today. You still want to...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. So I like to support them. Because I'm sure they keep up the good work all the time. I am not involved, you know, I am not an active member, to work for them. But I support them with money, because I'm not, you know, I'm not building a building in my name or something, but...

**INT:** You're helping them.

**ESTHER:** You know, every bit helps. I go to their functions, and whatever comes up, something new, I go there.

**INT:** What about Holocaust organizations? Do you belong to any survivor organizations, or have you ever been to any meetings of survivors?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Newcomers, or...

**ESTHER:** No, my friends are very active in it. **Very** active. But you know, if you work, and you raise children, and I spread out myself with New York. You know, the business was going between New York and New Jersey.

**INT:** So you were traveling a lot.

**ESTHER:** You know, traveling was no big deal to me, because I used to come home 2:00 in the morning from my work. Yeah, Thursday I used to work till 9:00 officially. And then if the customers came in 9:00, you had to, you know, it wasn't that you just give it to them. You had to start work, and you had to put the work on. You have to see if it works, and if it isn't finished, you didn't want to bring somebody who came from thirty miles away to go home and then come tomorrow again. So you had them there, so you had to finish. And we know, you know, I know how to finish. I know the work. I had to learn. I learned in a very hard way. Because I used to learn in New York. I had to take my little kid with me all the time.

**INT:** Well, we're going to get to that. But you never had time really for any kind of survivor organizations. You were too busy with the job.

**ESTHER:** No, I didn't have time. But you know, if they wanted something, I was always there to put it in. And they have a journal, they have a this, they have a that. And "Esther, you know, we are doing this." (laughs) "Have it your way." But it's nice, you know. They do.

**INT:** Okay. I'm wondering if we can start now with your life all the way back. If you could tell me, just describe who was in your family, how many brothers and sisters you had, and who they were, and tell me a little bit about your town and what it was like in your house.

**ESTHER:** Well, if I look back to the town, truthfully, I think it had to come a change. The change had to come. Because we were very suppressed. You know, once that religion puts a lock on your neck, you are doomed, and you cannot live only by religion. See, the house where I grew in, it was an open house. We had everybody there. Because we had a business. We lived on the crossroads of the town, and the crossroads were going three ways, to major three ways. And everybody had to stop there, you know? (laughs) If it was for our benefit, or for our disaster, people still stopped there.

**INT:** What kind of business was it?

**ESTHER:** We had like a restaurant. People slept in the house. And it was like an inn, more. But we didn't sell, we didn't have a liquor store. You know, the inns usually had bars, and we didn't have that. No. Just we sold food for the people. And they used to commute with wagons, and you know, they had to have, it was open space a lot. So the people used to be very happy to have a place to land in and we received them nicely.

**INT:** How big a town was this?

**ESTHER:** It wasn't big.

**INT:** About how many people? Do you have any idea?

**ESTHER:** I really don't know.

**INT:** Small town.

**ESTHER:** It was a small town. But a lot of Jewish people were in it. It wasn't small. The area was tremendous. But not too many people. See, it was a river in the middle, and the river used to wash away a lot of things.

**INT:** What's the name of the river?

**ESTHER:** Iza. It used to be a lot of disasters there, because people were living close to the rivers, you know, because that's how they settled. So I don't know, I really, I was so young, you know, at the time.

**INT:** Was it near a big town?

**ESTHER:** A big town? Yes.

**INT:** What would be...

**ESTHER:** It was Bistritz, one town, and Sighet was another town.

**INT:** So was it in the Carpathian Mountains?

**ESTHER:** No. The Carpathians are down more. Yeah, we were in the Carpathian Mountains, but on the higher side. Oh, you mean on the lower Carpathian Mountains. We were on the higher Carpathian Mountains. Yeah, right. Carpathian Mountains.

**INT:** So there was a large Jewish population in the town.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** There wasn't that many non-Jews?

**ESTHER:** We had...I don't know. You know, I was so young. I was maybe fourteen years old. Thirteen and a half years old when I left.

**INT:** But your neighborhood was all Jews? Did the Jews all live together?

**ESTHER:** See, that was the whole thing. No. Where we lived, there were maybe three Jews. That's all. On our area. You know, on that little spot. But then the Jews were in the town. You know, down and on every side, were only Jewish homes.

**INT:** I see. So you were further out.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, we were out, like by the crossroads.

**INT:** Crossroads to the big cities.

**ESTHER:** And I had the chance to look into both ways of life, you know. And...

**INT:** You saw all these people coming in. And I guess there were a lot of non-Jewish people coming in, too.

**ESTHER:** Oh, mostly non-Jewish. Non-Jewish, Jewish, too. You know, in our house the biggest rabbis were davening, because they stopped off from the buses. The buses were stopping by us.

**INT:** Oh, the bus stop was there.

**ESTHER:** Yes. I mean the buses. The connections. We had no train, so the buses gave. And we used to sell tickets for the people for the buses. So it was...

**INT:** Boy, you had a lot of stuff going on there.

**ESTHER:** (laughs) Oh, yeah. So like I said, the biggest rabbis were davening by us, because the buses were late, and they had to daven Minchah or Maariv, you know, so they stepped off, and they came into our house. Because there were always a few people, so they got together in our house a minyan. It was put up a minyan.

And we had, the King Carl, no Michael, he stopped in front of our house. He was a young boy. He came to visit the town and he, too.

**INT:** The King of Romania?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He wasn't the king then, he was just the prince. He was young. And it was decorated outside, the fences, were beautiful covered. Anyhow, but the biggest beggars and the biggest thieves and the biggest liars, loused up people, people with lice (laughs), came to our house, too.

**INT:** Oh, literally loused up. Really, oh.

**ESTHER:** Everything came by!

**INT:** Boy. You saw the whole world.

**ESTHER:** And my mother, she should rest in peace, used to take off their clothes, give them something, because she kept them, you know, they shouldn't...

**INT:** Separate them?

**ESTHER:** No, not separate. She brought them into the house, but she had some clothes. They had to drop off the clothes. She used to give them the clothes to put on, and then she used to boil it.

**INT:** She wouldn't turn them away.

**ESTHER:** And hang it up. We didn't have a dryer. And hang it up over the oven and dry their clothes so that in the morning they should have something to go home in.

**INT:** That was very nice of her. She didn't turn them away.

**ESTHER:** No, never. Nobody was turned away. And everybody, as a matter of fact, I went to Romania, to Hungary, and I was traveling around, and I have found a cousin of mine, I don't know, through an incident, and he had remarried -- not the first wife, the second wife -- and he was reminiscing about his olden times, you know. So he told his wife that he had an aunt where he was learning. You know, in those years you learned, and you had days. You ate one day here, and one day there. So the boy had places where to eat. I mean, it was assigned. But he wasn't assigned to us, because it was too far to come up. But from time to time he used to get very, very hungry, he took his time and came up. (laughs) He said, "I had one aunt, she had ten children. And she never asked me if I'm hungry. She always brought whatever she had, she put on the table," and he used to have his best meals. And his wife was telling me about [it]. He says, "This is one of the ten children." "Oh, yeah? Where you had your big meals, and you ate till you couldn't stop?" (laughs)

**INT:** So your mother was feeding everybody.

**ESTHER:** My mother was a very good woman. A **very** good woman.

**INT:** So you had ten children in your family?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my mother married, my father was married before. And he had two children. His wife died of childbirth. She had twins and she died suddenly.

**INT:** Did the twins survive?

**ESTHER:** No. For two days or three days. In those days you had no bottles, no things. So my mother remarried. My father remarried, and my mother was younger, twelve years younger than my father. Well, that was the standard thing, you know, in those years. A man was always marrying two or three wives he went through, because she had to do everything, you know. He was the learner.

Anyhow, we were ten children.

**INT:** So your mother was the second wife.

**ESTHER:** My mother had eight of her own.

**INT:** What were your parents' names?

**ESTHER:** My father was Daskal.

**INT:** How do you spell that?

**ESTHER:** (Spells it) Avrom. And my mother's name was Fried. But we carried the name Fried because in those years, you know, the guys didn't marry legally, just by the rabbi. So you weren't, so the kids were after the mother's name. It wasn't accepted.

**INT:** Wow. That's interesting. What was her first name?

**ESTHER:** Malka. Like Malka.

**INT:** Like your granddaughter. [COSKRM's daughter]

**ESTHER:** She's named after her. So my mother was a very good woman. Very, very good woman. She did for everybody. She used to be, when she was a small child, she lived on the other side of the town. And she had little playmates, and you know how it goes. Mixed. Not just Jewish. Everybody was playing together. And the women used to go to the fields to work with the little baby on the horse, you know, a little cradle. And probably pregnant. And they left home the chickens, and the cows and everything, and

they were all in the field all day. Then they had to come home, feed the animals, you know, prepare supper for everybody. They were working very hard.

So my mother used to know that they were coming off the fields. She used to watch, and take them off from the horse, with the baby. Like I see it now. "Come on in, dears." "I can't, I got to feed the horse. I got to feed the dog, the chickens." My mother used to say, "Just come in for a little while. Have a drink, have a bite."

**INT:** She was a real tzadekkes, it sounds like.

**ESTHER:** "And you are going to feel better when you go home. Take a break." And she used to take them, practically wait for them and take them off the horse. And they used to come in. And the same thing, when we were in the ghetto. One of the neighbors, two of the neighbors from us, Gentiles, who brought food to the ghetto for my parents. They really risked their lives to come there. But they wouldn't budge. They were handing them something, not that it helped, but it was a good gesture, because my mother was so good to everybody, that they were crying.

**INT:** They remembered her.

**ESTHER:** They cried. They couldn't take it, that why, you know. But a lot of them were very happy. You know, now I'm going to have her house, I'm going to have her things.

**INT:** It was a mixed...

**ESTHER:** We didn't have such a big house. It was everything on a low...

**INT:** So you had the restaurant in the downstairs, and everybody lived upstairs?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. We had, it was a house...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Everybody came in, while my mother was doing the baking or something. See, that was the good thing, I think. That you could see how things are being done. It was done in front of everybody. It wasn't done in a cubby-hole here, and a cubby-hole there. So you learned. You learned while you were talking, while you were doing your own job, you could take a look how that's being done. You know, you weren't sectionalized. You had to do everything. You saw the fire in the oven is not working well, so you got up from your seat, whatever you were doing. You were running to put, and you knew how to do it, because you were watching everybody doing it. So everything was open. Our house was open. We had one room, one nice room. It was called the Parade Zimmer. You know what that means? (laughs)



**INT:** Parade room?

**ESTHER:** The Parade, you know, it's for elegance. Like the living room. So that was kept.

**INT:** That was special.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And lots of times people used to sleep there, you know, better kind of people used to sleep there. And once, I remember we had beautiful damask, you know, for the...and the people waited for the bus in the morning to leave. And my mother, they had a room. They paid. They took off all the linens from the bedding, and they rolled it up, and they took it with them. (laughs)

**INT:** Oh, great.

**ESTHER:** You had all kinds of people. And then I remember my father. I have met these people in Israel, in what is it, the Salt Sea, in the Dead Sea. I don't know how we got kind of squeezed in there. She said, "From where are you coming?" So what happened, her father had a mill, a sawmill, and he went to pay the people the wages. And when he slept he put all the money under the pillow, and in the morning he was in such a rush that he forgot all the money under the pillow. So my mother comes in, and she's pale, I noticed. Because like I say, we saw these things, because the place was open. Otherwise I could have never known. And my father says, "What's the matter?" And I said, "What's the matter?" "They found the money. And he's going to go there, and what are they going to do?" You know what my father did? He took a horse, and he ran. It was fifteen kilometers away. And he brought the money. Because he had to wait the whole day. But my mother was so upset, because somebody could have left that money there and say that my mother took the money, you know?

**INT:** Right. You had to be careful.

**ESTHER:** You could be accused for so many things, in places like that, which really. Like some people, there used to be a lot of contraband. You know, from Czechoslovakia they used to bring the textiles and everything. And they used to...

**INT:** Trade it?

**ESTHER:** With the buses, yeah. Once the customs, the police, the custom police were waiting in our house, because they were tipped off that it's coming. And my father found out what's going on, and he knew it was Jewish people. So he met the bus. He took the horse ahead, and they threw down the things. When they came, they didn't have anything. So then they went to pick up the things and they brought them and put them in our, in haystacks, you know, because we had a stable. And somebody came to pick it up. They said it's their stuff. Textiles. Beautiful, must have been something very beautiful.

What do you think, they came to pick it up, and my father didn't know any mayases, you know. Who took it. It wasn't theirs. So...

**INT:** They just came and took it?

**ESTHER:** They just came and took it, and he assumed it's one of those people, but they knew, but it wasn't.

**INT:** How did they know it was there?

**ESTHER:** Because they knew the whole story, you know. And they denied that they took it. You could see them maybe a year later, that their kids were dressed up in the same materials and everything. But till then, we were accused, you know what I mean? So it was really...

**INT:** You had to be very careful.

**ESTHER:** It was a tough situation there. But mostly it was colorful.

**INT:** Did you enjoy all that busyness in the house?

**ESTHER:** Terrible. No, we didn't like it.

**INT:** I mean, you had ten children, also. That's a lot of kids.

**ESTHER:** Yes, but you know something? We didn't go in each other's, I don't remember, we are all, kein ayin hora, in such good terms, you know, all of us. And we didn't fight. I don't know, I see kids fight so much. We used to get angry, because why, we were limited in things. So if somebody had to go some place, my father told me, because I used to take care of my things. You know, I wasn't so active as my other sisters, I was more slow. So my things were wearing longer. And I had to give them, you know, share. And I didn't want to. Well, my father was very angry. You know, so my sister was angry. You know, something like this could be a skirmish. But we should actually fist-fight each other and tear each other down, and the **language**. My mother would **never** allow it. We wouldn't **dare** talk like this.

And something else: people used to come into the house with the buses. They knew you cannot get the food what you want to get, because there weren't these restaurant chains like they have here, you know, wherever you go, you hop into a chain and you buy something. So people used to bring along their own food. So you saw them unpack on the table, and buy a coffee or a tea. Or who knows. A soup or something. And they used to leave a whole mess there, you know. And they used to unpack, and you know, when you pack, if you go somewhere. So our neighbor's children used to come in, you know. And they used to go like this (staring at the food). And my mother said to the people, they were sharing. You know, you go on your trip, how much can you carry? And the kids there wanted and waited to get. And my mother used to say, "Look, they

are not my kids. If you feel to give them, it's okay, but I don't want you to feel that you make this mess here, and you have to share with my kids. My kids are not, these are not my kids." Because she used to feel embarrassed. We never knew to go over and smell their...just we never. We didn't eat our own food, either. We were very poor eaters. My mother always had a problem.

**INT:** With all of you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Empty stomachs.

**INT:** So explain who were all the people in your family. Who were the kids, and who was the oldest, and their names.

**ESTHER:** Well, my older sister is in California. That's my sister from my mother. My two brothers, my younger brother from my father's side, you know, my two stepbrothers, but we are like really, it's not such a thing as stepbrothers. Even COSKRM feels she's the kid, and she got the ring from Menashe in my brother's house in Boro Park. I mean, it's not such a thing, it's mine. My sister-in-law comes to my house, whatever she feels she wants, she takes. No problem. You know, it's not a greedy family. Don't, give me, what can I get from you. You know, it's not like that.

**INT:** Okay, so you have two stepbrothers.

**ESTHER:** Anyhow, my brother, my older brother, he learned, my mother thought it was a bad time, and she was very far-sighted, because she grew up in the city, in Arad. Also she lost her mother when she was twelve years old. So she knew what to look into. You know, she knew bad luck and everything. So she wanted the boys should have a trade, because with a trade they are going to get some place. And she saw that the war is going to come up. You know, I don't know. She always talked. We were so young. It was so far away from the war. But she kind of smelled it. She wanted my brother should learn a trade. And he learned tinsmith and locksmith and mechanic. And that was very handy to him, because as he grew up, at eighteen he had to go to the army, and he was in the air force. And you know, to be in the air force, then it was Romania. You really had to be very handsome, straight. Clever. Good hands. And he was, eighty people they selected, and my older brother was one of them. So he really was such a good person.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Ben-Zion.

**INT:** He's from your father's first marriage. He's the oldest.

**ESTHER:** Yes. He's a piece of gold.

**INT:** Did he survive the war?

**ESTHER:** Yes, thank G-d. Ah! He's something. He used to take my older sister, you know, my sister, when he was in the army, she was already eleven, twelve years old, and the times were getting bad, you know. So he took her to the city there, Klausenberg, which is all the way up. He took her there, and paid for her to learn how to sew. Could you imagine? Because in school they were giving already hard times. So he took her there and paid for her while he was in the air force.

**INT:** She needed a trade.

**ESTHER:** Because he was making even money in the air force. You know, he was so clever. So intelligent. And he was so good to us. And he loved my mother. He **loved** my mother. And my mother was very good to both of them. But the little one couldn't accept her, because you know, he lost his mother. He was the baby, and all of a sudden another kid is coming, and another kid is coming, and you know, these kids were coming, and it was very hard.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Chaim Meir. Meir.

**INT:** How old was he when his mother died?

**ESTHER:** He was five and a half, the little one, and the other one was seven. So it was a very...

**INT:** Did he survive the war, Chaim Meir?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. We survived the war in Budapest together. He was in the army, too. In the army, and then he got into the labor camp. And then he was with Wallenberg, you know, in those Swedish houses. It's a whole...

**INT:** You're going to tell me about that later.

**ESTHER:** But I want to say that my brother, when he came from, he, during the war, he worked in Budapest, and he wasn't in the army like all the other ones, because he was a very skilled designer, clothes designer. And he had a shop in our town already. As young as he was, he organized a little shop for himself, and he worked with seven people. And only intellectual people used to come there and work, you know, have their clothes. He had materials, you know, he used to. And people pick the material. He wouldn't sew unless you bought the material from him. And he had people, and he designed it. He cut out the things and fitted, you know, and the people were doing the work. So this is the...When he came to the United States, he made \$30,000.

**INT:** Wow!

**ESTHER:** They brought him out from Germany. Yes. He worked for (?), you know the real fancy people who were making suits and fine design things.

**INT:** That was a lot of money in those days.

**ESTHER:** A **lot** of money. It was, you know, a lot of money. And he was doing very well. Has two children.

**INT:** And then what happened?

**ESTHER:** He lost his wife, too. He had a wife and a child. And they got killed. And then he remarried. When he came here. In Germany he remarried after the war, and he has two kids. Yeah. And then my sister in California.

**INT:** She's the oldest of the second family.

**ESTHER:** She's a year and seven months older than me.

**INT:** Close.

**ESTHER:** It's very close. But she had a board and care home in California. And she was in the concentration camp.

**INT:** What is her name?

**ESTHER:** Olga. She was in the concentration camp, and she helped for so many people. I mean, if she would go to Israel, they would make a big party for her. What she didn't do. Everybody was talking about her, her goodness and everything. But she was left with a lot of big, big problems. Because she was beaten over the head, and she was thrown. Because we were three sisters. Three sisters in the concentration camp. It was Olga, Lily, and Agie, and they were together. And then they split them up, and Olga thought that if she is not going to be, because Agie was ten years old when she got there in the concentration camp, and she's the only one that survived from the whole town, and it was something like 100 children of her age. And she was the **only** one, the ten-year-old one that survived. So my sister Olga, she was the oldest, and the other one was twelve, Lily was twelve. And she figured, if she is not there to help and to supervise, they're going to be killed. And she was so upset that she didn't stop crying. And Lily cried. And Lily tried to fight, you know, the Germans. With cries and with tumult, and my sister Pessie, Olga, and they beat them up so badly. See, Agie, she didn't say anything, because she was, you know, she didn't realize what kind of a war she is losing. And they were already a little bit older, so they realized, and they were a little bit more experienced from the house. You know. So they beat her up, they took off her clothes, and they threw her between to be taken to the crematorium.

**INT:** Olga.

**ESTHER:** Olga. And when the people who worked there in the crematorium, they used to take the people, the dead people, the half-dead people to the crematorium. So they recognized Olga there, that she was still alive. And she couldn't move. She was beaten up so badly. So they covered her up, they dragged her up, they covered. I don't know how they got her into the Revier, you know, it's a place where they...

**INT:** Hospital?

**ESTHER:** Like a little infirmary. And she revived. And she came back. But she doesn't know anything about it.

**INT:** She doesn't remember anything?

**ESTHER:** She does not know a thing. But the people who were there, you know, they know. She doesn't. And she got injured a lot. She has her head, her ear was running. It's still running, and always running, and she's nervous.

**INT:** Where does she live?

**ESTHER:** She lives in California, Los Angeles, South Shenandoah Street.

**INT:** So there's Olga.

**ESTHER:** And Olga is the one who made possible for a lot of people to have a home. A house, not a home. A house. Till today. Whatever she made money in there, and they all liked her very much. You know, with the sick people. She had the kind of, you know, people who go into nursing homes, but younger people. That's what she was handling. And everybody, the families liked her, and they used to come around. Until today, they take her out. Because she was so good to these people. And she made money. And the money she made, she remarried. She didn't have children. And she had experiments, and a lot of things were done to her, very sad things. So she married a guy with three children, who lost his wife. And she raised those three kids.

**INT:** She sounds like a really special person.

**ESTHER:** And they really call her "Mother." And one is vice-president for Solomon Brothers, and one is in computers or something in California, and one lives in Staten Island, also gave him money to buy a house, two-family house. He was a little bit on the retarded side, the middle one. But she keeps him. She made a wedding for him. He got married. You know, he has a house, and helped him till today. In every way. So she really, she gave the kids braces. She gave them schooling. She sent them to yeshiva, you know. Everything.

**INT:** She sounds very special.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she is special. But if you see her, she is still, she was a very attractive girl. But unfortunately, if you see her, you would never believe that she had such a power to do so much. You know what I mean?

**INT:** Why do you say that? What does she look like?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. Her speech is bad, and you know, she's deteriorating. She had a heart condition.

**INT:** How old is she now?

**ESTHER:** She is seventy. Seventy and three months.

**INT:** Who came after her?

**ESTHER:** Me.

**INT:** Oh, okay, you're the second. Okay.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I'm the second. And then Lily, who's in Brooklyn. She came after me. And then Agie came after Lily.

**INT:** How do you spell Agie?

**ESTHER:** Wait, I don't even know. Because I call her Agnes. Agie. (spells it) And she's married. Agie. She has seven children. And Lily's married, has five boys. Beautiful boys. Handsome, very nice, educated kids. In the Jewish only, nothing else. But very fine boys. Fine boys. And Lily's very, very, **very** ultra-religious.

**INT:** Oh, boy. Where does she live? Boro Park?

**ESTHER:** In Brooklyn. No, my other sister, Agie, she lives in Boro Park. And some of her children live in Monsey. And some of her children live in Israel. So she has very nice children. She has three daughters and four boys. The daughters are something. I don't know if you ever saw them here. They are something. We are so proud of them. I was in the mountains, and she came there. She has eight kids. She came in, nobody would believe that she has eight kids, that she's that age.

**INT:** She's very attractive?

**ESTHER:** Not only attractive. So calm and so like...

**INT:** No problem. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** No problem. You know, everything. Come to her house, you feel that Graff Pilsudski is coming, you know. (laughs) Everything is set -- I swear -- with even a ring

on the napkin is put in, with the name. The ring has a name, so that the kids shouldn't mix, you know, the napkins. Everybody's trained, and the place is not so big.

**INT:** How does she do that?

**ESTHER:** Calmly, coolly. Very calm. And very cool. And she's very intelligent. She didn't go to college. No, they don't believe in that. And Agie, the other sister, Devorie, is the same thing.

**INT:** Who's Devorie?

**ESTHER:** Devorie is Agie's daughter. And Rechy got married, and she's the same thing. So neat, so clean. My other niece, Agie's daughter, the second daughter, she has nine children, and she works, every day. She goes to work. And you should see her house, and she hasn't got steady help.

**INT:** I don't know how they do it.

**ESTHER:** She have maybe twice a week somebody comes in. She does it, and it's calm and it's cool. She has time to give me a call. And she apologizes, she wanted to call me sooner, but she just didn't get to it. And I am afraid to call her, because I'll take her time, you know? I feel...how do I come in there, you know, taking space away from the children? But everything, and on a small budget. On a small budget. He's a melamed, and for three months I heard he wasn't paid the tuition already. You know?

**INT:** I know. The yeshivas don't pay always.

**ESTHER:** And you know, the poor people, I mean, with all these kids and everything. You know. But they don't go on welfare. No. No welfare. So this is what...and then two brothers. After Agie I had a brother. He was eight years old, and he got killed.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** His name was Hersh Leib. No, Hersh Leib was after. Yeah, Hersh Leib was after Agie.

**INT:** How do you spell that?

**ESTHER:** Hersh Leib. Two names. And then I had a sister Chansa. Chansa. **Beautiful.** Every time I think that name, G-d. She was...blue eyes. **Big** blue eyes and blonde hair. And good and intelligent. What a kid. She was my pet. And she got killed, too.

**INT:** How old was she?



**ESTHER:** She was maybe seven. Maybe. Maybe my brother was nine already, and she must have been seven. Yeah. Then I had a sister, Gittel. She got killed, too. And then I had a brother Mendel, he got killed, too.

**INT:** So they were very small.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They went with my mother. They got killed all together.

**INT:** How old was Gittel and Mendel?

**ESTHER:** Well, the baby was a year and a half old. And the other kids, were like I say, same age. Tiny.

**INT:** So out of the ten children, how many survived the war?

**ESTHER:** We are six. Yeah. Thank G-d. But Agie, too. Lily, you should see Lily how she worked hard. Boy. She really came with nothing. And she took the kids to go and learn how to make hair replacements. And she did sewing, and she did modeling, and she did so many things, just to make an extra dollar, because her husband couldn't make a living. And he was a chazzan. Very nice guy. Very nice. But you know.

**INT:** It's hard to make a living with that.

**ESTHER:** In those years. You know, in those years, and even today. So my sister, because he was a chazzan, she had to go wherever he was singing, wherever he was employed, for Shabbas, she used to schlep the kids, cook first the meals in the house, give everything a peckel, and go by train. She didn't have a car. And go by train and by subway, by bus, you know, till she went. He was in the Bronx, he was in other places. For Shabbas she always tried to have the kids together with the father together. And schlep them all over, and worked very hard. We had very hard lives.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** But one thing: we all made a living for ourselves. And Agie, she was very sick after the war. She married very early, she came, they were, they took them into Sweden, because they were so young. So I think Graff Bernadotte or somebody exchanged them, just when the war ended. They took them into Sweden, and they put them into schools. But my sister Lily was very sick.

**INT:** Lily or Agie?

**ESTHER:** No, Lily. Lily was very sick, and Agie was good. But Agie got sick after she came to the United States. She got married, and she had three kids. She got very, very sick.

**INT:** What did she get?

**ESTHER:** He didn't make a living, and she broke down. We thought it's over, you know? And all the doctors suggest that she should go for shock treatments. This is...

**INT:** Do you mean she was depressed?

**ESTHER:** Very.

**INT:** Very depressed.

**ESTHER:** Very depressed. And all the doctors pointed with the fingers to go for shock treatments, and this was going to help her. And her husband is a, he's an angel. He's a...he's a wonderful, wonderful person. Family man. But he couldn't make a living, either, you know? What did he do? He was selling eggs on a little baby carriage. You know. Taking on the third floor, and then they didn't have the money to pay him, because they were in the same boat. (Laughs) There was no money. So he had to go **again** and collect, you know, on the third floor. And the people used to lock the door, you know, once they got what they had. They didn't have the money to pay. A lot of people did that, you know. So it was very difficult. And my sister, here the kids were coming along, you know, and she was very depressed. And she didn't know how, she just flipped, finished. She couldn't talk. She was just like this. And here the kids are running around, a million things to do, and she is sitting like this.

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**ESTHER:** I took her to my house, my other sister took her to her house, and we tried, you know, but it was very difficult. But then, her husband said, "No shock treatments." The rabbi told him, no shock treatments. To give time. It's going to get through. And we tried to train her how to make hair replacements. And we paid her. Whatever I made, and whatever my sister Lily made, we told her, "Look how much money you make." (laughs) We really needed the money for ourselves, too, but we gave her, it should be an...

**INT:** Incentive.

**ESTHER:** Incentive. That she should work. And as soon as she started, and she saw that she could do what she has to do, and it's not bad, and she's making so much money, so how could she be not doing, you know? So she just kind of woke up.

**INT:** That was the best therapy for her.

**ESTHER:** And I want to tell you something. Kein ayin hora, you know, all the seven kids wouldn't budge without her. They all have homes, her kids. All her doing, believe me. She works very hard. She got into real estate, and she got into a lot of things. A lot of things, and she does the wigs, and she went to learn how to style, and she really...and kein ayin hora...

**INT:** She came out of the depression?

**ESTHER:** Kein ayin hora, beautiful, without shock treatments. She would have gone for shock treatments, but family is very important at a time like that.

**INT:** Right. So you came in and you helped her.

**ESTHER:** We came in, we helped. I took her to my house for maybe three weeks to get her out of her scene. You can't go to a hotel and put her three weeks in a hotel. Which is good, you spend money. But it's not like being with the family, you know? So I did my best, whatever I could. My other sister did her best. And her husband was...

**INT:** He was good.

**ESTHER:** Ah! We said, "Listen, if so many doctors are saying, maybe it will help." Doctors, you know, sometimes it helps if you have no alternative, probably. Maybe it helps. I don't know.

**INT:** But you found the right therapy for her. She needed to be busy.

**ESTHER:** We felt terrible. Here was this kid with children in the house, and look, how much could we do? We were auf tsuris, too. We didn't have money right from the beginning. My husband worked for ninety cents an hour. He was in Germany a teacher. He taught electronics in Munich. He came with recommendations, this much, what he accomplished. He took out all the people from the concentration camps, you know, the young guys who survived. The young kids, seventeen, eighteen years old, and he organized a school there, and he was teaching them, and he got professors in, and he was very capable. He came here, he could make ninety cents an hour. So it was very difficult on that amount to live. So you had to see what to do. Other people didn't do anything.

You know, there are certain women, they said the furniture was torn, the kishkes came out. If I had a little broken down piece of furniture, I took a needle and thread, I fixed it, because I saw what it was done in the house. By us we had looms, they were weaving carpets. We had help. And I have here from the museum, I picked up a book. I see how the women used to come in by us, because it was warm, and they used to spin, you know, the thread? So my younger sister, this Agie, she was, when she was a little kid, when the buses used to come in the morning, she used to get up very early, and she used to spin, and everybody used to admire a little kid like this spinning. She always kept her hands busy.

**INT:** Always was busy with her hands.

**ESTHER:** We all. You have to do something with your hands.

**INT:** Do you think that comes from your house, and the way...

**ESTHER:** I think the house did a lot to us. Otherwise, because we didn't have education. You know, it was no way to get. But whatever, we see those pictures rolling (laughs). You know, how one could be a beggar, and one could be a professor. And one could be...

**INT:** So you saw the whole...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, the whole thing was rolling throughout.

**INT:** The whole world. It was like a movie.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, believe me. We are neglectful, because we got so involved with families. We should have really wrote books about it. I have a customer...

**INT:** So even if you lived in a small town, you really saw the whole world.

**ESTHER:** Right. And you know something? The whole small town used to come up to us.

**INT:** To see the world, huh?

**ESTHER:** To see what's going on, and we couldn't see everything, because we had to be inside and do the work. You know? I remember I was six years old, and I was staring through there. I was looking because we had a front porch, like. And I wanted to see, too, the buses came in. (laughs) Six years old, I wasn't more. And my father, should rest in peace, came over, got me here by the shoulder, he said, "A little girl, a maidele darf tun wos." You know what that means? "A little girl has to do something." And pulled me like this nicely into the house.

**INT:** Oh, boy. What did you have to go do? You couldn't just stand there and watch the buses.

**ESTHER:** No. You had to go and do something.

**INT:** So they were teaching you to be busy. Do you think it was too much responsibility your parents were giving you at that age?

**ESTHER:** I think it was very great what they did. It was not easy, because maybe...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** Could you repeat what you said, about the reason you think you survived the war was...

**ESTHER:** I think I survived, that's the truth. Because whatever I got from the house, and from around, whatever it came in and it was going out, that was my only education at the time. And that made me survive. Because I came to, I got out of the ghetto, and I survived on my own in Budapest. It wasn't that I was getting a little soup, or somebody was taking me or bringing me. I had to do everything alone. I had to get those papers. And train myself, that I am not Jewish, and talk it all out of myself, that I'm **not** Jewish, and I have to do what I have to do. And I used to go to church. And because in school, it was a Catholic school in the town. There was no Jewish school in our town. Only the boys were learning, you know, in yeshivas. But for the girls, there was nothing.

**INT:** No school at all? Public school?

**ESTHER:** No. I mean, we had school, public school, but the public school was a Catholic school. It was not such a thing that it was from the public.

**INT:** Secular, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It was the Catholic people, it belonged to the Catholics, the school, they were in charge.

**INT:** So that's where you went to school.

**ESTHER:** Yes. But it was an arrangement with a rabbi that when the priest comes to give the Catholic, the religious hour, that we should be dismissed. The Jewish kids should be dismissed.

**INT:** So you didn't have to sit through that.

**ESTHER:** But we didn't have to sit through the religion. So we were learning all together. But when it came to religious lessons, we had to go out. (laughs) I was, I don't know, I had a girlfriend, the priest's daughter was my girlfriend. And I was fascinated. I wanted to know what the priest has to say. And I was hiding they shouldn't point a finger on me, you know, that I'm not obeying, that I'm staying in there.

**INT:** Oh, but you were listening?

**ESTHER:** And I used to listen in. And I, you know, I kind of...I wanted to know. Because if I came to the priest's daughter's house, she was very nice to me, and...

**INT:** Wait. How could a priest have a daughter? They were allowed to get married?

**ESTHER:** Not a priest. How do you say, a pope. No. A galach. I don't know how you say it. Priest? No, he was married.

**INT:** Oh, he was married?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, he was Roman Catholic. Not Roman. Greek Catholic, I'm sorry. Greek Catholic.

**INT:** Oh, okay. Maybe they were allowed to get married.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, Greek Catholic.

**INT:** Greek Orthodox or something like that.

**ESTHER:** Yes. And it was, if I would tell you what that town had, but the priest, I don't know how you call it, the Greek Catholic. It was a palace, with a church, with grounds, with beauty, with art, and all those peasants supported it. And the peasants didn't have anything, and the priest's children were going to higher education. But the peasants didn't have to go to school even to finish up that school that it was there. See, it was a system to bring down the people through religion. It's more a mitzvah to go on the field and take care of the fruits and vegetables and everything than to sit in school and learn. So certain times they were designating the kids from the schools, the peasants, to go and help their parents on the fields, because there was no machinery, you know. But his kids had to go to school. And his kids couldn't get involved with anybody from these peasants. His kids had to intermarry with somebody who was educated, you know, to maintain the priesthood.

**INT:** Right. Interesting.

**ESTHER:** And she was my, we were sitting in the same bench, and she was a very intelligent kid, and I liked her, and I said, why shouldn't I, you know, because I was exposed in the house to so many Gentiles and everything. I could still maintain my own thing, you know.

**INT:** But you were curious. You wanted to know.

**ESTHER:** So I learned all the things.

**INT:** That was probably a good thing.

**ESTHER:** And that was a good thing, because when I came to have, I had to have the Christian papers to survive the war, I knew so much, that I went to church with these people, and I really pretended, and it was perfect. But at the same time, I **never** forgot that I'm Jewish, because my brother was in the labor camp, and I used to be able to go there, because I was a Christian. So supposedly, I'm a friend. I was a friend to my brother. It wasn't that my brother was my brother. He was a friend. So through that way I was able to go in any place, and it was no problem to me, and I worked.

**INT:** Well, you're going to tell me about this. But I just wanted to get a few more things about your life before the war. I'm wondering if you could explain a little bit about what school was like when you were growing up.

**ESTHER:** In our town? Well, you had to walk three miles, three kilometers, to school in the morning. And the clothes was very poor you know, because it was limited. So my mother, to make sure that we are not freezing by the time -- in bad weather, I'm talking now -- she used to give us a **little** bit of liquor in the morning. We had fish oil, you know, and a little sugar, and a little...we didn't eat. So she gave us a tiny bit of whiskey to keep us going, we shouldn't freeze. I don't know if it was good or bad, but this was what it was. When we came to the school, the school was **spotless. Clean.** It was **shining.** Every little thing was -- one room, but it was brilliant, and the fire was crackling, and it was warm. It was a pleasure. The teachers came in and they were sparkling. **Clean.** Not fancy, but clean and washed and put together nicely.

And then in the morning, as we came in, we had to sing the prayers, say the prayers, you know. It was, you know, it was the...the priest, how you call it, the Catholic, we had to thank Jesus Christ for everything that's there. You know, we had to say it. And then we started school.

Oh, and the inspection. You had to be clean. You had to put your fingers on the table.

**INT:** Oh, they look at your hands.

**ESTHER:** Your hands, if your nails were clean. Your clothes is clean. That started. That was maybe five minutes, three minutes. Then we made exercise. Calisthenics. We all stepped out and we had to make a, I don't know, and you did it? We did it, after the three kilometers. (laughs)

**INT:** You got a lot of exercise.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. But it was good. And then we sat down, we started to study. And the teachers were very, very good, I think.

**INT:** What was the language of instruction? What did they use?

**ESTHER:** When I was going, when I started, it was Romanian, and then it started into the Hungarian. But I was only one year in that, and then it was over.

**INT:** How many years of schooling did you get?

**ESTHER:** I had around five years of school, that's all.

**INT:** So you were ten years old when it stopped?

**ESTHER:** When it stopped, yeah. It was ten, eleven. No, it was eleven.

**INT:** Who were your friends?

**ESTHER:** Everybody. I didn't have too many friends, because there was no time. We had to work. In school, you went to school, you had to do your work. You came home, where some more work was waiting for you, because you had to chip in to the household, you know, even though we had steady help. But you know, you had to do the cooking, the cleaning, and everything. We had to be handy. You know, bring in this, take that, go there. Go shopping. You know, it was no car. Errands, you have to do. And we used to do them. And then at night we took it easy.

**INT:** Did homework.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** So you didn't really have girlfriends.

**ESTHER:** We didn't have too much. And I'll tell you one thing: we didn't have books. That was a big problem. And the jealousy was going on very big. It was tremendous competition, because there were people who could squeeze in books. You know, who could go, they had more lee-way than we had, and they were more secluded, so the parents had more time to do for them, you know, because my parents were occupied with business, with the people, with the house, with, you know, it was too much. But I remember one incident, speaking. We had these books, and the teacher said I should share the book with another girl. And she told me to come to her house, and I should do my homework. And she said, "Not now. I don't want to do homework now. Let's play." So we played. Then the time got late, and I said, "Look, give me the book home, because I want to go home." She says, "I can't give you the book." I said, "Then let's do the homework. Let me do the homework." She says, "Oh, no." And then the mother came in, she says, "You know what, little girl? I think you should go home now." So I was back to school without my homework, and I was so upset. Look, till today I remember. So it really was, because there were times that I wanted to do more, and I could have done more.

**INT:** But you had no books.

**ESTHER:** It was very limited. In the Jewish, for the girls, the Jewish language wasn't emphasized. You know, we didn't have to know anything. See, that's why I'm very angry. Because I grew up in a house, in a family where they are all, they were all teachers. My mother's family especially, they were all teaching everybody, in the Jewish, the Talmud, you know, the customs, and all the Tanach and Chumash and all these things they were taught. But the girl didn't have to. She didn't have to know. This was in our town a lot and in our area a lot. And I was very upset about it.

**INT:** Did you get any after-school Hebrew training, or tutoring?



**ESTHER:** They had for a lot of people, but by us to come up to the end of the town, it was hard to get somebody all the time, you know. Because everything was walking. And the big doing was in the town, you know. It was closer, more people were concentrated. We were more on the outside. Which it wasn't far. It was maybe another two kilometers to walk, it wasn't a lot.

**INT:** Yeah, but to get somebody to come out, it wouldn't work.

**ESTHER:** So they used to come and not come. But I learned on my own.

**INT:** How did you do that?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I really don't know how. I remember I was in my aunt's house, and they were...(pause)

**INT:** Okay, you were telling me about how you think you learned for **yourself** some Jewish learning. How did you do that? Did you do that from your brothers maybe, or your father? Your father didn't teach you?

**ESTHER:** He didn't have time. My father was very occupied. My father, he used to teach my brothers.

**INT:** Tell me about your father.

**ESTHER:** I had four brothers. You know, he was involved with the kids. You know, once a girl was born it was a very sad situation. This was the trend.

**INT:** How do you mean sad?

**ESTHER:** Sad.

**INT:** Why?

**ESTHER:** Because if a boy was born, it was okay. But another girl, you had to prepare a dowry, you had to prepare clothes. It was a **big** responsibility, a girl. And a boy wasn't. A boy you married into somebody, and it was all right, and continued, in misery maybe. (laughs)

**INT:** Right. (laughs) But girls were considered a burden?

**ESTHER:** A burden. I remember my mother had a kid, I think it was my fourth sister, because we were four girls. You know, it was Olga, me, Lily and Agie. And when Agie was born, my father came in, I remember. He came in, he was so upset.

**INT:** Because it was another girl?

**ESTHER:** It was another girl. So he had four girls. The two boys didn't count to him, you know, that he has already two boys. But when my other brother was born, you know, the young brother, I remember he used to wake him up. He was three years old, he had to go to cheder. Would you believe it? Wake him up in the morning. And we were big girls, and we didn't have to go. There wasn't. There was very...

**INT:** It was very divided between boys and girls.

**ESTHER:** Exceptionally.

**INT:** Was this because of the religious...?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. That's why I said that it had to come to a change there, a big change. Because all the girls had to do, they had to know how to sew, they had to know how to cook. They had to know, they had to, they had to, they had to. But to be educated, and be able to look into a book and understand what somebody is saying, somebody **else** is saying, more than the rabbi in the town, that wasn't their place. And it was very, I'll tell you. I really resent religion a little, because of that. And that's why I got to be so, I followed my husband, you know, because he wasn't interested.

**INT:** He wasn't observant or religious?

**ESTHER:** No, he was very educated. He finished Hebrew high school. He learned a lot. You know, on the Jewish field, but he learned in the curriculum, too. He was from the German border, you know, so he was like a German plus Jewish. And he didn't believe in all these Hasidim and all these extreme religious people, those beards and peyos and all these things he didn't go for.

**INT:** Did your father have a beard and peyos?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And my mother wore a sheitel. Yeah. How could she not? They would expel her from the town. I don't think she...

**INT:** All the women covered their hair in the town?

**ESTHER:** **Everybody** had to cut their hair off.

**INT:** Everybody was Vizhnitz Hasid?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Everybody had to cut their hair.

**INT:** They shaved, or just...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Shaved. Yeah. I think it was so cruel. I think it was...

**INT:** It sort of defeats the purpose, sometimes. You know, you're supposed to cover your hair so that other men won't find you attractive. But you want your **husband** to find you attractive, so if you've shaved your head under the sheitel, it doesn't make much sense. It never made sense to me.

**ESTHER:** You know, I almost broke up a relationship with my sister from Brooklyn because of the sheitel with COSKRM. They insist that she should wear a sheitel.

**INT:** When she got married?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I really put my foot down, I said -- not that...I like a sheitel, you know what I mean? It's nothing wrong with a sheitel. A sheitel is a great thing. It's a great convenience. But when it's put on because the men organized that thing that she has to be, you know, blankety-blank, just for them, and not educated, and not, you know, just do the thing. I think it takes a little time to bring up these people to the level. A lot of the men now, truthfully, if I would have a girl now, and I'm telling **you** that, it's going to go on the record. If I would have a daughter, I wouldn't send her to yeshiva, because they break them in to work hard, and be for the man a little nothing, and they don't even appreciate a good woman. Believe me, they don't. They just see a nice beautiful girl there who's dingling and dangling and asking for more than they can give, and then they are alert, and they **love** it. But the woman who drags and pulls and puts things together, and brings from nothing she makes something -- she is not appreciated. She is just, how much more can you put in there?

**INT:** You're saying in the religious world.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. It's in the religious world a lot. The man picks himself up and he goes. All right, he puts in the few dollars, it's true, and some of them don't even do **that**.

**INT:** They sit in kollel or whatever, they sit and learn.

**ESTHER:** And they are miserable. They come home and they are, you know. Even among the more advanced people, you know, the more professional people. If they have that real religious background, a woman is not their cup of tea. It's a convenience. It's like another piece of furniture there, or something. Even though they are taught that the woman is here, the woman is there.

**INT:** So you, somehow you got a strong sense of independence. I mean, if you grew up in a family where the girls were sort of, it sounds like, second-class citizens. It sounds like the boys got the education.

**ESTHER:** Third-class, not second.

**INT:** Third-class, okay. The boys got the education, the girls had to do everything. Did the boys have any responsibilities in the house, the brothers? Did they have to help in the house at all?

**ESTHER:** Well, my mother used to tell them, like Pesach, they came home from learning, they had to peel some potatoes, you know, because it was a big family, and you know, a lot of potatoes. (laughs) They didn't protest. They were nice. And...my mother tried to make very good kids out of them. You know, she didn't bring them up in a religious way. My brothers are not brought up... (Pause)

...Too much, way too much. But they were stepping all over the people. And that's what I'm afraid now, too. I don't like when I see some big shot is donating a **big** amount of money to these private schools, and then he lines out the schedule what he wants it should be, the curriculum, and the whole thing. I think that's...that should be eliminated. I mean, a school is -- COSKRM had that problem, when she went to high school. She was editor-in-chief of the yearbook. And there were some people who, in the yeshiva they were giving a lot of money. So that was her girlfriend. Very good. She always had a very fine, you know, the upper level, COSKRM, in school. She took all the honors in that school. But, when it came to the yearbook she wanted to put up all her pictures in there, you know? I don't know how many. And somebody else too, who gave a lot of money. And she said, "Hey, wait. This is not an exhibition. This is a school book, a yearbook. We have to give an even place for everybody. This has nothing to do with a charitable organization." You know, she was an idealist. But it wasn't the right thing to do in the school. And she said, "What? I cannot do, who gives \$27.00 shouldn't be in with nothing shouldn't have? He is in the same school." You know, she lost five very good girlfriends because of it. And when she went to complain, the rabbi almost told her to get out of the, almost threw her out. "You don't know. These people are our supporters. We have to give them a lot of space." And you know, she came home crying. My husband even didn't give her credit. He said, "Oy, you got to learn. Don't you know how this goes? The ones who are these private schools, they're all board, and they're supplemented." And that's why, he didn't want my children should go to the...

**INT:** Yeshiva.

**ESTHER:** No. He didn't believe in it. Listen, I'm happy she went, in a way, and thank G-d she went through with it. But you know...

**INT:** If you had to do it again, though, you were saying...

**ESTHER:** I wouldn't. I wouldn't, because I'm so afraid of her children, too. That there could be somebody who is making a big amount of money, he just has a crazy idea in his head that you have to wear peyos, and you have to wear a beard, and you have to do this, and you have to wear a long, and you have to wear a short, and you have to, you know, putting up all these things. And he himself is not clear with what he wants, you know. She, or whoever. You know. And I'm afraid for these things. There has to be a strong hand who should say, "Now, listen. You want to support the school? It's very nice. But

we have to support the curriculum which it has been adopted originally. Not every time it's coming in with a new...with a new facet, a new thing." But look, it's not for me to tell, but it really should be supervised.

**INT:** But somehow you got this sense of independence, though, I mean, even though, I can hear the resentment you have about the religion, and how it treats women. But how do you think you got this strong sense of independence that you've had your whole life, it seems? Did you get it from your mother? Was it just in you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my mother put a lot of confidence in us. A lot.

**INT:** She did.

**ESTHER:** Yes, a lot. She...how would you feel when the people were drinking in the town. I'm going back to before the war. The people used to go, the Gentiles used to drink a lot. They used to go down to the bar or how you call it, to the liquor place, and drink, and then they'd pass by our house, and they used to knock at the windows and yell and scream and scare the house. And my mother said to them, "You better don't do it, because you'll be in trouble. Don't scare my kids when they go to sleep." They left. But it was going all the time. Once my mother said, "I'm going to prepare hot water, and when they come to the door, I know already when they are going to come to knock, I'm going to pour hot water over them, that they should remember not to come here." Well, my father got so scared. He said, "Don't you ever do something. It shouldn't even go through your head. Because there are five brothers. And they'll come, they'll mangle you with the kids, with everybody together. You'd better, you've got to remember you are Jewish and you are here, and stay out of," you know. Gave her a whole speech why she shouldn't do it. And my mother was listening. (laughs) And she said, "Okay, you go to sleep."

**INT:** Did she do it?

**ESTHER:** So what do you think? She didn't do it. She waited for Yom Tov. You know, my father, for Rosh Hashanah, for Yom Kippur, he used to go to the rabbi, which it was maybe 25 kilometers, 30 kilometers away. So he used to go for Yom Tov to the rabbi. And he stayed there.

**INT:** The Vizhnitzer Rebbe?

**ESTHER:** To the Vizhnitzer Rebbe. To the Spinker Rebbe, you know. And he stayed there. So it came Yom Kippur in the evening, my mother came, she went to shul. Yom Kippur once a year she was **allowed** to go to shul. That was proper, you know, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the women had to go to shul, and sit on the attic there.

**INT:** She didn't go on Shabbas?

**ESTHER:** No! Very rarely. Unless it was...

**INT:** No? Really? Women didn't go?

**ESTHER:** No. So she had to stay home with the kids. So what do you think? This guy comes, one of the guys, comes to the door.

**INT:** On Yom Kippur night.

**ESTHER:** On Yom Kippur night. My mother was tired from the ta'anis [fast], probably, and you know, my father wasn't home, and having the kids around, and she didn't know how good the babysitting was going on. You know, it was a lot on her, and coming home and having this drunk knocking on her door, from whom she didn't have anything, and who didn't give her anything. So she figured, now is a good time to take care of him. And she had had water prepared, because she figured maybe (laughs), she had it already, probably ahead of time. And the guy came, and she took a big pail of water, and she threw it over him, and we were there, we were so scared. And me, after I heard what my father was lecturing her, I was all out of myself. But I didn't open up my mouth. I was hiding, and I went away. My mother was shaking. He never came around again.

**INT:** See that?

**ESTHER:** So that gave us a little...

**INT:** Yeah. She was **tough**.

**ESTHER:** That gave me a little, that's how I got the strength, I think.

**INT:** She didn't listen to your father. She just did it anyway.

**ESTHER:** No. As a matter of fact, when they came to take my father, my mother was there to say, "Listen, you cannot take my husband. He is not a communist. He didn't do to anybody anything wrong." Because the first thing, they took the men, you know, when they were rounding up the people. "And you cannot take him." And she was standing. You know?

**INT:** She was a strong person.

**ESTHER:** And then in 1935 -- to go back -- in 1936, because we were living in that crossroads spot, there was Romania, at the time. And Goga, he was like the president of the country. And he, his goal was what Hitler did, to kill all the Jews from Romania.

**INT:** Oh, he was an anti-Semite. How do you spell his name?

**ESTHER:** [Spells it]. And Cuza, it's C-u-z-a. Cuza and Goga.

**INT:** And who was Cuza?

**ESTHER:** Cuza, they were together. They were the same bandits, the same like Iron Guard.

**INT:** The Iron Guard, they ran the country?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, right. I don't know if you heard of the Iron Guard.

**INT:** Oh, I heard of the Iron Guard, sure. They were terrible.

**ESTHER:** So what do you think? In 1936 the buses, it was winter time. It was a bris in the town, and people were coming in to the bris. You know, the family, the grandparents, the aunts came to the bris. And they were going home. It was Sunday night. And the bus was late, because the snow was this high, and the bus had to go on those serpents, you know, so it was delayed. And the house was full of people waiting to go home, to go wherever they have to go, and I was sick, and I was dressed up to go with the bus to the doctor, which it was 25 kilometer away. And my sisters were already in clothes, they were going to sleep. It was around 7:00, 6:00. And you know, in the winter time, 6:00, it's dark.

All of a sudden, two truckloads of these Iron Guard guys, sixty people, thirty people in one truck, in one cammione they were calling. They came in with the black hats, black clothes, you know, with bats in their hands, and they said, "Do you sell whiskey?" And my mother said, "No, we don't sell whiskey." They broke open the door. They didn't just open up the door. But they broke it open. And they came in and they asked for whiskey, and my mother said, "We don't sell whiskey." "What do you sell?" My mother said, "We are not selling anything, but if you want food, we were just baking." My mother had some rolls put in in the oven, you know, just ready, because she figured these people are coming...

**INT:** For the bris.

**ESTHER:** They'll have to wait for the buses. And she prepared, you know, to treat everybody. And she said, "Look, we have bread, we have meat." And they started to hit everybody with bats. The beards, Jews with beards were in that place. And they were just cutting and knocking. And my sister Lily, she's very...

**INT:** Were you there?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And my sister Lily, I was there sick, because I was dressed and waiting for the bus to go, too. And my sister Lily, she must have been eight years old, maybe. Nine. 1936. Yeah. I was maybe eleven. No, I wasn't eleven. 1927. I was nine. And she was eight, maybe seven and a half. And she ran off out of the bed, and if something, she broke two windows, that people should run out. But she was undressed already. And we were running out. Could you imagine, I was so sick, but I saw what's going on, and my mother was pleading to them, "Gentlemen, please. Don't disturb the

house. Don't disturb the kids," and they split her head. And she had to have, they cut her up all...she was a mess. 100 stitches they put on. Then the bus arrived, and they took her away. But we were already running away from the place, with my sister. And my sister's foot, she stepped into that glass because she was barefooted. She ran out of bed. She stepped into the glass and she cut her foot very deeply, probably, you know, in the snow and in the ice and everything. And we were running, and I see her foot is **bleeding**. I see white. I couldn't see the blood, but I saw black, you know, on the snow. And I say, "Look, you are bleeding. We have to go back." I thought she is going to die. And here, barefooted on the snow. Could you imagine? Running from the house, from the bed into the snow? And my mother is there, and my father had been in the backyard by the garage, by the stable, because he checked out if the animals are going to be protected during the night, because it was a frost. You know, it was very cold. And he happened to be outside when all this thing was going on in the front. And I brought my sister back, and when we came back, we found nobody there. Because the bus picked up everybody and took them.

**INT:** Took them where?

**ESTHER:** To where they were going, to the...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Maybe it's still going on something in the front, because he heard what's going on, the screams, and the horrible things what it was going on. So my father with the beard, he was afraid to come up, so he was hiding still there, and guess what? He was hiding, and it was a place there in the back of our house. Way down the river was running there. So they had all these wires, you know, this, how do you call it?

**INT:** Electric wires?

**ESTHER:** No, you know...

**INT:** Oh, barbed wire.

**ESTHER:** Barbed wire. We had barbed wire to catch whatever it comes down.

**INT:** Oh, to keep the mud.

**ESTHER:** To keep the mud, yes. So my father ran in there to hide, and he tore his foot, and it was rusted wire. So he had an infection in his foot, and he was sick and sick, and that's how he died in the concentration camp, because he was marching.

**INT:** From the foot injury?



**ESTHER:** From the foot injury, because he had to march, and his foot acted up more. And they shot him on the...as he was marching. Because he didn't, whoever didn't keep up, he was shot. He almost was through the war already. And they shot him when they marched.

Anyhow, my mother in 1936 was already...

**INT:** She was fighting off the Iron Guard, here. She's standing up to all these people.

**ESTHER:** Could you imagine? **Sixty** people we were told were there. Sixty people, and they came and they cleaned our house. They cleaned us out.

**INT:** They took everything?

**ESTHER:** They took whatever they could. And I came home to a practically empty house with my sister.

**INT:** These were like the police? These were like...

**ESTHER:** The police didn't do anything.

**INT:** Who were these people? They were Iron Guard?

**ESTHER:** The Iron Guard. They were running for election. There was supposed to be an election in two months. So in two months we were all having notes that we have to leave the town. Where, what, it's no...all the Jews had to leave the towns. And where are you going? And here, you know the time approached. And I used to see that straight wall. I said, "Where are we going to go?" In the meantime, you know what we did? We built a double wall in one of the rooms to put all the, we had preserves and things, that maybe, for some miracle, we'll come back from where they take us. We should have something. So we covered up, it was like a double wall. And we build that wall, and behind that wall was all the conserves, and you know, whatever we had. You know, not much, but it was fruits, you know, jams, and all kinds of tomatoes, it wasn't too much. But this is what we were doing to protect ourselves. There wasn't much.

But it happened that two months, just when the date came in, because they assumed they're going to win the elections. In the meantime, they lost. So that was the great miracle. I remember we were dancing.

**INT:** What year was that?

**ESTHER:** In 1936.

**INT:** What happened to your mother?

**ESTHER:** Well, my mother survived, and she was...

**INT:** She had 100 stitches in her head? Her face?

**ESTHER:** (Sighs) Her head, her face, and she came home with, they brought her home with bandages like this, and bandages over there. She had, you know, like strips from the whips in her own house. Could you imagine? In her own house. And no police, and no nothing.

**INT:** Nobody to go to.

**ESTHER:** That was in 1936. And in Romania at the time, they used to throw out Jews from the trains.

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They used to kill them and then put up a sign, "Kosher meat."

**INT:** This was **before** Hitler.

**ESTHER:** This was before Hitler. Hitler had just come in in 1936, didn't he?

**INT:** '33, I think.

**ESTHER:** '33. So they got Hitler. But every bad has a little good. What happened, because the Romanians did so much horrible, such a horrible thing to the Jews, way before the Holocaust, that they wouldn't give the Jews out. Hitler wanted to take them out, because Hitler was in pact with Romania, too. And they wanted to take the Jews out to Germany to the crematoriums, you know, and kill them. But Romania said, "Listen."

**INT:** We'll do it.

**ESTHER:** (Knocking on the table) "You leave my Jews alone. I know how to treat them. You know what we did in 1936. We have better ideas now." In the meantime, slowly, slowly, they took the money away from the Jews. They took business away. You know, they were doing some pogroms here and there. But they didn't deport them.

**INT:** Why?

**ESTHER:** Because they needed the money. Because they knew what Hitler is doing. Hitler is taking away from the people everything. And kills the people. So he doesn't have to count on anything. And here the Romanians were afraid, because the Jews were so interwoven with them, and in business and in everything, that they were afraid.

**INT:** So they wanted to keep the Jews' money. Not the Jews themselves. They didn't care about the **safety** of the Jews.

**ESTHER:** Who, the Romanians?

**INT:** The Romanians.

**ESTHER:** They protected them a little, because they didn't have the facilities to exterminate them, like the Germans had. So it wasn't...

**INT:** But they weren't against the idea of killing Jews.

**ESTHER:** No, no.

**INT:** They were **killing** Jews.

**ESTHER:** No, no, not at all. Not at all. But one thing. If you were in Romania, you could survive as a Jew. You weren't, if there was an incident, that somebody lynched you or something, too bad, you know. But it wasn't an open thing to do. It wasn't.

**INT:** When you were going to school, did you have any anti-Semitism from the other kids? Or the teachers?

**ESTHER:** It's funny. Never.

**INT:** You never did.

**ESTHER:** No. Isn't that funny? If you ask me the question, I didn't. As a matter of fact, the teachers always called us out to prove to the peasants, to the Gentiles, "You see? They're not even Romanians. They speak the language better. They know how to sing, they know how the poem [goes]." We knew, you know. It was easier. (laughs) I don't know why. It was easier for us to grasp than for them. So they used to call us out.

**INT:** So you were the role model for the Gentiles. It's interesting.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, the role model. We were always the role model. As a matter of fact, if a woman was serving in a Jewish home, she had like a college degree. You know, if she got married, and she served till, you know, she got married, and in a Jewish home, she had an asset. It was like a...she knows how to do things. She knows how to work. Because the Jews weren't just working. They were industrious, and they were using their heads, too. Because these guys were studying and maybe they were pushing a little bit. I don't know what it caused, but...the Jews were always a little on a higher level. I don't know why. I don't know how. But they always called us out and always nice. Never.

**INT:** Your parents, how did they feel towards non-Jews? Did they ever talk to you about it?

**ESTHER:** Very good. Very good. It was not such a thing. It wasn't, you know, my mother never instilled on us what...it's only one thing. If she had to cooperate with the

town, you know, she couldn't. You know, like my older poor sister. She was sitting on the porch and talking to a boy. Now, the word was going around already that, you know, Avrom's tochter, she was talking to a Gentile. But it wasn't by us. My father didn't find it...

**INT:** A problem. It wasn't a problem.

**ESTHER:** No problem.

**INT:** Because the chances of her marrying him would be very slim.

**ESTHER:** Right. It was...no problem. They were young kids. But right away it was already that she's no good, and labeled, and oh, G-d. That's why I say...

**INT:** Small-town minds, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, but you know, I think religion did a lot of damage there to a **lot** of people. It...I could see even with my sisters. They feel that **I'm** damaged. Maybe they are right, who knows (laughs) to tell. They feel I'm damaged, because I'm not complying with all their rules and regulations. And Mrs. K. feels the same, and Mr. K. feels the same. You know, the poor guy married beneath his level. (laughs) He's more religious than my daughter. But he married, you know. What can I tell you? That religion is...

**INT:** So you didn't really experience any anti-Semitism until this incident. Well, no, you said that they were getting drunk and you know, bothering your mother.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They used to come around. But you don't see him as a Gentile. You saw him as a drunk.

**INT:** Oh, I thought you saw him as a Gentile drunk.

**ESTHER:** No. Absolutely not. I don't remember that. Absolutely not. He used to maybe make a note, but I think he was jealous of my mother. I think he wanted her attention. That's my...they all liked my mother. As stand up as she was, they liked her. They liked to deal with her. They liked to get her attention. But she used to tell them off (laughs) in such a...she was very good with the language. I didn't get that from my mother. My mother was very good. She spoke languages very fluently.

**INT:** What did she speak?

**ESTHER:** My mother spoke German fluently. She spoke Russian. She spoke Hungarian. She spoke, as a matter of fact, she always corrected us that we shouldn't pronounce the words this way. Because we followed the kids. She spoke Romanian and Jewish, and she knew some Hebrew.

**INT:** Where did she learn Russian and German?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. She was in Arad. And there they spoke many languages, and she learned. She was very, very into, because her father was, like I say, the whole vicinity knew him. I was in Budapest, and after the war, and they wanted to know who I am and what I am. And I tried to tell my father's name, my mother's name, and "Who's your grandfather?" so I said, "Vigdor Fried." Then they heard, Vigdor Fried, so they called me up on the podium there, and there were a lot of people to say, "You know who this is? This is Vigdor Fried's grandchild." You know. And to me Vigdor Fried wasn't a big deal, because he lived next door to the school. And I never was called in from school to come in for lunch or for something, you know. And when I came in to visit him, because my mother used to say, "Go and see what Grandpa's doing, how he's feeling." So I came in, and he said, "Who are you? Pessel, Esther, Laya, Aga. Welche bist du?" Because we all grew tall, you know, and he saw us very rarely. And I was so insulted that I never went anymore.

**INT:** He didn't know who you were?

**ESTHER:** I didn't want to go to see him **anymore**. And now I feel differently, because he had quite a few grandchildren.

**INT:** Couldn't keep them all straight.

**ESTHER:** And his wife had died when the kids, my mother was twelve years old. And he remarried. He remarried a woman who had three kids. And one daughter, one son lived with him in the house. And he had seven children. So he had enough troubles on his head. (laughs) And he had the school there, where he taught people, and where he had to excel, and he went to the shul, and you know, he had his own. So, and I was a girl. But then I found out that all the grandsons, the **grandsons**, they all became something because they went to his school. And Elie Wiesel was studying in his place.

**INT:** Oh, really?

**ESTHER:** Yes, when he was young. Because he said, Elie Wiesel, they asked him many years ago how come he got so, because he didn't have too much school, and he didn't have this. So he said, "Listen, because of the teachers." And he was telling a few teachers, and that was my grandfather was one of the teachers.

**INT:** How about that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. So I don't know from where my mother took it, because she really couldn't have too much. But her two sisters, three sisters, were very religious. Oh, **very** religious.

**INT:** But your mother was very religious, it sounds like.

**ESTHER:** She **had** to be. I don't think she was...

**INT:** Oh, really?

**ESTHER:** I might be wrong. My sisters feel that I am wrong. I think she was very religious from a different point of view. She didn't believe in all this, she wanted the kids should wear a little more delicate dresses, you know, more a little bit sophisticated. But we were talking and pronouncing, you know, the way the peasants were talking. You know, kids copy from the outside. My mother used to say, "You don't say it like this. It's not (says a word). It's (says same word with different emphasis)." Or they used to say (Word meaning soon), soon. "What kind of a saying is that? Immediate." You know, she always... So we used to laugh at her that **she** doesn't know how to say it. (laughs) You know, we used to make fun of her. We knew better, but we were copying the wrong thing, you know. So she always tried to, or on the buses. If she saw the people were coming in, you know, some very nice dressed up ladies, you know, traveling, she used to go and find us, to come and see. "You see how nice she looks? Look at her stockings, her shoes, her hair. Look how beautiful." So you know, we used to learn like drips and drabs. But she was very tuned into us.

**INT:** But you don't think she really had a strong belief herself?

**ESTHER:** Oh, she believed in G-d. Oh, G-d! She **believed**. She used to be such a, oh! She believed in G-d. But all these other little things, she didn't. Like Pesach. We ran out the last year, we ran out of matzah. We ran out of everything. What were we, kids, we didn't have what to eat. You know, we had to wait. We had chametz, but the Pesach stuff ran out, and it was one more day, the last day, we didn't have already. So my mother, what did she do? You know, I'm thinking now. A religious person would say, "Okay, one day we are going to fast. We'll have some tea, or something, it's going to work." She didn't go for that. She had some flour, she made a good cereal. She had some cheese, she put the cheese on top of the cereal, because it should be nourishing, and she made a good meal for lunch. And then for supper we could eat whatever was there. But somebody else would not have done that. Maybe they did it, too, but they didn't talk about it. I don't know. But she...you know. It's more a mitzvah to keep the kids fed than to keep them hungry.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** My mother was a very great woman. I have to say, I think she inspired us all. With good things. We all feel the same about her, so it's... My father was good, too, but that was the system.

**INT:** Tell me about your father. You didn't talk much about him. What was he like?

**ESTHER:** He was a very handsome man.

**INT:** Yeah?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, very handsome.

**INT:** Was he tall?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Tall, very good figure. He could have passed for a woman, for a beautiful model.

**INT:** Yeah?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, he would have passed. And he was full of laughter, and jokes. And whoever came in, he used to entertain them, and they used to tell jokes. He used to tell jokes. And it was very, a lot of fun, you know.

**INT:** Did he and your mother have a good marriage, do you think?

**ESTHER:** I think my mother **loved** him. She was crazy about him. I don't think he liked her as much, because he had his wife already, you know. And my mother was too gullible, too, because she wanted the two boys not to forget the mother. So she, I say now to myself. She had the picture of the boys' mother, I mean, of her husband's ex-wife, in that living room, you know, in the fancy room. She didn't take it off. I would have taken it off. (laughs) And she let it be there. I remember that picture. And I said to myself, then I didn't realize so much. But later on, I said to myself, you know, I was too young to say later on something. She was very sacrificing. My mother sacrificed a lot. And that's the only way to be a good mother, unfortunately. But if you are involved with me, and myself, and I, and this is the generation, and this is what we have to do now.

**INT:** Did you see affection expressed between your parents, or because it was so Orthodox, you didn't see that sort of thing?

**ESTHER:** No, I didn't see too much. Yeah, yeah, I have to say. My mother used to sit on his lap.

**INT:** Oh, did she?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They used to sit by the fire, and they used to dance. She used to take the kids, and he, and Friday night we all used to dance around the table, you know, after supper. We always had at least twenty people at the table. Because some people, the bus was late. You know. They couldn't go out, so they stayed over. We always (laughs) had a house full of people.

**INT:** Did they argue, your parents?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Do you remember any arguments?

**ESTHER:** No. I don't remember them arguing. No. It was some interference with his family, because it was a lot, they didn't like my mother because there were some people in the family who they would have liked to get into my father's home, you know, to marry him. He should have married **them**. There was a resentment, a lot, because my father had a very, very beautiful home. I think the woman whom he had married originally, she must, I don't know how she got to come to that town. (laughs) I still can't figure it out. Because she came from the city, from Sighet. Very intelligent woman, and very sophisticated. She had clothes there, those beautiful hats, straw, hand-woven straw hats, and furs, and you know, it was a big hope chest there that my mother put everything in there, and she must have kept her things. Beautiful, beaded gowns, beaded dresses, pure silk. You know, in those times there wasn't anything. All beautiful beads.

**INT:** When did you see this stuff?

**ESTHER:** Because my mother went Yom Tov to shul. (laughs) We used to open up the hope chest.

**INT:** Oh, when she was gone.

**ESTHER:** We used to dress up. Yeah, we used to do a lot of damage. (laughs)

**INT:** Pretty great dress-up clothes, huh?

**ESTHER:** Oh, dress-up clothes, and then we figured out we could make something out of it. (laughs) We tore it up, we cut it up. We made little dolls, little dresses. My mother didn't know.

**INT:** She didn't know. You just shut the hope chest before she got home.

**ESTHER:** Oh, sure. (laughter) She was busy. We always had a little time to do. My father, we had, you know, on the windows, those shades, those woven, you know, that they are woven, like they look like venetian blinds, but they are woven. They are not fit together. But **beautiful** design, you know, something like this. Beautiful design pattern, woven. That was all handwork. And the most beautiful lamps, with you know...

**INT:** Tiffany lamps?

**ESTHER:** Not only Tiffany. It was the porcelain, you know, those big blown porcelain lamps, and these lamps that they hang, you know, like a chandelier.

**INT:** This was in your house.

**ESTHER:** In our house. That was my father's house with his first wife.

**INT:** I see.



**ESTHER:** And my mother married into that house. But as time were going on, then beautiful dishes. You know, the glassware. Because she, poor woman, died so suddenly. And everything was so, so sparkling. Not when I was already grown up, but it was already, even when I got older to understand what I saw, you know? It was a lot of beautiful things there. And my father's family was anxious for one of the daughters to marry, you know how it was in those years. But why my father, how she married my father, and what it happened, I don't know, because she came to that town.

**INT:** How did your parents meet?

**ESTHER:** My parents? As a shidduch. She came back to the town from where she lived, originally. Where she was born.

**INT:** Where was she born?

**ESTHER:** She was born in Sacel, in the same place where I was born. And she came back where she grew up to visit. And my father's wife had just died.

**INT:** I see. So somebody made a shidduch.

**ESTHER:** They put them together. They didn't want my father, because my mother's family was very much against it.

**INT:** Why? He was much older.

**ESTHER:** It was a lot of things, if I could see now. But my mother appreciated the home, a family, because she didn't have. So she kind of saw, my father was very good-looking. And in those years, twelve years for a man didn't mean anything, because he looked young and the woman looked old. If she was twelve years older, she was already ready to be buried. (laughs)

But my father, I think, my mother's family didn't like the idea to intermarry there, because he was married before. He had two children. And then, he wasn't of such a high caliber, like my mother was. My mother's family were all on the educational ladder, you know. High teachers. You know, really knowledgeable people. Very high knowledgeable. And my father's parents were, he was a builder. My grandfather. In fact, he built the house where we were living, because my father inherited the house. And my father's brothers were full of life. Handsome, all of them. A pleasure to be in their company, and their children the same.

**INT:** How many brothers?

**ESTHER:** He had two brothers.

**INT:** Did they live in the same town?

**ESTHER:** No, they lived not far. They lived a little bit away. But one was a tailor, but he wasn't a tailor. My brother learned from him a lot, because he was really a very skilled person, designing beautiful things, and my brother learned from him, from my uncle, a lot. And my other uncle was a...carpenter. But he made the top furniture. If you see something, Biedermeyer, or if you see Baker, or if you see, you know, something really on a high level, this is what he used to make. In fact, his son, that lives in Israel, he learned from his father, and he had the same business. He's very well-to-do, and my cousin's son is in the same business. He has a few stores, now. Because you know, the trade was going on. But by my mother's family, this was, you know, a trade.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** You know, in those years, a trade, it wasn't on such a high level.

**INT:** They had scholars in their family.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, all scholars, yes. So the scholarship, and so my father's family wasn't appreciated in my mother's family. Because it wasn't, like I told you, my girlfriend, the priest's daughter, couldn't marry. She fell in love after the war with a boy from the town, a peasant. Very handsome, beautiful, nicely brought up and everything. She couldn't marry him. Was a big adjustment. Just like a Jew and a Christian would get together. This is what it was going on. So in the Jewish groups, it's the same thing. So this is what it was with my father. But my father's family they were full of life. (laughs) They were dancing, they were singing. We used to go there.

**INT:** And he was like that, you said.

**ESTHER:** My father, yeah. Laughing. Always had a joke. Always a joke. And my mother **loved** him. Oy, she was crazy about him. And the respect she gave him, and the respect she told **us**. You know. We didn't even have to be told to respect. It just came. It was there.

**INT:** So your mother really loved your father, but you're not so sure about how your father felt about her?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. Maybe he was more shy to us, or something. I don't know. But my mother always, she sat on his lap, she hugged him, she kissed him, she was around. But his family, a lot of them didn't like the idea that my mother is in the family. So it was a lot of, they used to instigate the kids and this and that. So you know, like a family. But it worked out.

**INT:** Were your parents affectionate towards the kids? Was there a lot of hugging and kissing between your mother and the kids, or your father and the kids?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah, I think so. My mother especially. I don't remember my father. My father stayed away. He had to do with people, and you know. People used to come

from the buses. They wanted to buy some wood or shingles, or you know, or for the mill, for the sawmill. My father knew wherever, he was like the Yellow Pages.

**INT:** He directed everybody?

**ESTHER:** He was like the Yellow Pages. I mean it. When I think back now, he was like the Yellow Pages. If they wanted to know something, you ask Avrom. And he was stupid. He was telling everybody without getting a commission. And finally he got a little bit smart, because my mother started, "It's time-consuming, you're not helping me here, and I'm left with everything, and you will get out of there, you don't be everybody's good-doer," because some people were hitting it right, and the ones who hit it right, you didn't hear a word about them. The ones who didn't hit it right...

**INT:** You heard about it.

**ESTHER:** You heard about it. What did she need that? She says, "If you can't have something out of it," I mean, he had to provide.

**INT:** Who do you think had the power in the family, between your mother and father? Who do you think really ran things?

**ESTHER:** I think my father was. (laughs) Oh, yeah, he was up there. My mother was the doer.

**INT:** But who had, who made the decisions in the family, do you think? Your mother or your father?

**ESTHER:** My father. That was bad, because my mother always said, "Look, we have beautiful children. We have smart children. We are blessed by G-d." I remember her saying at night. "Why can't we move to the city? They have better schools, they have more to offer. Let's move out of here." But my father was afraid to move, because there was the house, and there was the income, you know, the livelihood, and he was comfortable, so he didn't want to move. But my mother was willing to take...

**INT:** She was willing to go.

**ESTHER:** Oh!

**INT:** Take it all and go.

**ESTHER:** (Laughs) That's all, she was willing to leave everything.

**INT:** Was she fed up with the life, do you think? She was tired of working so hard?

**ESTHER:** No, no, she was just... no, not her. She just, she didn't see the good future for the kids there in that town. She wanted the kids should be more educated.

**INT:** The girls, too?

**ESTHER:** The girls, too. Yes. Yes. The girls had to know, and we should go to the city, and why can't we go to the city? We are going to live in a smaller place, the kids are getting bigger, they'll start to work a little bit. We'll manage. Let's go. Let's go. He always changed the subject. He never wanted to get into it. So what can I tell you? We missed out a lot.

**INT:** What city would she have moved to?

**ESTHER:** To the same city she was in.

**INT:** What was that?

**ESTHER:** Arad. It was a nice city. Very open city, very elegant. It was a German city, and a lot of Jews. And it was a lot of education. And all, everybody was...

**INT:** A lot of music, I heard. There was a lot of music going on in Arad.

**ESTHER:** In Arad?

**INT:** Musical culture, and education.

**ESTHER:** Everything was going on in Arad. Swimming. I was there after the war. (laughs) I just wanted to see why my mother was always anxious to go back. She always talked, she said, "I lived with the..." how you say, with the geist. How should you say?

**INT:** The soul?

**ESTHER:** "With the soul, what they gave me in there. I lived, and they were so good to me, they were so nice. The people were so nice." And she said, "That's what I have in me. That's all I have. With that little bit, it makes up to go on in life." That's how she always talked.

**INT:** She always wanted to go back there?

**ESTHER:** Because she was twelve years old when the family took her there. She was, you know, an orphan.

**INT:** Her mother died.

**ESTHER:** She was an orphan. And there were two more left unmarried.

**INT:** Was she the oldest?

**ESTHER:** Youngest. No. There were two older than her.

**INT:** Did she have sisters or brothers? A sister and brother?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. They lived in the same town.

**INT:** Okay, so you had a relationship with your aunts and uncles.

**ESTHER:** Oh, very good. Especially me. Yeah, I had a...

**INT:** Why especially you?

**ESTHER:** Because I have an aunt, who unfortunately in the First World War, the husband went into the army, and she never heard from him again, and she had four kids. Two girls and two boys. And the two girls died, and she still didn't hear from him. And she had these two boys to bring up.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** So my aunt lost her two girls, and she still didn't hear about her husband. And she struggled with the two boys. But she wasn't a widow. She was an agunah, this is in Jewish, somebody who...

**INT:** Oh. You don't know where the husband was. She can't get married again.

**ESTHER:** She cannot get married. She couldn't remarry.

**INT:** Because there's no proof that her husband's dead.

**ESTHER:** No proof. And her husband was dead or alive, and nobody could tell. Anyhow, she was in big troubles. So what did she do? She took care of this house very diligently, and she was knitting. From that she made, for the peasants she used to. And she was a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful woman. Educated. I don't know how she got it. She must have been a little older, and maybe she was older and her mother was still alive. So maybe her mother was doing something for her, because she was very sophisticated, and very educated. And she used to pray **every night and every morning** three times a day. Very religious.

**INT:** What was her name?

**ESTHER:** Her name was Baba. Baba. Her name was Miriam, but she was named Baba, because she was very sick, and Baba is an old woman, so they called her "Old Woman." Well, she didn't know what to do. And you know what she did? She used to go and clean for people, wash the clothes. Could you imagine, in the town? Nobody

should know. And Shabbas, she used to go every Shabbas to shul. She didn't care (laughs) you know, if it was the trend, or it wasn't the trend, she was going to shul. And she used to dress up very beautiful, and all the kids who were in shul Shabbas, she used to tell them -- girls, mostly girls -- to come to her house. So from the little poor thing that she had, she used to bake challah herself, you know, and slice up a big challah, in little small slices, and dry it. And prepare tea. So she didn't have money for tea. Tea was expensive. So she used to take brown sugar, brown it, and make like a tea scents, you know? And in every, she had water on the oven, and everybody had tea with challah, you know. But she put some jam on. Everybody had a little slice of that toast. And she was a **tremendous** storyteller. And she used to, I wish I would have been more there, you know, with her. I could have learned something. And she was alone. She was frightened. Maybe sometimes, maybe people wanted to rape her or something, and she was scared. So she used to ask my mother to give her a child, to give her somebody in the house, because she is so alone. And my mother felt sorry.

**INT:** Where were her boys? She had two boys. They were grown up already?

**ESTHER:** They were already in the yeshiva. They were in the meantime maybe twelve, thirteen years old, they had to be away. And she was scared to be alone. So she used to always ask for me. She liked me to be there. And I used to be there as much as I could. But I wasn't too happy, because I wanted to be with my sisters, with my brothers, you know, all that rigmarole that I was missing. (laughs) It was so **quiet!** But I enjoyed it. You know, it was very good. After a while I used to come voluntarily. Because I liked it, it was good. And I had such a special treatment. They always, my aunts used to think I was so beautiful, and I'm such a fine girl. Always telling me that.

**INT:** Always telling you that? Great.

**ESTHER:** "You are so...Oh!" And one of my aunts, I used to sit down and talk to her.

**INT:** Also your mother's sister?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she used to go, "Pooh, pooh. Ah! I can't look at you. You are so gorgeous."

**INT:** (laughs) That's great. You like to hear stuff like that.

**ESTHER:** I didn't think I was gorgeous. (laughs) I was so thin. You could see through me. But they all, you know. So they gave me, because I had a little private treatment, because there everybody, (laughs) you know, you weren't even noticed!

**INT:** You weren't special at all.

**ESTHER:** No. Everything, you know, you just do what you have to do.

**INT:** What town did she live in?

**ESTHER:** In the same town, yeah, in the same town. And she lived in my grandfather's original house.

**INT:** What kind of stories did she tell? You said she was a good storyteller.

**ESTHER:** She used to take the girls, people to the cemetery, and to the dancing, and to the, I don't know. She must have read Cinderella, or maybe she knew some...and she used to take us through the woods, and through the cemetery, and the people used to come and grab, and you know, here it was almost dark. But the way she put you, you thought you're right on top of it, you know. Oh, she was a **special**, special storyteller. And her son, one of her sons, was the same thing, because he moved to Israel, and he was the Rosh Hacol in a big town there, in Ramat Gan, Ramat Eliyahu or some place. I know he was also a very excellent storyteller. The son.

But to her husband, you know what happened? She lived alone all her life, and the older son grew up to be a wonderful person, and the younger one wasn't a good one. He was, something was wrong with him. He always came to Mama to get him out of troubles. He always was short on a day and short on a week. (laughs) He wasn't, he wasn't...what the other one was. And the older son that grew up, he got married very young to a **wonderful** person, and she kept my aunt like her mother. And my aunt used to keep her like her child. She was very fond of her.

But after the war, my cousin got a letter from his father, from Russia. He found out that his son is living. And he is living, too.

**INT:** The father? The husband? He was alive all that time?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And he got married in Russia.

**INT:** How could he get married again?

**ESTHER:** Because a man could get married, you know.

**INT:** But he was already married.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, but that doesn't matter. He was in Russia. And he settled there with somebody. And he married, had kids, I think, two kids. And my cousin didn't answer him, because he felt that what a joke it was, you know, making a joke of his mother's life like that, and she could have married **very** well, because first of all, she was Vigdor's daughter.

**INT:** She was beautiful.

**ESTHER:** And she was **gorgeous**. My sister Lily looks a lot like her, but she's not, she wasn't as tall. Very sophisticated. Not only beautiful, but you know, sophisticated looking.

**INT:** So he destroyed her life, basically.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. But you know something? Here it is. This is what I want to say. She entertained the kids. She made her life happy. She was working. Even though she didn't do the work which it was proper for her, but she shouldn't have to come to anybody, anybody should give her. She was working, she was doing menial things. And she tried to hide, people shouldn't know, because it was beneath her level to do these things, because she was well-versed. She had so much to offer. And she could have married anybody from that town, would have been happy to get her, because she was really an asset, because her house was **spotless**. And the way she guided herself, and always with a smile. Nobody knew.

**INT:** So she didn't sit around feeling sorry for herself.

**ESTHER:** Never, never. And if she could do something, I remember where we had a house, once a year it was something very, very big. They were coming from one end of the state, so to say, to a church. Like, you know, they were marching to that church, every, Suenta Maria. It was a big church, and every year they used to go there, you know, the holy people. And they used to take out the churches, and every town was represented, and they all used to pass our house, they had to. So we made good money. That was a good day, it wasn't raining that weekend, (laughs) we were cleaning up for the whole, at least a half a year we could live. And she used to come up and help bake and prepare, because it was a big to-do to prepare.

**INT:** Were your mother and her sisters close? Were they close?

**ESTHER:** Very close, yeah. They were close, but it came a time because my aunts didn't agree that my mother should be in my father's hands, in my father's family, and even after we were together, she had already two kids. (laughs) They thought, my uncle who lived, was in America already, he sent 100,000 lay, for my mother.

**INT:** How much is that?

**ESTHER:** It was a lot of money. Like now, \$100,000, maybe a little more, she should divorce my father. After she had the two kids.

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** They were very much against the whole.

**INT:** But why? Oh, because he was...



**ESTHER:** Because the family, they wanted that my mother should be really cherished and put on a high pedestal that she married into that family, and they, you know, this is what it was. It wasn't my **father**. It was his family that was very much. A family could do a lot of things, you know. They could do a lot of good, and they could do a lot of bad, you know. So under the...

**INT:** So this aunt was, so that was a special relationship you had with her. What about grandparents? Did you have any grandparents alive?

**ESTHER:** I had only my grandfather, what I told you. This Vigdor. He didn't know my name. And I didn't go to see him anymore.

**INT:** But your other grandfather...

**ESTHER:** No, they were all dead. They were all dead from before the war. They didn't live so long. She lost her husband. She had nobody. And she lived alone in the house, and she had to plead to my mother to send her down a kid to be with her, she shouldn't be, you know, she probably got once in a while so...

**INT:** Scared. Sure.

**ESTHER:** And when I came down and I slept there, she made me feel (laughs) like I'm the only kid in the whole world. And I liked her, you know. She really liked me. And she used to do for me, knit me little things. Maybe she said with me a lot of prayers, and she talked to me a lot. Maybe that's something.

**INT:** Why were you chosen to go? She wanted you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she always wanted me.

**INT:** She picked you.

**ESTHER:** I don't know why. Always me. They all wanted me. The whole family wanted me all the time. I don't know. Because the other ones were more aggressive. I was more, you know, more quiet. I'm the quieter of them all. They are more, you know.

**INT:** They were louder, or...

**ESTHER:** Louder. Not loud, but more moveable, more...my sisters, they were...

**INT:** More emotional, or more...

**ESTHER:** No, running on the ice, you know, with the shoes. Skating.

**INT:** Active.

**ESTHER:** Active, yeah.

**INT:** But you weren't. You were sitting at home.

**ESTHER:** I was afraid, because I was so thin. And I was always a sickly child.

**INT:** You didn't eat. You said you weren't a big eater.

**ESTHER:** I didn't, none of us, we didn't eat. We were very poor eaters. Some of them ate a little better. But they were going on the ice, and going on the trees, and tearing out the fence, and running after the boys. You know, and (laughs) you know. It was, you know...

**INT:** Lively.

**ESTHER:** And I wasn't like that. I was more, you know. But I was very angry as I was growing up that they didn't teach me. I was so to say on the mountain of everything, and nothing was given to me.

**INT:** What were you missing?

**ESTHER:** They could have taught me a lot of the Hebrew schooling, you know, of the Talmud. It would have been very interesting. I had to do it on my own, you know, and start up, and it was embarrassing. Because when you are grown up, you want to know already something, and I didn't, and I studied. I didn't study, you know, I just tried to get into something.

**INT:** Could you read the Hebrew letters?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I read. I read, sure. I read the siddur.

**INT:** But when you were a child, did you learn that? No. Not even that.

**ESTHER:** No, no. Nothing.

**INT:** But the boys were getting woken up for cheder.

**ESTHER:** In fact, I was writing Yiddish, writing pretty well already. But I got away from it, and now it's, you know. See, it's good when you are very young, that you start it up, then it stays with you better than as you pick up things when you are older.

**INT:** What languages do you speak now?

**ESTHER:** I speak Hungarian, Romanian...

**INT:** English.

**ESTHER:** English. Jewish. I speak it.

**INT:** At home, what did they speak?

**ESTHER:** At home, by us? Mostly in the house Jewish and Ivrit. Not Hebrew. Ivrit. You know, anything my mother wanted to talk to us, the peasants shouldn't know, or somebody, she used to say in Ivrit. My mother was very...my sister Lily, she's like that, too. And I think COSKRM's like that. Look, she picked up Polish. She went to school, she studied, and she never...I don't speak Polish. She never heard Polish in my house. But she thought she has to have, so she went to school there, while she was doing, and instead of having a rest or something, she went to another class there. Picked up a little, you know. Now my sister was very, my sister Lily, she's very good with languages. She speaks Polish, too. But she learned in camp, in concentration camp.

So this is really, the town was pretty, like I said, my aunts didn't accept my mother's family too much. But as an individual, it was okay. Like she used to say, I remember I came down with my two sisters on a Shabbas. (Laughs) They said, "Avrom's maidens are here." You know, I don't know if you speak Yiddish. You don't speak Yiddish.

**INT:** A little bit. I just understand a little bit.

**ESTHER:** So that means, Avrom's **girls** are here. You know. It was, you know. It wasn't "Malka's maidlach," you know. So (laughs) it was a stigma there. That's why I say the religion created an awful lot of things. Instead to incorporate. Later on it came up a little bit more. See, it started already with, not the Baal Shem Tov, what was his name? I can't think now. He was the one who united the Hasidim with the...lower levels, so to say.

**INT:** But there was still this stratification between the scholars and the crafts people. And the workers.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The workers, yeah. Well, it was three stages, really. It was the skilled, the highly skilled had the level in society, the higher, the upper skilled. But the lower skilled, they didn't have a place in society. They had to marry the same thing, and the same intermarry with the same thing, and the same thing. And if G-d forbid, somebody got into it, you know, by mistake, you paid a price for it. It was always reminded that you are not in the classy society. Even though the high society was as dirty, as rotten as you can think of them, even though they had their own shortcomings like all the other people do, but they were on the higher level, and they took positions, and they told you what to do, and you had to do it, and if you didn't do it...

My mother had a sister, but she lived very far away. Deep in Romania, close to Bucharest, to the city. And one of her sons was a doctor, dentist. He learned in the royal palace. He was practicing. He was really very smart. And he married somebody from the town, a cousin. And the times got so bad in 1936 -- which I remember, I was very

young at the time -- in '36 they had to leave, '37, they had to leave that place, because on our side, it wasn't so bad. You know.

**INT:** What side were you on? East or west?

**ESTHER:** We were on the Hungarian side. So they moved out of deep Romania, and they came, settled in our town. Now, we needed a dentist anyhow, so he was doing great. So, but why did I came to tell you that?

**INT:** About the sister. Something about your mother's older sister.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah, so he moved into the town, and his wife, because she was living in Bucharest, it was a big city, and she worked in the royal palace, you know, she was, her husband was working in the royal palace, so it was a big, she isn't going to wear a sheitel.

**INT:** Right. She's more modern.

**ESTHER:** With no hair at all. She had to be, you know, she wanted to be. But she was very religious, and so was he, because he studied in my grandfather's caboodle there. (laughs) Sorry. And she came to the town, and she had her hair, she wore a sheitel, but she had some hair in the front, only. Well, it was a federal case. It was a shul scandal. That she goes with her hair out. And she should cut her hair. I remember that. That was a **big** fuss. They really hunted him.

**INT:** Who was protesting? The women, or the men?

**ESTHER:** The men in shul, sure. In shul, the messages were coming out, not from a paper, not from a book. Everything came out from the shul, and everybody went to shul in the morning and brought back the news. See, the news was read to you, or explained to you, and you had to go according. So really, we were like a commune. A little commune there, you know, with the James Jones (laughs).

**INT:** It wasn't **that** bad. (laughs) I don't think you would have taken cyanide.

**ESTHER:** No, I'm taking that back. I just say, it was very, very difficult. Very difficult.

**INT:** You had to tow the line. You had to follow what they said.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, you had to follow everything. Even if it was going against you, against everybody. You see, the problem was that if one is rebelling, the whole thing might pull up, you know. So you are out of the...So it was very difficult. You had to live there, and we were pushed down, and that's why my mother was always begging my father to move out, because in the city you could do what you want to do. And you could **still** be religious. And you know, my mother used to say, "Why do we have to build a sukkah that we shouldn't see any light through it? A sukkah's supposed to be built with a

little light in between, you know, so the wind shouldn't blow the light out. But if you keep everything so tight, it will go out, we wouldn't even know where we are standing, which way to go. You have to expose the kids a little."

And she saw the war coming. This is what I can't figure out. Why did she, at such an early age? I remember way back, before the war, before anything had started, she said, "You never know. This is going to be a big problem for the Jews."

**INT:** How did she know that?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I can't figure out. Who, what and when. I don't know how she had time to **think**.

**INT:** She saw it coming, though.

**ESTHER:** She wasn't listening. She was thinking all the time. She really was thinking. Because otherwise, how could she tell? How could she know all these things?

**INT:** Maybe from the people coming through. She talked to the customers, and she could get an idea of what was happening.

**ESTHER:** Maybe, maybe, maybe. Those big rabbis.

**INT:** Your father didn't see that there was trouble coming?

**ESTHER:** He wasn't tuned into it, no. He had his jokes. His people. Everybody schlepped him here and schlepped him there, and everybody wanted to talk to him, you know. He was happy. He wasn't a miserable person. Very happy.

**INT:** But your mother was more thinking. Contemplative.

**ESTHER:** She wanted to share. She saw the world **outside** of that little town. And she had to settle in it. You know. And I'll tell you, a lot of very smart people come out of there. I'm not talking about my level. I'm talking about, there are a lot of people. Look at Elie Wiesel. He was in the same...

**INT:** Sighet. Wasn't he born in Sighet?

**ESTHER:** Yes, right. About sixty kilometers from us.

**INT:** Not far at all.

**ESTHER:** Then it was.

(PAUSE)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with a survivor. It's May 5th, 1996. And I was wondering if you could continue and tell us about your experiences during the war. You spoke a little bit about how things were getting very difficult, even before Hitler came to power. People coming into your grandmother's house.

**ESTHER:** To **our** house.

**INT:** Yes, to **your** house.

**ESTHER:** To our own house.

**INT:** Right. And attacking.

**ESTHER:** My grandmother was gone, way, way.

**INT:** I'm sorry. In your mother's house. And I wonder now if you could tell me what happened from 1938 on, or when...

**ESTHER:** Well, 1936 we had this, that they invaded, they broke into our house. I mean, they came, two big truckloads of these Cuza and Goga. They were going for that, it was a very reactionary organization, that their motto was to kill the Jews. That was in 1933 it started already, but in 1936 they gained a lot of power, and they were running to win again. But they didn't. But till it was established that they didn't win, they were doing a **lot** of damage. A lot of killing. A **lot** of killing. And as a matter of fact, the week before they won, we had to pack and leave the town. And we didn't know where to go. I mean, it was...and I remember facing the wall. You know, I said, "Where are you going to go?"

**INT:** What year was that?

**ESTHER:** This was in 1936.

**INT:** This is before the elections?

**ESTHER:** Before the elections. Before Cuza and Goga's elections. And it was a terrible thing, and they said, "We'll go." And if you haven't got where to go, it's too bad. They're going to shoot and kill just like they did in other places. But we were lucky; they didn't win. The Democratic Party won. And the fact that they didn't win, we could stay. But we stayed till 1939, and then the Romanian army was occupying all those mountains there, because they knew the Russians might come, or the Hungarians might come, so they put up all kinds of resistances. So where we lived on those crossroads, these soldiers were coming and coming. You know, day and night, you heard (makes marching sound). You know, only footsteps, footsteps. And finally it stopped, by 1940. 1940 the Hungarians started to, Hitler came and made order, you know, said the Romanian Jews should go to Germany. The Romanians said, "We cannot give our Jews, because we know what to do with them." Because they had already shown their...

**INT:** Anti-Semitism.

**ESTHER:** Their ability that what they could do with their Jews, so it's no use to take them out, because they knew if Hitler takes them out, they'll have their money, their valuables, their everything, and the Romanians weren't stupid, you know.

But in 1941 the Hungarians came in. The Romanians came out, and they went back from where they were coming, to (?), you know, to the main Romanian cities. And the Hungarians were conquering, because Hitler gave -- this Transylvania was the name of it -- gave it to the Hungarians. Took it away because the Romanians didn't listen to them, you know, and it was a skirmish there. So they gave back this place. Because this place was Hungary till 1985. 1885. It was Hungary.

**INT:** It was Hungary, and Romania took it over.

**ESTHER:** Romania took it back. And in 1941, '40, the Hungarians took it back. I mean, they gave it to them back, for prices. And when they gave it back we thought, we were so happy that the Hungarians are going to be, because our parents were telling us what a good life it was under the Hungarian regime. In the meantime, as soon as they came in and they covered, they started to bring the Jews in horse and buggies from around the Polish borders, passing them through our place, and taking them to the borders. I don't even know, I was a kid. You know, I didn't know where they take them, I just remembered they had to stay in the wagons.

**INT:** Who was taking them?

**ESTHER:** The Hungarians. The Hungarians. And then Czechoslovakia was also taken out from, the Czechoslovakians were occupied, and then the Hungarians got in there, and they were deporting the Czechoslovakians. But not deporting by train. It was just, you know, a little pocketful of things.

And then from 1942 till '44, it wasn't bad. You know, it settled. They were doing all kinds of dirty tricks, you know, with the Jews. Taking away business, penalizing them for every little thing. But in 1944, in March, the Germans didn't like the idea the way the Hungarians were conducting themselves, so they came in to support the Hungarian regime, which they didn't have enough power to do it the right way, the way Hitler had lined it up. And in 1944, it was that horrible thing that they took the Jews to Auschwitz. And it was a lot of, a lot of tsuris, you know.

**INT:** Tell me what was happening in your family, what was happening to you? And during these years, as the Hungarians were coming in and taking over, how did it affect you?

**ESTHER:** As the Hungarians were coming in, it was, they weren't beating. They weren't killing, you know, like the Romanians did when they were pulling out. But you know, whatever they could, they were doing, all kinds of...funny things. But not

dangerous. Not that I remember. Because I remember the soldiers were stopping over in our house. And my mother wasn't afraid, you know. When they came in to eat, or to make a stopover or something, my mother wasn't frightened like she was when the Romanians were pulling out. Because when they were pulling out they took everything with them, you know. We weren't sleeping home, even. My mother sent us away in the outskirts, you know, on the fields, there were little houses. The peasants had little tiny houses, and it was, we had to sleep there while they were coming out. In the meantime, the soldiers are passing by to the outskirts. They didn't have enough place through the streets to pull out. They were pulling out from the side.

**INT:** Oh, so you weren't safe.

**ESTHER:** (Sighs) Oh, I want to tell you, I was laying on one of those benches, sleeping on really, a naked, naked bench. By the oven it was a bench. No cover, no nothing. And all of a sudden these soldiers came in, the Romanian soldiers came in. And I remember, they went to sleep with that housewife, you know, with the owner of the house. Her husband wasn't there. They made so much tsuris there, you know. She had to sleep with all of them.

**INT:** Oh, gosh.

**ESTHER:** And I was there on the side, you know, a kid. 1940, how old was I? 1927 I was born.

**INT:** So you're thirteen.

**ESTHER:** Around thirteen, yeah. I must have been thirteen.

**INT:** So she was being raped by all these Romanians.

**ESTHER:** She, yes.

**INT:** And they didn't see you there?

**ESTHER:** And they saw me there, but you know, I was kind of, I was so narrow, so thin, that I don't know. It was dark in the room. Maybe they didn't see me or something, I don't know. Because they were just coming and going through with her, and going out. And they stopped.

**INT:** Who was this woman?

**ESTHER:** She was a neighbor of ours. My mother knew her very well. But they lived, let's say, maybe a mile away, not even a mile. A mile away. So my mother figured out that we are going to be safer there. In the meantime the soldiers are passing through there. It was a terrible thing.



**INT:** What were you thinking when all this was happening to this neighbor? How did you get through...

**ESTHER:** I was sitting there, laying there and just...you know, shivering. I couldn't even shiver because I was afraid they're going to notice that I exist. I was like laying dead there. And it was dark, see, no lights, no nothing. It was raining outside. So maybe they didn't notice me.

**INT:** Did you understand what was happening at that point?

**ESTHER:** I didn't. I didn't. But she used to scream at them, and tell them, and you know, but she didn't have a chance. She didn't have a chance even to get out of [bed].

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** '39, '40. Then it came, the Hungarians came. The Hungarians started up with horrible things, you know.

**INT:** What did they do?

**ESTHER:** Well, they started to deport people, to catch them on the street like dogs. You know, whoever passed on the street. And I wasn't there at the time. I was in Budapest. I had a brother who was in the army. And we didn't know how to reach him, because no mail was going from Jewish people. So I was figuring, you know, my parents, that maybe if I go there, I'm going...But it was a very difficult thing to do, to go, because in those times to travel it was already a no-no. But I had papers.

**INT:** This is still 1940?

**ESTHER:** No, this is 1944.

**INT:** Oh, okay. Well, what happened in the years from the time you were in that house?

**ESTHER:** It was quiet. It was quiet.

**INT:** It was quiet? How did it affect your family?

**ESTHER:** No, it didn't. It didn't. I would say we were going. It was very bad, it was rationing, and they confiscated everything from us. And the school...

**INT:** What about your business?

**ESTHER:** Oh, you couldn't. You couldn't have any business. I mean, the school was taken away. Not taken away, we couldn't go to school, because we had to pay them a

certain amount of money. And we paid a certain amount of money for maybe a few months, but then, and if you didn't pay, it was no school. It was nothing. It was very difficult. Those three years, I mean, the Hungarians really, they were pushing and shoving, and you know, you could be hit and killed, and they didn't say anything. But they didn't do it like en masse. They did it, you know, pinching you here, catching you there, interning you there, you know. You just heard things. And then you used to, I remember once, somebody came from the next town and told us that it's something very bad coming through, it's going to pass our place. We should, to hide the kids. You know, we heard it. And my mother said to my father, "Where should we hide the kids? In the basement? What should we do?" And they were so, so alarmed. But then it passed, you know? It was like a cloud going through, and then the sun shined a little bit. This is what **I** remember. It's a long time ago. (laughs)

**INT:** Did you remember what your parents were talking about in the house, and were they giving you any advice?

**ESTHER:** They were cleaning out our house all the time. Whatever we got into the house, and we started to arrange a little bit, to organize a little bit, it was taken out. Robbed. Always robbed.

**INT:** People would just come in and take your stuff.

**ESTHER:** You know, I came home once from my aunt. Everything was peaceful. I came home, the house was empty. **Nothing** was left there, nothing. You know, the bedding, the quilts, the...the minimum what we had, because we had a beautiful house, you know, before, but then it was robbed. All the time. You couldn't replace things as fast as they were robbing. And it was a bad place. My mother always said to my father, "We should move. We should move out of here. Go to the city." But then when I was in Budapest and my brother saw me there, when, it was in 1944, he said, "What are you doing here? You'd better go back. You don't know what's going on here? You don't know? Over there, by you, it's much quieter, it's much nicer." You know, because that's how much he knew, in Budapest. He says, "Come on, I'm going to organize." Here, the poor guy was breaking his head. Whom could he take, what could he do to send me back home? And to go by train, to put me on the train. It was impossible to go by train, because they could catch you. You know, because Jewish people were...

**INT:** Not allowed to travel?

**ESTHER:** Not allowed to travel.

**INT:** Under curfew or whatever.

**ESTHER:** Yes, sure. And whoever traveled took a big chance. And my brother said, "You'll do way better, because look how they catch the people here on the streets. Like dogs." My girlfriend, my cousin, she was in Budapest. I made a date with her to see her. I'm waiting for her. You know, and you never think that the same thing is going to hit by

you. I'm waiting and waiting and I say, "What kind of, what is the **matter** with her? I mean, wasting my time and letting me stay here, and she said for sure, and she yanked me to come and I should be there. And she's not here. What happened?" She was caught and deported. And I didn't know till later on, you know, when my sisters were going there and everybody. But I got stuck in Budapest.

**INT:** Okay, but before we get to Budapest, I want to try and fill in those years. Are there any other stories you can tell me of the years between?

**ESTHER:** Well, there were a lot of tsuris, because my mother's head was split in so many pieces, and this was in 1936. And she was sick for a long time. Her eyes were kind of deformed, and she looked very...she was very depressed. She looked very depressed. And she used to look at us with such a sad way, you know. She felt she is going to lose us, you know? I could remember, she had that feeling that it's not going to take long that we're not going to be together. She had always like a premonition. She always saw things way ahead from other people.

**INT:** Right. You were saying that.

**ESTHER:** I never, you know, I can't figure out. How could somebody see things so far away? But not act on them, you know. And she was very upset.

**INT:** Did she talk to you about it? Did she talk to you about how she was feeling, and her fears for the future?

**ESTHER:** Well, she always said, "You have to do this, and you have to do this, and you have to learn how to work, because if you are going to be able to work, you're going to survive. Because if you're not going to know how to do anything, you are not going to be able to survive." And as a matter of fact, my two brothers, who were stepbrothers, but I mean, they weren't her sons, they were my father's sons. She made sure that they shouldn't sit and learn. And yet she was really from a learning background. Her family was very highly learning people. But she wanted them should learn a trade. Because she saw what life is bringing. So they should know something. So my brother was learning in a very, very good place, in my uncle's place, designing clothes. And that survived, that really rescued him.

**INT:** Which brother was that?

**ESTHER:** The brother from Brooklyn, Chaim Meir. And he had, they made him a place in Budapest, not in the camp where they were. In the city he had a room, with maybe six people working for him, and he was designing clothes for the officers' wives, and for officers, you know, when they get out of the military outfits. And he was doing so well that he used to send packages to his wife and child, because he was married. And he thought, you know, that he is helping them, but he didn't get answers. In spite of it, he still sent packages. And for a short time, she must have gotten them, but then they were

deported, and he still sent packages, he never knew what's going on. But he was doing very well, you know, because of my mother's far vision.

**INT:** Foresight.

**ESTHER:** And my other brother became a locksmith. The poor guy (laughs) was suffering, I mean, it was a terrible thing, very hard job. But she felt this is the only thing. Because the learning, the Jewish learning, is going to be good if you have a peaceful situation. But if it's a wartime, or a persecution time, if you can't deliver, if you can't do something skillful, you're not going to exist.

**INT:** And what was she telling the girls? The same thing?

**ESTHER:** The girls, that we have to be on our own. My mother wanted we should learn. She wanted me to be a hat maker, you know, a hat designer. My other sister should be a designer for clothes, my older sister. And the other ones were kids. I mean, she was just dreaming. We were **all** kids. So she was just dreaming about what would be good, because she felt if you work, if you are working people, you will survive better. And it was true. Because all those people who were learning, they didn't know how to do anything, and they didn't survive.

**INT:** Was your father also giving you messages of survival, or only your mother? Do you remember your father telling you anything, or telling the boys anything?

**ESTHER:** No, our father always made us do things, you know, for him. You know, the fathers in those times were the people who had the children to do things for **them**. This is what I remember. Maybe I'm wrong. My father could put me to do work outside which it was for a man of maybe 25 years. You know, to paint the bottom, or something, really like in the army. (laughs) I mean it.

**INT:** I remember he wouldn't let you stand at the window to watch, right? You had to keep busy?

**ESTHER:** Oh, you remember that? He took me here by the shoulder. I was six years old. "A little girl doesn't stare. Go in and do something."

**INT:** Go stay busy.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, busy. And my mother, in the summer when we had vacation, you know, we were home, my father used to wake us up to go. We should do this, and do that. My mother used to say, "Let them sleep a little more. Let them sleep a little more. They're going to work **plenty** in their lives. They'll have plenty of hardships. Let them sleep." You know, because she always said, that they let her sleep in the place where she was raised, because she was twelve years old, you know, her relatives. She told that that sleep gave her so much energy to go on in life further. Because there were no vitamins (laughs), and no special foods, and no...

**INT:** You needed your rest.

**ESTHER:** But if you rested, you were able to concentrate. You were rested, and she felt that we should have. We were growing fast, and we didn't eat.

**INT:** Would he listen to her?

**ESTHER:** Sometimes. Mostly not. He wanted, you know, he felt we got to do. But he didn't, he was always, like I say, the Yellow Page man. Anybody who came with the buses, he knew for **everybody** what one needed machinery, one needed for wool, something to produce wool, you know, to make it or something, to spin. You know, everything for industry. He knew everybody who could do it, who is willing to do it, and then he, we had forests. People used to come and buy shingles and wood for building, and everything, and my father used to know who has it. And who's going to make it to order. And my mother got angry once. She said, "Listen. I don't want you to be the Yellow Page," or whatever she called it something. The mediator or something. "You got to do something in here. And if you can't do something in here, you go there and you do for them for nothing, and then they are going to complain if they don't get the right thing. And if they have a mint that you don't know anything about it. So stop it." So I don't know what he did. But my father was very happy. He was very friendly, you know, very...everybody liked him.

**INT:** Outgoing.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Was he like that with you, also?

**ESTHER:** Jokes and everything.

**INT:** Was he like that with the kids?

**ESTHER:** With the kids, yeah. Once in a while. Not too much. He was too much involved with him, with the families, with listening in shul what's going on, and coming home with stories, what's happening, what's this. And what this woman is doing, and that woman, and you know, always something, you know, to learn from. (laughs)

**INT:** But during the war time, he wasn't giving you kids as much advice as your mother was.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Your mother seems to be the one who was really helping you.

**ESTHER:** We were always around her. Always around her.

**INT:** And you say she was very depressed after the injury?

**ESTHER:** After the beating, yeah. She was very. But one thing: she tried to hide it **so badly**. She was singing to us, you know, trying to. I'll never forget about the Serbs, and about, you know, the war songs. And she knew them all. And she sang with us, and especially Saturday night, before you light the candles, you know? We were there all together. She used to tell us stories, and she used to sing with us, you know. It was...

**INT:** She told you stories, too? You told me about your aunt that you were very close to, who also told wonderful stories.

**ESTHER:** Oh! She was a storyteller. She really. My poor mother didn't have too much time, because every minute she was interrupted. She had to work. See, my aunt didn't have a business. We had a business with a great demand. You know, people always interrupted, came and go, and you have to do the cooking for them. We had help. But to organize, to bring it in, to take it out, to bake the breads, and to...

**INT:** Sure. She was very busy. But your mother also would like to tell stories.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she would have told us more.

**INT:** If she had time.

**ESTHER:** But she had no time. She had very little time.

**INT:** And she liked to sing. And she tried to get out of her depression a little bit?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she tried. She hide it.

**INT:** Not to show it.

**ESTHER:** Now that I'm thinking. At that time I didn't know anything. But she used to stand like this (with a sad face). I was very observant on her, you know. It's not so good. My younger sister, too, Agie, is a lot like my mother. And you know, she's a little depressed, because she was younger than we were, you know? She picked up every little thing from my mother. The movements and everything. And then she got into the concentration camp when she was ten years old, and it was a terrible thing. So she really suffered a lot of depression.

**INT:** But what do you mean, you were observant of your mother? You were always watching her?

**ESTHER:** Because I used to watch her. I used to watch her, and I used to want to **do** something for her, you know, that I could see she suffered. Her head was always in pain. You know, she had 100 stitches on her. She was six weeks in the hospital after that bash-

up, and people died after they were hit in the house. Maybe two, three days later, they died, sure. And my sister Lily? She ran through the window, she broke the window. How old was she? She was four years younger than me, so she was nine years old. And the snow was so high. And she broke that window, she got out of bed. So that she cut her foot on the glass. And as we were running on that snow, I just saw black, you know? And I said, "What's going on?" I take a look, her foot is bleeding terribly. I say, "We got to go back." We were hiding there in an open space. Ah! I want to tell you. And my poor mother had to suffer, because they knocked her on the neck, on the head.

**INT:** But she was fighting them off. I mean, she was telling them to get out.

**ESTHER:** She was talking to them. Yeah. She was staying there and watching her kids, you know? Not letting go, you know. Another mother would have run out and left the kids there. She was there till the last minute. Everybody was running, but not her. And she got it. It's a miracle. It was a miracle.

**INT:** That she survived, yeah.

**ESTHER:** She was bleeding, when we came home we found puddles of **blood** on the floor. All over. You know, at night, if a cat was jumping off from someplace, we had cats.

**INT:** Oh, did you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. (laughs) They used to drop them off from the buses. Anybody had a bad cat used to put them (laughs) and the cats used to come to us. Anyhow, I don't know what to tell you. But really, I don't remember too much. I know, believe me, we went through. I know one thing. They confiscated from us **everything**, when the Hungarians came in. And they gave us rationing. And they gave us like a pound of bread.

**INT:** And you had no more business. You couldn't have a business anymore.

**ESTHER:** No. We couldn't have anything. No. We could not have anything. And it was so bad. It was **so bad**.

**INT:** Were they killing Jews? Were the Hungarians killing Jews, also?

**ESTHER:** They didn't kill as much. You know, catching them like dogs, here and there. It wasn't a massive thing. But in 1944 they were killing, and they were, you know, there was massive deportation, massive killing. Local killing. Out of town killing, you know.

**INT:** So up until 1944, you couldn't go to school anymore.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** So you were, what were you doing with your time?

**ESTHER:** Don't ask. We were hanging around, like on grass, you know, growing like grass without anything, because we were surrounded. You couldn't travel, you couldn't go. People couldn't come too much. You know, the Jews, if the Jews didn't travel, there was no business, anyhow. Because the Jews were doing the traveling, mostly. And it was very difficult, those two years, three years, oy, oy, oy.

**INT:** How did you get through it, do you know?

**ESTHER:** Very bad. We had a little garden by the house, you know? We had some land which we took care of. We had somebody who worked it. So we got some vegetables in the summertime, and we had our own wheat. And you know, you tried to do a little here, a little there. But really it was very difficult.

**INT:** But how were you coping, you, personally? How do you think you were coping with those difficult times? You were a teenager.

**ESTHER:** You know what I ate? You know what we ate? You should never know. You know, oatmeal is a very good food, a good cereal. But if it's processed. But if you take oatmeal and you just crumble it, and you don't sift through all that husk, all that...it's like needles. And we were baking bread out of it. And I want to tell you (laughs) if you ate two bites, you didn't want to eat no more. Because it stuck in your throat like needles, and you couldn't, you couldn't get it out, and you couldn't get it in. And my mother, should rest in peace, used to take barley. I don't know how she organized barley from someplace, and she cooked a big pot of barley with water, just plain barley and water, and we were eating it with a little salt. And that's it. That was the food for the whole day.

**INT:** But emotionally, how were you?

**ESTHER:** We were doing fine emotionally. We didn't fight. We weren't big eaters, that was a big thing, too. You know, we were very poor eaters. You know, other people like to **consume**, you know? You don't, lots of times I see people **eating**, you know? Non-stop. We didn't know that. As a matter of fact, when the people came into our house, and they brought, you know, food for themselves, because they didn't have the restaurants on the roads like they have them here, so they used to come into the house and unpack their things. And maybe buy a coffee, or maybe buy a fruit or something. And the kids from the neighborhood used to come in to play with us. So they used to go over there and smell and look at the food. And they used to give a little piece here. Then my mother noticed, and she said, "Look, you have to forgive me, but the kids who come to your table and you give them, I don't want you to feel they're my kids." Because we didn't even think to go over and look what somebody has, or to, we didn't accept anything. We were brought up that way. But we had enough food before all this horrible thing happened.

**INT:** Do you think the fact that you weren't big eaters helped you?



**ESTHER:** We survived. Yes. I would say so. Because you know, in Budapest, while I was on Christian papers, I was doing very well. I didn't have any problem with food. Never. Because whatever I found, I ate, it's good. And if I didn't eat, it was good, too. But I had a friend with whom I was together. She had her mother, and a little brother. She had her husband. I didn't even realize how much she could eat. Because she told me later on. I found once a potato. I don't know if I told you. And I cooked it, and I ate half of it, and I put away another half for her when she comes home to have something, too, to eat. Because we were working at the time. And when she came home, and I gave her the half a potato, she was crying. And I didn't know what happens. I say, "What are you crying? Magda, what happened?" She says, "I feel so embarrassed. I find things and people give me things, and I eat it all up. I never share with you. And here you are sharing with me with one potato." I say, "That's why you cry?" She was so honest with me, you know, she felt so guilty. And to me, I just found out then what she was getting and what she was eating (laughs) and I didn't even know about it. It never dawned on me that she wouldn't share with me. I thought she just doesn't have, and that's why she doesn't do it. But she really had, and so did her mother, and so did her brother. They were, you know, finding stuff here and there, never shared. Because they were big eaters. And she was almost dying, because she needed more food.

**INT:** But you didn't. So who do you think was giving you strength, or where were you getting strength from through those years? We're not in 1944 yet, but through the years when you were on rations, and you couldn't go to school. And here you are a teenager, and it seems like you couldn't go out much, either. Could you go outside?

**ESTHER:** I was thirteen. Yeah, almost fourteen. No, twelve, thirteen, yeah, fourteen. Fourteen I was out already. Gone.

**INT:** So how do you think you got the strength to get through that?

**ESTHER:** It was, I don't know. We weren't used to have a lot, you know? That was a big help, too, I think. I don't know really how it worked, because we didn't complain. We didn't feel depressed that we don't have. If we have, it's good, and if we didn't have it was good, too. And if we had, we always liked to share it with somebody else, which I think it was good, you know. And all of us liked to share, till today. You know, it's not such a thing that I have it. I'm always looking. And at the same time, if I see a lot of food -- COSKRM has a problem with me. (laughs) I put away a certain amount. Because if you have the whole food there, people go munch and eat, and they don't even know that they are eating. So what I do, I put meals out, you know. Regular meals. And the rest I cover up, put it away, and that's it for tomorrow. And my kids used to laugh. They laugh at it now. Because when I used to see they eat a little more than they should, I used to say, "I need it for tomorrow." And this is what my mother used to say. I saw my mother had a piece of bread, maybe a kilo, two pounds of bread? And you know, we were eight kids, nine kids. And she took for every kid a piece of bread she gave. And one piece I saw she puts under the pillow. And she didn't have one piece of bread. She didn't have for herself anything. And I said to my mother, "Why do you put the piece of bread there?"

Why don't you eat?" She remembered one kid was sleeping, and the kid is going to get up, and then it's going to be a terrible thing. She wouldn't have what to give the child. You know, it's a terrible thing. So she sort it out. She gave everybody a little piece so that you shouldn't faint, you know, you shouldn't. And then once in a while our neighbors were bringing in something, you know. But it was...misery. Misery. Terrible.

You know what I did? A woman offered me some potatoes. And you know, we had those ovens to bake bread? And they had these ovens from brick and they were round, you know? And the ovens had to be smeared out from time to time, you know, to go into that oven. It's like a...MRI. You know, you go into that oven.

**INT:** Yeah, long and narrow.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, but the bricks were falling, you know? And you had to smear out there. First take clay, dig up the clay, and with my feet I had to dig it, and I made it like clay, and then with a little light I went into the oven, with a pail of that clay, and with a pail of water on the other side, and just like this, smeared it inside. And I got a few potatoes. And I had what to, you know. Who would think? (laughs) My mother, I didn't even tell my mother.

**INT:** Oh, you didn't tell her. You just went to a neighbor's and did that.

**ESTHER:** G-d! She would have cried. She would have been out of her mind, you know.

**INT:** Was that your idea to do that?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my idea. Because I was very skinny. You had to be skinny to go in there. And to be able to turn around. Not everybody could do it. And I was doing. I used to do maybe two ovens a week. But then it wasn't all enough. (laughs) What didn't you do? You did everything, you know.

**INT:** So did your brothers go off to the army at this point? Or what happened to...

**ESTHER:** They were in the army already 1939. See, the Romanians mobilized them at eighteen. And they were in the army till **1945**.

**INT:** In the Romanian army.

**ESTHER:** No. It was the Romanians. The Romanians got them in in 1939. And then the Hungarians took over, so they became Hungarian soldiers.

**INT:** And they were safe even though they were Jewish, in the Hungarian army?

**ESTHER:** They weren't Jewish army. They were (Hungarian word) how do you say it? They weren't soldiers. They were the army, but in civilian clothes. They were like labor.

But under the military. See, the camps were the labor camps. But the soldiers, the Jewish young soldiers who were in the army in 1939, they got to be soldiers, but in civilian clothes, and they weren't sent to the front. They were just, you know, supplies, and tearing apart machinery, and cleaning up, and you know, they were in dangerous places, in the worst places. But they didn't destroy them, because they were good, they were help.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** They didn't train them with the army, with the military, how should I say? With guns. The Romanians trained them with guns, because then it was still a little quieter. But after that they weren't trained with guns.

**INT:** Okay. So they were gone already in 1939. So tell me what happened in 1944, then.

**ESTHER:** Well, in 1944, they started to mobilize the Jews. They built ghettos, and we had to go into the ghettos. And the fact that I was going to my brother before, you know, just to find out what's going on there, he should know what's going on by us. I wasn't in the ghetto.

**INT:** Oh, well what were you doing? What do you mean, you were with your brother?

**ESTHER:** See, the ghetto was organizing. And my mother, like I told you, she was always far-sighted. So she told me I should go and tell my brother, maybe he is going to be able to do something for us, we should not have to go to a ghetto. The ghetto wasn't formed yet when I was going. But it came in such a fast way, when I came into Budapest and to talk to my brother about it, he was looking, what am I doing? He really was alarmed. What kind of a joke this is, a young kid to come up here? What can she do? Nothing. "You get home as fast as you can." In the meantime, through that time that I was there, and my brother tried to send me back, the ghetto was organized already, and already to go in, and they were deporting already. So when I was almost ready to come home, the ghetto people were going through Budapest, you know? They were deporting already, they were emptying out the ghettos. So I...

**INT:** You missed it.

**ESTHER:** I missed it. But I was on Christian papers, because I couldn't survive.

**INT:** So wait. Why did your mother pick you, first of all, to go to your brother? Why not your older sister? Why you?

**ESTHER:** I'll tell you. I don't know, I was a little bit...I don't know, very reliable. Because in 1939, the Romanians, when they came off, before they came off, there was a lot of tsuris by us, too, because they were passing by and hitting everybody. So the military was in the town, and I was going to the commandant. I was then maybe eleven

years old. And I spoke to him. I said, "I don't know what's going on. We cannot live here. My mother was beaten up, my mother's head was split. We are small children in the house. We cannot live. We cannot exist. Can't you do something for us?" And my sisters will tell you that.

**INT:** You just went up to him and said that?

**ESTHER:** I went up. And it was maybe a mile, two miles away from us. And I waited for him. I told him, I want to talk to the Commandant. And believe me, nobody told me. I just wanted to. I figured there must be something. And they put up a soldier to stay in front of our house for two years.

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** Till 1939 we had somebody who was staying in front of our house, a soldier, watching for us that nobody should come anymore and you know, harm us. The real way, the way they used to do it. So I did it. And then it was something else. They were building a railroad in our town, and they were building it with the soldiers, with the Romanian soldiers. This is what they were doing. And the Romanian soldiers were living on the outskirts, you know, in the bunkers, in the trenches. But there were some Jewish people who had some money, and they came into the town. And where could they come? To us. Because we were selling food, you know, we had something to eat. So once I saw the Commandant coming, you know, the head of the army. I saw him coming with a horse and buggy, you know, a real fancy one, with two more soldiers. And I say to myself, these soldiers are in our house, and they are eating and drinking, and they are sleeping. It was in the summertime. And if they come from there, they might stop over in our house and find out that soldiers are in our house. So what do you think I did? I ran fast into the soldiers and I said, "Take off your military pants immediately, and go up on the roof. Because the Commandant is coming." And what do you think? They were hiding. It was a good thing, there were maybe six people. If the Commandant would have found them there during the day, you know, lounging when they have to be on the Chantier (sp?), you know, on the fields, it would have been a court martial. And I told them, I woke them up. And I told them to go there, and when the Commandant and the officers came, those three people, I told them, "Please, be quiet. Because my mother is sleeping. Her children are sleeping." (laughs) And I postponed, you know, and I didn't let them in. But what do you think they did? They were going to the backyard, to the stable and to all over. And it's a good thing I didn't let them into the house, because not all of them had the time to hide. It wasn't enough time. And they survived. So they bought me, they put some money out, and they bought me a gift. So my mother felt that I'm pretty much...

**INT:** Independent.

**ESTHER:** Not independent. That I'm using, that I see things coming, you know, like she does. Because I learned from her, because I was, I slept with her till I was twelve years old. I'm embarrassed till today to say. I **loved** her so much. She was so good. Really. She was something. Not too many mothers like that. I mean, every mother is a good mother, but she really sacrificed. She **loved** her kids. Nothing was hard for her.

Anyhow, this is, I'm catching one, but it's very hard, you know, to go back. You know, you catch one thing. Because I don't have to whom to talk about my experiences lots of times, because I was the only one who was in Budapest by myself from the family, because I was caught up there, you know? I couldn't come back. And by the time I, all the arrangements were made, the train was there. We were organizing to give them food, because we heard that the train, the ghetto is passing by.

**INT:** Okay. So this is in 1944. So what time of the year, do you remember?

**ESTHER:** This was, I'll tell you, it must have been the end of May? End of May, maybe June.

**INT:** Your mother sent you off to talk to your brother and see if there's a way that you could avoid the ghetto. And how long were you there?

**ESTHER:** Not to avoid the ghetto. We should get some messages. We should be able to, because there was no mail, nothing. To get some connection. And I got myself a job. I worked in Budapest.

**INT:** Now, wait. But first you went to your brother, and he said, "Go back."

**ESTHER:** Oh! My brother was running around like a chicken without a head.

**INT:** Is this Chaim Meir?

**ESTHER:** Chaim Meir, yeah. He just couldn't, he couldn't see what happens, where's my head, where are my parents' heads, you know, that a kid coming to Budapest. In such a fire, where they are catching people, and I'm not familiar with the city, you know (laughs). But you'll be surprised. When you are very young, and danger is behind your neck, you catch on real fast. And you do a lot of things that you don't even think, you know.

**INT:** How did your father feel about sending you off to the city?

**ESTHER:** My father, he didn't care. Not that he didn't care. He was...you know, when life is difficult, you have no time to think too much, really. You have to, you know, a man is a man. See, now the men are different. The women make them more involved with the children, with everything. In those years the men had to just, you know, he was the head of the house. And the kids had great respect for him. And the wife had to prepare for him the proper food, and the proper everything, he should look nice. And

represent the household. You know. And if he was a very, he was a rich guy, he was providing, too, if he was rich. But if he wasn't rich, he expected (laughs) the same privileges. Everything had to be the same.

**INT:** Because as you're telling me this story, your father isn't in the picture at all. It seems to be your mother predominates in the picture. And your father doesn't even seem to be there. And I'm just wondering, is that just how it was, that he just wasn't involved? Your mother was making all the decisions, it seems like, and giving all the directives.

**ESTHER:** She really worked. And my father started to work a little bit too, later on help out when my mother wasn't well, because she was hit so badly, you know. So he used to help out a **little** bit, but really, they weren't **trained** to help. They weren't trained to do something. They were learning, you know, going to learn, and that was it. And some learned more and some learned less. And it depends what school they were going to. But really to help out a family, to take care of a child, to nurse, my husband didn't do it. I don't know how much COSKRM knows about how much my husband did involve himself with the household, with anything. I don't think so. Because he went to work in the morning. I mean, he was a good man. He was working. And he wasn't a gambler. He wasn't drinking. But to get involved with the family, I was the one to drag them to school, and I was the one to see they go to school. I mean, he was for it, too, I mean, there's no question about it. He backed me up, you know. They never said, "I'm not going to school." It wasn't such a thing. But you know, there are families where the kids say, "I don't want to go to school." Then he would make them go. You know, they would be afraid of him. Which is good, you know. One person's there, you know. Because if you get involved with everything, they try to find little, go around you. But if they know there is nothing, there is black and white, there is no gray, keep it up, you got to be...so that was a statute, I think in my house. And that was maybe my father's house. My mother respected him. She **loved** him, and she was very affectionate about him. But I didn't see **he** should be.

**INT:** Right. It wasn't coming from him to her.

**ESTHER:** I don't think so. I don't think so. And my mother was generous with his two kids, too, because they had a picture, a beautiful picture of my father's first wife. And she felt it's the kids' mother. So she let it hang in that room. And you know, till now I say, she must have been very stupid. (laughs) You know, why did she do that? To leave it there. But she felt the kids, she didn't want...

**INT:** That was their mother.

**ESTHER:** She didn't want to take it away from them, because she felt she's going to do what she can. And see, these two boys, they respect my mother even more than we do. They feel she was a tzaddekes, you know? And my older brother? Ah! From Israel? He helped her with the kids. He helped her with everything. He was so good to us. Never did he come with anything, till today, he would do for us anything. But my mother was

good to them. But sometimes you are good to them, and they are not, they are dogs, you know, and you never know. But they were...they appreciated it.

**INT:** So now tell me what happened when you went to Budapest, and your brother said go back. Did you go back to your town?

**ESTHER:** No. I did not go back. I took a job. And I worked in a military factory, where they were doing knitting. They were knitting sweaters and socks.

**INT:** You're still as a Jew now? You're working as a Jew?

**ESTHER:** No!

**INT:** Okay, so you have to explain all that. What happened? Did you know your parents were in the ghetto?

**ESTHER:** Excuse me?

**INT:** Did you know that your parents were taken into the ghetto, and that's why you didn't go back? Why didn't you go back?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I found out, sure, I knew. I found out that my parents are gone, the ghetto is gone.

**INT:** Okay, but how did you find that out in Budapest? While you were in Budapest?

**ESTHER:** In Budapest? This is funny. There was an organization that they were handing out things, you know, nothing was sure. But we got, how did I find out that it's true? I got a card from my mother, and from my father. See, my father was taken away way before the ghetto.

**INT:** What happened to him?

**ESTHER:** He was taken away. And he had his money in the shoes put in, you know, saved, to have it saved. So they took him away, and we were left without anything. You know, there were a few dollars.

**INT:** The Hungarians took him?

**ESTHER:** The Hungarians took him, because he was a communist. He never knew about a communist. You know why they did it? They didn't want to have any opposition. See, if the men were there together, when the soldiers came, you know, the army came to get them, they were afraid it's going to be an opposition or a revolt or something. So they took the men away. So this was the first thing what they did.

**INT:** What year was that?

**ESTHER:** This was 1944. In April they took him. Because they came in March, originally. The fifteenth of March the Germans came in, occupied. And my father was taken, I think, the end of the month, maybe the beginning of April.

**INT:** Where did they take him, do you know?

**ESTHER:** Who knows?

**INT:** You don't know. You never saw him again.

**ESTHER:** No, never. (whispers) And...

**INT:** You don't know what happened to him.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I didn't see him. Oh, I know what happened. He got into the concentration camp.

**INT:** Which one, do you know?

**ESTHER:** He was in the labor camp. My sister could tell you in which camp he was. He was shot Sukkos, is the yahrzeit. Sukkos, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May. He was shot eight months, nine months before the liberation.

**INT:** Was he on a march?

**ESTHER:** He survived, yes. He survived, they took him to work. Because he was very well-preserved. You know, he looked good, very good. So they took him to work. And he worked, but then they marched.

**INT:** And his foot injury.

**ESTHER:** And his foot, see, you remember, yeah. When those people were knocking everybody out in the house in 1936, my father fell down in that, how you call it, that wire?

**INT:** Right. The barbed wire.

**ESTHER:** Barbed wire. And he tore his veins, and it was no penicillin, no nothing. So he was suffering on his leg for a long time. But he was managing. But too much, for such a long time. So they shot him.

**INT:** Because he couldn't keep up.



**ESTHER:** He couldn't keep up, yeah. So he was in the concentration camp. Sure. My father was.

**INT:** So they took your father away.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And my mother was left with the kids, and with everybody.

**INT:** And she sent you off.

**ESTHER:** She didn't send me off. I mean, I was off already. When my mother was in the ghetto, I wasn't home already. I was not with them.

**INT:** No, I understand that. She sent you to Budapest, and then your whole family was taken to the ghetto.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** Do you know where the ghetto was? Was it in your town?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Dragomaresh. Yeah. It was a ghetto. Yeah, sure. I knew the town, I knew everything. But they were saying that anything it goes on, it's true. But it wasn't. But one thing I was sure it's true. Because I got a card to Budapest that my mother is doing fine, and that they have pictures there about how they are plucking feathers. You know, they take off the feathers from the stem, and they are taking care of little kids. I had a picture. And signed her name. So what do you know? That they are some place taken in Germany, and they are sitting and plucking feathers, and they take care of the little kids. This is what I knew for a while. But you know, since I saw that train leave, I never stopped crying for one minute, for maybe three months. Endlessly.

**INT:** When did you see the train?

**ESTHER:** The train, that was in May, I would say it was.

**INT:** In Budapest? Leaving Budapest?

**ESTHER:** In Budapest. See, we thought, we heard that the train is passing by with Jews. The Jewish organization prepared food and everything. We came out to the train station to bring them to eat, because they are passing by. In the meantime, they passed. They didn't stop. And after that, you know, even though I got that card and everything, somehow I cried for three months, endlessly.

**INT:** Was your family on that train?

**ESTHER:** Yes. And my little sister, which I liked very much. She was at that time maybe six years old. **Beautiful**, blonde, with blue eyes and everything. And I dreamt that she is like in a casket, and my mother is laying next to her, after the train passed. I

dreamt. And that dream was every day in my eyes. And you know, I just couldn't forget it. I could not forget it. (crying)

And then it came out, and July I found out from a German guy that he's coming on vacation to Budapest, because he's working in Germany in a place where they are killing the Jews. They burned the Jews, and it smells there terrible, he told me. And he has to have a little fresh air. So they sent him out to Budapest. And it happened that I was in Budapest, where I was living, I got a bed, with one more girl. And there was an old lady who lived there. Very elegant people, you know, very nice. Her husband was in the symphony, playing in the symphony. And when I found out that, what's going on...wait a minute, it's a little late. I'm getting so...Found out from this guy. Oh, you know what happened? They were bombing Budapest constantly. And I was sleeping. In that day everybody who had disabled anybody, or an old person, was evacuated from Budapest to the outskirts, because the bombs were coming endlessly. And I didn't care, because what do I have to worry? I lived there, and where am I going to go, what am I going to do?

So during the night this guy who lived there, the son who was in the army, his wife lived there, too, but she was away with her mother-in-law. And he came at night, and he came to sleep with me. You know, and he smelled and whiskey. And he must have vomited or something. And I said, "Pebie, what are you doing? I'm not your wife. Your wife is gone." And he didn't leave me alone, you know. He just wanted to go.

So what do you think I did? I had experience from way back. I ran through the window. And I got into a house where there was a Jewish lady. She told me she's Polish-Jewish. And she kind of hinted to me that she is one of what I am. And me, stupid, I went in there to hide. And she was hiding her husband, who was a Polish guy who couldn't speak any Hungarian. She hid him there. So she got an idea for me, and I didn't know what she was thinking. She says she knows somebody who could hide me, and hide my brother, because where he was in that army camp, it wasn't secure anymore, because the Germans were bombarding there, you know, and they were taking them out and killing them slowly, you know. So she said she has a good place for me, to put me in a safe place. And I said, "Okay, it's wonderful. Tell me." And I was working at the time. "Tell me what." She says, "You come with me Sunday. I have a friend who owns a hotel. And he has a place out from Budapest, a house, that you could work there in the outskirts in that house, and you'll be like a Gentile girl helping out. And you don't have to worry. Your brother's going to come there, he could work around the house, too, and he's going to cover up." And I'm sitting there, she goes in to speak to this hotel friend of hers, and I'm sitting and waiting for her to come back, to see what's happening. She doesn't come.

So one of these fancy soldiers, a German soldier, comes and sits next to me and he reads, and very gentle, you know, very nice. And he starts a conversation with me. And I'm stupid, what do I know, you know? That this is what she's matching me up with. She brought me in as a call girl, you know, there. And I didn't know. See, later on, maybe a year later, I caught on.

**INT:** How old are you at this point?

**ESTHER:** I was already fifteen, maybe. Almost fifteen. And this guy talks to me very nicely. And I answer him. And he says, "Let's go for a drink." I say, "No. I don't drink." I say, "I have to wait here for somebody." He says, "Don't wait. She's not going to come." When he said that, I started to think: A drink? Okay, what can you do? He's a soldier, he was telling me this story how he's coming from the ghetto, from that Auschwitz, and how the chimneys are burning people, and it smells terrible. And they are burning the Jews there.

**INT:** He told you this?

**ESTHER:** He told me that.

**INT:** Did he know you were a Jew?

**ESTHER:** No! No! He didn't know.

**INT:** How was he telling you? Was he telling you in sadness, or was he telling you with horror?

**ESTHER:** Very sad. In sadness. In sadness. He was telling me in sadness. He told me that he needs some fresh air, and he likes Budapest, and the Duna is here. And I said, "Yes, it's a beautiful place." But you know, my mouth, my chin got like this, you know, when I hear what's going on. And what he was describing me what's going on, and how they were bringing them in and giving them showers. So I got **first-hand** information from this guy.

**INT:** Did you hear any of these rumors before?

**ESTHER:** Before? **None. Absolutely** none.

**INT:** So how could you, how did you feel? Did you believe it?

**ESTHER:** I just, then I didn't get any cards, I didn't get anything, and I saw they are still catching Jews, and it's still a kasha, you know. And the bombs were falling, and everybody's getting killed, you know. So you just try to think. And this guy says he wants to go across the street, and I go with him across the street, because I said, how am I going to say no? He's going to get me by the neck because I saw already that he likes me and he wants me badly, and he complimented me that I'm so pretty, and I'm like a flower, he was telling me. So I went there, and he ordered something to eat, because he was hungry. He wanted to order for me, too. Very generous, very gentle. And you could know how I felt to eat, you know, and how to have a drink. And I pretended, you know, that I'm eating. And then he said, "You know what? We could go for a ride through Budapest." And I say, "You have a car?" He says, "Yeah. I came with a car from Germany to Budapest." "Oh," I say. "You have a car." And you know, I was trained with people, so you know, I knew I have experience from before, and a little bit, you

know. So I said, "You have a car. Where did you park the car?" He says, "Not far from here. It's maybe a block from here." "Oh," I say. "So let's go for a ride." And when he went for the car, I took off my shoes, I turned over my clothes, I was going out from the house from there, you know, from this restaurant. And I went into a corner. I changed my dress. You know, I put it upside down. And I ran.

I was running, and then I said to myself: where do you **run**? It's that woman who put you together, who wants to help, you know. I think: I got to hide myself from her, because she's going to be in trouble, too. Because I put together right away that she was using me. She used me for her husband, not for anybody else. And I was afraid to go home. So I went to somebody else whom I knew, a different, an acquaintance. And she didn't know that I'm Jewish. I just said, I can't remember what I told them, that I'm...something happened to me, you know. Oh, somebody ran after me. Some crazy guy ran after me. All right. Some crazy guy ran after me. I couldn't go home. I was looking for another place. And I was in such troubles. And I started to see, how could I go and tell my brother what happened to me? Because I have told him, because this was Friday, and I was there Saturday in the camp to tell him. I used to go every day to my brother's camp, because I was a Christian, you know, so I could go in there, even though they were Jews only, you know, but they know that I'm my brother's girlfriend. You know, that I was his...So I used to go in, and I told him the big news that what I heard, and what's going on, and we might be able to hide or something. He didn't buy it. But I told him.

And I didn't know how to hide. Then I told my brother what happened. He said, "You should dye your hair. Dye your hair and do whatever you can. And don't go in that area. Move out from Pest. Go to another town or something." So what can I tell you? I didn't do it, but I was hanging around to another place. And this guy, I was so scared. You know, this woman was in deep trouble. I found out after. I came back after the war. I came back, and I wanted to know, you know, from acquaintances there, what's happening after. You know, I came back in 1947 to Budapest, to see what's going on. She was in troubles, because she said this guy, this hotel owner set him up, and there was a ganze kasha there, because he came to have a good time, and in the meantime, I played him out. They sent me with somebody and look what happened. She ran away. And embarrassed him. He comes with the car to pick me up, and where am I? (laughs) No place. So this was one episode, really, but it was very, very, that I found out that my poor parents, and everybody is gone. And I couldn't believe that I still have sisters who are alive in the concentration camp.

**INT:** But you didn't know that at this time.

**ESTHER:** I didn't know anything till after the war. I knew one thing: that the Jews who aren't going, who were deported, were killed. They cut off their hair.

**INT:** He told you everything.

**ESTHER:** Yes. They cut their hair off, and they gave them gas showers, and they burn them, and then they have to be carried away, the bones and all this stuff. And he says,

"It's a very hard mission." He had all kinds of medals. But very kind person. He was, he was telling me in such a sad situation, in such a sad way.

**INT:** He was horrified by it, or saddened by it.

**ESTHER:** Not horrified. He felt bad for himself that he had to be in a spot like this. You know. Nobody wants to be in a spot like this.

**INT:** When you got to Budapest, where did you live originally?

**ESTHER:** Oh, that was another thing.

**INT:** You're only 15 years old, right?

**ESTHER:** Fourteen. I was in...I got myself a place. There wasn't such a thing that you got a place to live. You got a bed to share with somebody. You know, you couldn't get the **whole** bed. There wasn't such a thing. So I found a place with another girl, which I didn't know her. And that place was such a bad place to live there. I didn't, you know, you don't know. You come in, just like my brother told me.

**INT:** But how did you even pick a place? How did you even know where to go? You'd never been to the city.

**ESTHER:** No, a lot of Jews were living in that area. But they were already, you know, they were trying. The Jews were in Budapest. They weren't deported till, taken away till...

**INT:** The very end, right?

**ESTHER:** Till November. So that was a Jewish area. So I was living in that.

**INT:** With Jewish people.

**ESTHER:** Not Jewish. They were Gentiles. And this place, what I'm telling you, the guy came to me to sleep with me, it was in the same place. But that area was like a very bad spot for young girls to be.

**INT:** And you didn't know that.

**ESTHER:** I didn't know. In fact, I came home once from work, and I said to my landlady there, I slept with a very nice girl. She was a sweet girl, very nice, educated girl. She was maybe 25 years old already. She wasn't married, so we were boarding. That old lady of the house, there were two beds, two double beds, in one bed, two people were sleeping, and in the other bed two people, she rented out. And she slept on the foot of the bed, of the beds. A very intelligent lady. Very nice, clean, everything was very nice. But...when I came there to live, when I came from work, it was dark already. And I

saw these women with short, tiny little skirts in the winter. It was cold. And with blouses, you know, and so **tight**. And all made up. And I thought, I saw a lot of men there, you know, where I was passing by to go to my home. And I said to myself, "Those poor women hang around there because their husbands are in the armies, and they come to meet them there." See, this is what I was thinking.

**INT:** Yeah. You were so naive.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. So I said to my landlady, "You know, Anosh Naynee, I don't know what's going on over there. I feel so sorry for those women. They're half naked, and they hang around on the street in the cold, and they have to wait for their husbands to come from the army, maybe to just meet them." Well, they were **laughing**. I mean, what did I know? That they come there to catch the guys? You know, to make business. I didn't know.

**INT:** You didn't know. How could you?

**ESTHER:** Listen, I came out...

**INT:** It wasn't where **you** came from, exactly.

**ESTHER:** There wasn't such a thing. So I lived there, where this guy came at night. He didn't sleep with me. He was, you know.

**INT:** He was so drunk.

**ESTHER:** He was drunk, and I got out of it. You know, I didn't need, you know, for my first time, with him.

**INT:** But how did you get a job, and how did you know? Was your brother helping you?

**ESTHER:** No, you'll be surprised. Between the Jewish people, it was a paper, you know, Hungarian paper. And I started to read, because they put ads, you know, for people who want to work. And I got from the ad. I followed the ad. And you know where I worked? From there exactly one hour it took me to get to work. **One hour**.

**INT:** An hour you were in Budapest, you got a job.

**ESTHER:** One hour I had to travel to go to the job.

**INT:** Oh, I see.

**ESTHER:** In one hour I came back. But it wasn't a bad job, because they trained me how to do the knitting, sweaters, and it was very interesting work. And I worked on

machines, you know, by hand. The machine had to go by hand. And I used to come home at night, I want to tell you. I had hands like two logs.

**INT:** Your arms were sore?

**ESTHER:** My arms were so sore. And I survived, you know. Then I moved out to another place.

**INT:** But wait a minute. I'm just having a hard time understanding. You're fourteen years old. And here you are in a big city with nobody to tell you what to do.

**ESTHER:** To supervise, to do anything. This is what I want to say.

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** How did I put myself to go for one hour on the streetcar, you know, the snow, the rain. The streetcars from the bombs, the windows were all knocked out.

**INT:** So it was freezing.

**ESTHER:** So the streetcars were open, and we were riding, and you know, lots of times I used to have shoulders full of snow on my shoulders, you know. And all around, till I got there. And the rain. In 6:00 I was at the train already. And you know, where I lived at that time, I couldn't even warm up a tea or something. You could just go out. When I got to the place where I worked, I got myself something to eat. I don't even know what. I don't even know how I **existed** with such a little, now I'm thinking. But then it changed. The bombs were falling, the times got, you know, it got worse.

**INT:** But wait, you worked in this place with this loom, this knitting mill.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. And I was paid.

**INT:** Uh-huh. And you're still as a Jew, or not?

**ESTHER:** No!

**INT:** Okay, now how did that come about?

**ESTHER:** Always. Because I had Christian papers.

**INT:** Where did you get the papers from?

**ESTHER:** My brother got me somebody to give me very good papers. He was a colleague of his place in the army where he was. And he wasn't supposed to sell those

papers. He was supposed to give it to people who tried to rescue themselves. But he sold them to me, for 500 pangos, that was a **lot** of money.

**INT:** Where did you get the money?

**ESTHER:** I worked. I worked, and I paid him out. And my brother had a few dollars, he helped me out.

**INT:** Did you have to change your name, your language?

**ESTHER:** Oh, sure. I changed my name.

**INT:** Do you remember the name you used?

**ESTHER:** My name was Annush. Roman Annush. And I came from the Romanian side, you know, like a refugee I was.

**INT:** You made up a story?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It was, well, it was a very real story, because I was from there, and they occupied, and a lot of people were coming towards Hungary who didn't want to be on the Romanian side. So it was...

**INT:** Sort of a true story. But you just didn't use your name.

**ESTHER:** It was a true story, but a different name.

**INT:** And what about your language? Did you have to change that?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I spoke the language. I spoke fluently.

**INT:** You were fine anyway, with Romanian and...Hungarian.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I spoke Romanian. One thing, we picked up languages. My mother was very particular we should speak languages.

**INT:** That's right. That's right.

**ESTHER:** She was very. She spoke many languages. She spoke German fluently, because where she was brought up, it was a German town. Practically Germans, in Arad there were a lot of Germans. And there were Hungarians, and there were Czechoslovakians, Yugoslavians, and there were Romanians. So she was on that border where Yugoslavia is, Hungary, and Romania. But it wasn't Hungary at that time. It was Romania all the way. But it was...

**INT:** But she knew the languages. And you were fluent in Hungarian and Romanian?



**ESTHER:** Yeah. I was very fluent. Very fluent.

**INT:** So when you were in Budapest you were speaking Hungarian.

**ESTHER:** I spoke Hungarian, and **nobody** knew that I'm not. I **never**, never did I have an occasion that they should stop me, because, or to question me, you know? I was once squealed on. This was in October, 1944. Because a lot of people were coming from the Romanian, Hungarian side, and were pushing up towards Budapest more, because they didn't want to be occupied by the Russians. They wanted to stay with the Germans. And that was a big problem, because like I say, we had this restaurant. A lot of people were coming and going in our house. And somebody came from our town, and she recognized me. And she was telling there the super. "She belongs in the ghetto. What is **she** doing here?" So I didn't know, but the super found out.

And here I have an uncle who lived not far from me. An uncle -- he wasn't an uncle, he was 100% casualty from the First World War. He lost his eyesight. And Hitler exempt them for the time being. And they gave me a lot of valuable things to hide in my place where I was living. Not already, I was already then in Buda. You know, I came out of Pest. I lived in Buda. And my uncle, I called him uncle, he wasn't an uncle. But he was Jewish. And he had a daughter, he was very friendly with me. And he was selling cigarettes. And you know, he had like traffic, how you call it? You know, he was assigned, you know, cigarettes had the monopoly. And they had that monopoly store. And from that store he used to give me all the time a few dollars, a few cigarettes to bring to my brother. And I used to sell it and get a few extra dollars for myself, not enough from the work. I didn't need it, because I made enough money at work when I was working. Because I picked up real fast, and I was making my norm, and it was okay. Like I say, we were trained to work (laughs) so it was no problem. You were just switching from one thing to the other.

But it was really...wait a minute. What did I say now about...Oh, my uncle, who was 100% blind...

**INT:** He gave you things to hide.

**ESTHER:** Oh, he gave me things to hide. And I was worried that if she is going to, you know, I'll have to move, I'll have to get out of there. And I started to take all those valuable things to my uncle, to bring it back. And as I brought one load of things -- it wasn't far -- I come back to bring the rest of the things, and they caught me. So they took me to the police, and they questioned me, and they beat me up (laughs) you know, they pulled my hair, they spanked me, I should tell the truth. I say, "I don't know her. I don't know who she is." See, if I would be a man, I would have a problem already, because, you know, if you are circumcised, they know already. But I was trained that if I'm not admitting, let them do. What will they do to me? They'll take me to Auschwitz? Let them take me. You know. If I'll say I am Jewish, they'll take me to Auschwitz.

**INT:** Anyway, right.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. So if they beat me up, maybe they wouldn't believe me, but maybe they'll believe me that I wasn't Jewish, that I'm not Jewish, that I don't know her, she doesn't know what she's talking about. And they released me.

**INT:** They believed you.

**ESTHER:** They believed me, and I was very...lucky, (laughs) because otherwise I would have gone to Auschwitz. Even though, in that time, the Hungarian, the Budapest Jews weren't deported yet. You know, they deported them at the very last. Just the Budapest Jews. And I was there. I knew all the ins and outs. It's too bad, you know, it's a little late at night for me to remember, but really, it was an awful. Then it started, a whole thing, you know. And (sighs) in October. Yeah, October the fifteenth, they started really the heavy, heavy stuff in Budapest. Because they were deporting. They deported already everybody from around Budapest, you know, from the small towns, from the ghettos. And Budapest was left. And they couldn't take it. They took Szalasi. No, it wasn't Szalasi. Oh, G-d, what was his name? See, it's no good so late at night, because in the daytime I remember better.

**INT:** Was he a leader of the...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The main leader. Not Szalasi. Yeah, it was Szalasi. Yeah, Szalasi, that's it. He was the one who reinforced the German government. Because the Germans felt, you know, we are strangers, so let's put a puppet government on. So Szalasi started to work it out. And he took the Jews. He put them in these one house, single houses. They merged Jews from all the other places, and they designated a certain area with houses. And in every house they put in maybe six families, eight families, as many people as they could push in there. And people were living there. And you could go out from 11:00 to 3:00, and the rest of the time, you were interned. This was already organized. But when Szalasi came, he wanted to do something else. All those houses should go into the ghetto, you know, to a big camp like. And he was killing the Jews then. Because Horthy was taken to Germany. They didn't think Horthy is doing a good job. Horthy Miklos.

**INT:** See, I thought Horthy, I thought he was the president.

**ESTHER:** He was the president at one time, yes. So Horthy didn't execute all the rules and regulations what the Germans wanted. So they took him into Germany and they held him there. But before that, he announced on the radio that the Germans are not our friends, and we are breaking up relationships with the Germans. And this was in October. I'll never forget. I was in the theater. Just, you know, it was a theater, and we got in on a Sunday afternoon. And they grabbed him, they took him to Germany. And at that time the Jews heard that Horthy, what he said, they were dancing, and they left the houses, and they came out at night, and they were celebrating. In the meantime, Szalasi came from

the back, and they got them. They took them to the Duna, they shot them. You must have heard of it.

**INT:** They dumped them in the river.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, they dumped them in the Duna. But I was not far from the Duna. And during the night I heard shooting, and knocking. And I said to myself: Oh, isn't that wonderful. The Russians are here. Everything is okay. Horthy got off from the Germans, and things are okay. In the meantime, I opened up the door in the morning, and I lived so close to the Duna, in Old Buda, it wasn't Pest anymore. See, there's Pest, Buda, and then it's Old Buda. That's close to the brick factory. And I lived there in the Duna.

**INT:** And the whole place is called Budapest.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. And the Duna, I take a look, because it was very close, maybe two houses away from the Duna. You could see over to it. It was a beautiful place. I take a look. People from both sides, you know, dead people. I said to myself, what is this? This is **tragic!** And I started to figure out, and I take a look, it's all with yellow stars, you know, the people. And I couldn't figure out what's happening. You know, you are young. You don't know what's going on. And when I saw what's going on, it was a terrible, terrible thing.

So I know my brother is in the camp there. And I fast ran to my brother to see what's going on, because I got already the message, you know, on the radio I heard already people talking. And I ran to my brother. And I say, "What's going on?" No, I went to my brother, and I want to see what's going on there. When I came there, they were all out. **Nobody** was in there, in the camp. And I saw a big Commandant, the head of the whole camp, which I have known him, because I was going in there for a year in and out.

**INT:** Pretending to be the girlfriend.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. He knew me as the girlfriend. Later on I felt it was a different story. And I come in there and I say, "Where's my boyfriend? What's going on?" He says, "Don't cry." Because I saw already it's a tragedy, because they attacked this place, too. He says, "I don't know. I think your boyfriend is smelling the flowers already from underneath. And all the other ones," he says, "I don't know what's going on, but I know 80 people got killed from here." All together was 160. "80 people got killed. We had them here." You know, they counted them. "And they don't know where the rest are." And I didn't know what to do. I said to myself: What am I **doing** now? Where do you go? Where do you stop? You know, what should I do with myself? My brother is gone. The people are gone, and I couldn't find him, and it was a tragedy.

Anyhow, I started to look into the army depots, you know, and they had camps where they were getting, they used to beat up the Jews, you know, when they found them on the

streets, they used to take them to a certain place, beat them up, and then from there they deported them. But at that time they couldn't deport them anymore, because the roads were broken, and it was difficult to deport them. So what did they do? They threw them into the ghetto, there was the ghetto already. And as it turned out my brother ran in with another person in a big barrel, not far from their camp. It was a big barrel, because it was a sugar factory, and they used to keep there all kinds of beets and things, you know, to ferment. So it was an empty one. And they fell in there. They threw themselves in there. And they waited till something is going to give. But they were there a day and a half, and they couldn't get out, because they were so weak, and it was so high that they couldn't climb out. So finally somebody came around, and they helped them crawl out of there. So my brother survived with another guy. So it was a relief, you know. Three days later I found out that he is alive.

**INT:** How did you find him?

**ESTHER:** I kept coming. I kept coming there. And then I saw a guy on the street, as I came out from my place where I had lived already. I don't know how many places I lived. All the time something happened, I ran out to another place. And I saw somebody who was at his camp, on the street. And I said to him, "What are you doing here?" I say. "Running on the street? Come in my house, in my place, till I find you a place where to go." I say, "You cannot hang around on the street like this." Because see, if you were of a young age, or you had to be in the army, or you had to be in the ghetto. So I took him in, and because it was such a revolutionary time, because Szalasi took over, and you know, the Jews were changing, and the houses were merging, you know, it was a whole revolution, because the whole thing changed in such a fast way. That was from October the fifteenth, three days, five days, it was a terrible thing. They were killing those people.

So what do you think? My landlady, by whom I lived, she was always away. She came home around 5:00. But because of that turmoil time, she came home at 1:00. And this Fritzie is his name, Fritzie was in my house. And I was getting the place with no guys, you know, not allowed men to come in. But he, what am I going to do? I mean, he had on his mind to do something, we should have love or something? And I come in, and she is there. And I see him. I got him an apartment. She found him alone there. An apartment, a bed. And she threw me out. So I was without a place. (laughs) And I got him a place.

**INT:** You got him a place. But you had none.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. But one thing, I never had a problem. They right away took me. Wherever I went, I never had a problem.

**INT:** Why?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. They always had a place for me. Really, it's a miracle. I didn't have a problem.

**INT:** You know how to talk to people to get them to believe you?

**ESTHER:** I don't know why. I don't know why. But I wasn't a dangerous person, you know. They sensed me. But what was I doing to anybody? Nothing. But maybe, I don't know, my personality or what, I don't know what it was.

**INT:** You're fifteen. Did you look like you're fifteen, or did you look older?

**ESTHER:** I looked older.

**INT:** Did you pretend like you were older?

**ESTHER:** I didn't have to pretend. I mean, I always was, put it up that I'm older. Yeah. I always tried to, you know. Oh, I would **never** say I'm fourteen, fifteen years old. Always, you know, eighteen, nineteen. See, you couldn't get a work book if you weren't eighteen.

**INT:** Yeah, I was wondering about that. How you could...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I got a work book. I mean, a false one. But I had to be eighteen. So I wasn't.

**INT:** But you easily passed for eighteen.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah, because I was tall. Yeah. And you know, they used to say, "You are like a kid." And I used to say, "How could they tell I'm like a kid? I'm so tall." (laughs) You know, I never remember people should call me a kid. Because I was always, "You are bigger. You know more. You shouldn't do. You know, do it for her, because you are older." Or something.

**INT:** Where was your other brother?

**ESTHER:** In the army. In the Ukraine. And boy, did he go through hell there. Oy, oy, oy. By the time he came home, after the war, slowly, he got liberated in April. See, the war was still going on. Because that area was liberated earlier. And he came home, naked. He was broken and sick, and everything. You know, so many years, since 1939 in the army, and from one place to the other, and then to the end, you know, like a Jew in the army. It was a terrible thing. So when he almost was home, he didn't have any clothes. It was in April. It was very cold and windy. So he found these bodies, you know, the Russian bodies on the ground. So he took off some German clothes and he dressed himself up, because he was freezing. So the Russians caught him. They thought he's a German. (laughs) Until he got through. They beat him up. He came home, he was so sick. He found, in Arad. He came to his wife's sister. Because there it was no persecution. It was quiet. You know, the Romanians were on that side. It wasn't a problem. So my brother came there, and she tried to help him out and to cure him. But he came home then to his town where he was living, and he didn't find **anything**. There

wasn't a thing, nothing. You know, the house, the walls were, you could see through them, you know? Because it had mortar in between, and the mortar was shaken off from the bombs and from fire, and whatever it was going on. So the wind used to blow in. And when I came home, this was maybe, I came in January, '44. January '45. January '45. When I came home, I took mud from the street, because I learned how to smear the ovens.

**INT:** The ovens, right.

**ESTHER:** So I knew how to experience, and I took, and I stuffed up the walls with mortar, and that's how I made a little home, a little place. It was a **terrible**. I'm telling you, after the war to me it was just as bad as during the war. Just as bad.

So in Budapest it was really, then it was Wallenberg. It came in. When was Wallenberg?

**INT:** He was in 1944.

**ESTHER:** '44. But this was before...the ghetto. Wallenberg was before the ghetto.

**INT:** Did you ever meet him?

**ESTHER:** Sure.

**INT:** You did? So can you talk about that?

**ESTHER:** Wait a minute. Was he before? Yeah, he was before the ghetto, because my brother was eventually out of that camp. Yeah. He was before the ghetto that I saw him.

**INT:** Before the ghetto in Budapest.

**ESTHER:** The ghetto was just forming when I met him. The ghetto just was forming. How did I meet him? He used to meet all these people who were on papers, or you know, who were hanging around. We knew, that's like a little haven, you know, he is doing something. But nobody revealed each other that we are Christians or something. Nothing. But they got the message. You know, you recognize your own people if you are putting in a lot of effort. So what he was doing is an awful lot of good things. He really organized. The people, they organized all the Jews, the men were mobilized in Budapest. And they were taking them to the other side of the Duna, you know, towards Austria. Because there was no more transportation for the Jews. I don't know what happened. It was cut off by the bombs, by something. So these people were marching. And when they were marching, he said to people, to other people, and he organized papers.

So how did I meet him? I was getting a big briefcase of papers, you know, how you go on the plane with a little briefcase? You know, they give you a little [one]? That's what it was. Papers from Sweden. That they are Swedish citizens. And they had Swedish

houses, you know, marked out. So what he did, I'll never forget. He gave me a briefcase, that if I see some blonde straight people, nice, young people, they are Swedish. And they don't belong among the Jews. This is what he told me. And you have to give them a paper. One of these. If you can, hand in these papers. So I'll never forget. It was rainy, in November. Very bad. Very bad. The beginning of November, the end of October. My sneakers -- I had sneakers -- the water went in, and it shoot out. And wherever I could I was giving a paper. And I helped out for the people. And what did he do then? As we were walking maybe another few miles, he called out, "Whoever has this and these papers should step over on this side." So the people had these papers, and he claimed that they are Swedish exempt. They are Jews that the Swedish government is, they are protected. And he had these houses for them. But it really didn't materialize till the end. It was a whole kasha, and I wasn't too much familiar, because I was young. See, they wouldn't tell me what they are trying to do, because I was a kid.

**INT:** And he didn't know you were a Jew, either, right? Or did he?

**ESTHER:** Oh, he knew. He knew. He probably knew very much. Sure. But one thing: they wouldn't reveal to me anything, what's going on, what they are doing. What did I know? Because you know, they squeeze me, they were afraid. I'm a young kid. But they felt that I could do a lot of things. You know, I'm pretty...

**INT:** But how did you hook up with him in the first place? How did you meet him?

**ESTHER:** Because we used to meet, you know, in a certain place. We used to go to a spa. There was a spa in the park, and we used to meet there.

**INT:** Who's "we"? Who's "we"? Just people that are....

**ESTHER:** We used to get together. And he was there, he used to wear a leather coat, and always discuss things. But he was discussing things there with grown-up people, you know, with mature people. And I used to go to the spa there. And I bumped into that spot, and I was listening, and since then I was going there. And this is how they got. And another thing: where my brother was in the camp, they had a printing place. What did they do in the camp where my brother was? All the bombs that they fell on the airplanes, on trucks, on big things, they used to bring in these people, brought them back to a safe place, and they sorted out the pieces, you know, the bigger pieces, and a bigger place. And you know, everything was valuable. It wasn't like here a throwaway. It was, you know, they re-used things. So this is what my brother was in that place where they were serving.

So what did they do? When they were getting those big pieces, the wings and everything, they built out in the middle, it was a big field there, where they were putting all those debris, and in the middle, they worked out like a little hut, a shack. It was, I would say, maybe this high. And they had typewriters there, and they were printing there in my brother's place.

**INT:** A little printing press.

**ESTHER:** Yes. They were working, and they were putting papers out. And he was probably connected with that place. They probably knew each other. And I don't know. Just we were congregating around these places.

**INT:** But the people who were congregating, were you all Jews hiding on Christian papers?

**ESTHER:** I would say so. I would say so.

**INT:** Nobody was going as a Jew, because they'd take you off the street. You couldn't do that.

**ESTHER:** No! No. No. I mean, the people who were marching were marching as Jews. You know, they were open with the star and with everything. But with us, I mean, me, I was walking there, I wasn't walking with a star. I never wore a star or anything.

**INT:** Right. And he had like a house there? He had a diplomatic house?

**ESTHER:** I don't know his house. I wasn't in the house. But we used to meet in the outside, you know, in the park, and here and there. But to the end, I was in the, one of these Swedish houses. I don't think it was his house. It was a house where, you know, they had documents there and paperwork.

**INT:** A safe house.

**ESTHER:** A safe house, yeah. But I don't know if he lived there.

**INT:** Uh-huh. What was he like?

**ESTHER:** He was a nice, pleasant guy. Very pleasant. But he always wore a leather coat. (laughs) That's how I saw him. And he was very pleasant and always asked questions and complimenting.

**INT:** Did you know what he was doing?

**ESTHER:** I didn't know. I didn't know. Later on I found out.

**INT:** So you didn't know when you were handing these papers out what you were doing exactly?

**ESTHER:** No. No.

**INT:** You were just helping him out?



**ESTHER:** No, I was helping out, because I knew the people are in troubles, and there are some Swedish people in there who don't belong there, you know.

**INT:** Oh, okay. But you didn't know that he's saying, "Hand them out, because these might be Jewish people"?

**ESTHER:** No, they were Jewish people. He told me, they are Jewish people, but they are protected by the Swedish government.

**INT:** Okay. So you knew what you were doing. You knew what you were doing.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, but they are Jewish people. But I didn't know what the score is. Where they are going to go from there, and what he's going to do with them, and where they are going to land. I didn't know anything. I just gave the papers. What do I know?

**INT:** Where did those people wind up going? To Sweden? Did he get them to Sweden?

**ESTHER:** No! No. They didn't go anyplace. They were finally, I don't know. I got to refresh my memory, really, it's late. And like I say, I fell and I was a little, you know, shaken up. But I would really...such a turmoil it was there. What did he do with the Jews then? He took them into these houses...and from the houses they had to find a place for themselves. So it really didn't materialize too much.

**INT:** But he probably saved their lives, a lot of them.

**ESTHER:** He saved them, yes, because he took them out from that...

**INT:** They had papers.

**ESTHER:** They had papers, and they could go and hide and do something, you know. And maybe in those Swedish houses they were. But what happened to them, I really... one thing I know. That he was, they say that the Russians caught him. The Russians didn't, I don't think so. What I remember is one thing. When my brother in January was liberated, you know, the ghetto, that little spot was liberated. My brother came to look me up and he found me. And where I was living there was a big school. In that school was a military, they made it into a hospital. And overnight they took the hospital away from there. They evacuated it. Where and what I don't know. Because I didn't live there anymore. I lived maybe five houses away, or ten houses away. Because every night it was another bombed-out place. And you had to keep on running to another place where you have a shelter. And my brother came from the ghetto, which I didn't know that he's living anymore, because it was another episode. After I found him from the barrels, it was maybe six weeks later, they took him into the ghetto. I tried so hard to hide him, to bring him to my place. He got tired of it. He didn't want to go and come and hide. He went back to his place, you know, from the army. And they caught him, and they threw him into the ghetto, and he almost died. So I knew he is not alive anymore.

In the meantime, after the war, that was in January, I was liberated the fourteenth, and he was the nineteenth. So he came to look me up where he left me before he got into the ghetto. But I wasn't there. And there was a girl who lived there. And I said, "Listen. If you still live here, in case my brother or somebody is coming and looks me up, tell them where I am." She was the only one I told where I'm moving, you know, where I keep on going. She was a...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** They caught them from the streets, from wherever, and they put them into that schoolyard. In my house where I lived was right next to the schoolyard. And when my brother came, they thought he's a prisoner, you know. He was pushed in there as a prisoner. But this girl saw him, and she escorted him out from the yard, and somebody noticed that she escorted somebody out from the yard. But my brother was already in my place. And when she came with my brother, we were talking, and I was shocked. He was maybe 80 pounds. He was, the lice, you could take lice like this (scoops it up), and he was in a **terrible**, terrible shape. I couldn't believe, you know, it took me an hour to catch up, to remember that he is alive. He lived for six weeks on a piece of pig skin. He was chewing on it. That was all. There was no food whatsoever. And I used to go into the ghetto, and I didn't know he is there. You know, you couldn't, you couldn't check out who's who.

And when the woman left from me, she went into that yard, back to her house, and the police, the Russian soldiers, grabbed her, and they said, "Listen. You just took out a prisoner from here. And if you don't bring him back, we take you." And my brother wanted, she came back, with the two officers, with the bayonets up, to take the guy back, because she said, "Look, I didn't steal him, I didn't bring him out. I just wanted to show him to his sister, to his girlfriend." And he wanted to go by himself with the soldiers there. And I said, "No! If you are going, I'm going, too." I say, "I'm not going to let you out of my hands." But as he was coming, he saw the shooting on every corner. There was no water. The people on the street lying, you know, dead. It was misery. The bombs were falling. You know, it was...He said, "You are not going out of here." Because I was upstairs, but we had a bunker downstairs, too. You know, upstairs I had some food, and I prepared for my brother. And downstairs I had a bunker, where everybody was only in the basement. There wasn't such a thing. Only the rats were upstairs, nothing else. No, this is the truth.

So I said, "You are not going. I am going with you." And he just, we were **fighting**. And you know something, if I would have not gone with him, so finally, they took me, too. And I went with him. And I came to the gate, and I say, "Please," to the officer there who was staying there. There were three people at the gate. I say, "Look, my brother." You know, I couldn't speak Russian. "From the ghetto." And I show him, you know, they should know, they are soldiers, they are fighting. I say, "He's coming from the ghetto. Look how he looks." You know, I explained them. I say, "What language do

you speak?" I say, "Can I explain you?" (crying) I say, "My brother is coming from the ghetto, he's not a soldier, he's not a...look how he looks." And I cried, you know, and I was shaking like a leaf. And he says, "No! Davai!" You know, "Go in there." And I pull him, and **I don't let him go**, you know, and I hold on tight to him, in the gate, in the middle of the gate I was fighting. And he says, "No, he has to go in." And I say, "Please, what do you speak? What language? Romanian, Hungarian, German? What do you speak?" He said, they were coming from the Romanian, they were passing over Romania, you know, and they were fighting towards Hungary, so he spoke some Romanian. And I told him. "It's my brother. I don't know anybody. My sisters were killed. My brother is killed. My parents are killed." I say, "Please, don't take my brother!" (crying) And you know, I said, "Please, that's all I have. Look how he looks! He's not going to make it if you put him in there." And from there they took him to Siberia. And they let him go. They **let him go**. I'm telling you, I'm thinking now. And I brought him back home. And I think Wallenberg was caught like this. He must have been caught as a prisoner some place where he was. Because they didn't identify who is a prisoner, you know, who is a soldier, who is a Russian, who is a fighter.

**INT:** So it was mistaken identity.

**ESTHER:** They were getting people, you know, whoever was with power, had a little energy, or something, they were afraid. Because they were conquering, you can't blame them. And they threw him into the yard. And from there they took them to certain stations, and they tried to bring them out, and they put them, a lot of people landed in Siberia. Most of them didn't come back. But there are maybe one or two who remained to tell the story what happened, how they were coming from Hungary from this...from this prisoner camp, you know, where they were lined up. And you're lined up in an open space, in January. Sick. You know, these soldiers, from fighting and everything. How many people survived? But they put them on a train and they took them. And whoever didn't make it to Siberia, they threw them out, you know. And whoever made it in Siberia didn't make it, either. So I think he was one of them.

**INT:** He just got swept up.

**ESTHER:** That he was swept up just like my brother was swept up. Without knowing who he is and what he is. And maybe once they found out who he is, maybe somebody killed him. From the people who found out, maybe, you know, one of the Hungarians who knew that he was fighting the Germans. You never know. It was very easy to kill somebody there, because you know, first of all, you were weak. And your mind didn't work well. And you were over-tired. And you didn't know what's going on. I think he was swept up like this. Because we made a big story about it, and it was a political thing, you know. That the Russians, this, here. I don't think so. I don't think anybody had anything...

**INT:** It was just a mistake.

**ESTHER:** It was a just a mistake. He fell in. That's my opinion, you know. But I remember I spoke about it, I was more fresher in my memory about him, in the library, in the Union library.

**INT:** You saved your brother's life. So what...

**ESTHER:** I don't know if I saved my brother's life. Who knows, maybe he would have survived in Siberia. Who knows? But he had no...

**INT:** But you hung on and you didn't let go.

**ESTHER:** Oh! I didn't let him. I didn't let him. I held onto him. He will tell you. He used to say all the time. "I don't know. I go with you, you see this and you see this, I don't see it." You know. Because I was trained to have my eyes open. Because we lived in such a treacherous place. And you go through with so many things. It's an education, unfortunately, a bad one, but. It's handy on certain times.

**INT:** What do you think got you through those years? How did you get through it?

**ESTHER:** When you are young, you go through a lot of things. The worst thing was to me when I came home. No house, no place. Nobody. I was sixteen years old, all those guys, everybody wanted to use you, to sleep with you, for a meal. Thank G-d, my brother had come home. You know, he survived, you know, and I came home.

**INT:** Your other brother.

**ESTHER:** The one brother. I came home with, then we came, after my brother was sent, you know, he was released from the Russians so to say, we packed up and we started to go back, you know?

**INT:** Back home.

**ESTHER:** Back home. Because, and the dead bodies what I was going through. The forest, 1,000 kilometer I walked **every day, every day** for six weeks, I slept in another place, till I got to a big city, Grosswardein.

**INT:** You were with your brother the whole time?

**ESTHER:** With my brother. Yeah, but with my brother we cut it off in Mishkoltz. It was another big to-do. Because when the Germans came out, you know, they retreated, so to say, and the Russians came over. They put all the machinery, telephones and everything, just like we have these telephones now, they put them in the basement, the women were installing, you know, and working. And I was there in the basement, and there were Russian women, and two guys, too. And they recognized me. When I was walking, they saw me going with a little suitcase, you know, in January, with snow and everything. And they passed by with that truck, with a commune, you know, they were

bringing food from one place to the other, or I don't know what. But it was away from the front line a little bit. And they saw me. And they stopped with the truck. And my brother was there, too. And my brother helped me to go in in the truck, because there were another few people there. And when my brother went to take the suitcase and start to come in, too...

**INT:** The truck pulled away?

**ESTHER:** The truck pulled away. And we broke off. But it wasn't a serious place to be broken up, because we could meet, you know? Because it wasn't a place that...it's no more war. It was already behind. We were behind the front. You know, way behind. So it wasn't a big to-do. But it was pretty bad, because I walked and walked and walked, and I came into Grosswardein, where my feet were frozen.

**INT:** Were you by yourself walking?

**ESTHER:** How?

**INT:** Were you by yourself?

**ESTHER:** No, we were maybe 60 people.

**INT:** Okay. Jews?

**ESTHER:** No. Everybody.

**INT:** Everybody, just coming back.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Caravans. No train, no bus, no nothing. Snow, sleet. You know.

**INT:** What time of year was this?

**ESTHER:** This was in January, 1945. Yeah. It was pretty, pretty hectic. The snow was till here (thigh-high). And then this...bus, or how you call it, the truck, dropped us off in a place, where we thought it's a little house and we are going into it. In the meantime, the little house, we thought, it's not far, because the open fields in the snow, and the little light in there, we thought it's just here. Well, the truck couldn't pull in that close, and it was maybe two miles, believe it or not, that we had to walk to go to that little house to take a break, you know, to sit, to sleep over. There were 60 people. Could you believe it? 60 people. And I was walking, and this truck wasn't a good truck for me. It was a bad truck. It was...when I came back, you know, you are naive. You don't know. You think these people are okay. But they tried to rape me, and they tried to do a lot of things, you know. And they really were...but thank G-d, I was pretty, pretty strong. (laughs)  
You know.

**INT:** How did you fight that off?

**ESTHER:** Because I was screaming. And I knew there are people around, you know, and I figured I'm going to chase off. But it was very scary, and very, very sad. Very sad. I was very...it was a terrible, terrible experience. But then, you know.

I slept, then I came again for maybe another 200 kilometers, 300 kilometers, and I found a very nice place, a very nice lady. You know, like I say. You go in, and you ask for a place to sleep. And I had good experience all the time, because people were taking me in. This was a very fine place, very nice place. And she got me in, and she saw I'm so exhausted. She heated water for me, and I to have water, you know, and I took a bath, and she made me a beautiful bed. And I was sleeping. And I was so happy, I had a good meal. In the meantime a Russian officer came to sleep with me during the night. And I was very upset. Oy, oy, oy. (whispers) I'm telling you. You keep on going and you go.

But it was...coming home, it still was, even worse. Because like I say, you didn't find anything. I had one sheet that I brought with me from Budapest, you know, in that little suitcase. And we were three people, we had to sleep on one sheet. And the sheet, we didn't have anything. So we had some hay, we brought in from outside, you know? So the sheet was always, you know, in the middle of the bed, because it wouldn't stay on the grass. And you didn't have what to cover yourself up. And if you had to cook, the rim from the oven was taken away, everything. You had to start from scratch. And my brother, he thought that where his wife's parents lived, maybe he's going to find something. It wasn't too far.

**INT:** But you had been separated from your brother.

**ESTHER:** No, this was my other brother, who was home already. He was home. He, I found him home. No, he came home, too. Maybe three weeks later. No, I came home three weeks later. He came home earlier. My brother.

**INT:** Which brother?

**ESTHER:** My, from Budapest. He came home, I think, three weeks earlier. Because I was sick. And I was, you know, like I say, I walked 1,000 kilometer, and how much could a person, and my hands were frozen, so I stayed in the hospital. And they wanted to take off my toes in the hospital. Because it was like pus. And I didn't know what's going on. For a week I was there, and they gave me a very good cream, and I felt it starting to circulate, and it cools it.

**INT:** What hospital were you in?

**ESTHER:** This was in Klausenberg. This was a big city. Yeah. Because from Grosswardein I came to Klausenberg, and from Klausenberg I had to go to Bistritz, and from Bistritz I had to go to Nassaut, and from Nassaut, I had to go to Telz. You know, it was a whole, and this is all, you know, no public transportation, or no anything.

**INT:** And you were on your way home.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** But you knew at that point that your parents...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, there's nobody there. No. But I was hoping **maybe**, maybe somebody came home from the kids, you know. But my brother, with whom, from Budapest. He was rushing home. I wanted to stay. I say, "Listen. You have to recuperate a little bit. You have to feel a little bit stronger. We don't know what we are going to encounter. These roads are bombed and people are dead people. And it's going to be a lot of sickness." You know, I realized what's going on. He wouldn't listen. He dragged me with him, I should go, and it's no use to stay here. And he was right, too, because the bombs were still falling. And what am I going to stay there? Maybe he was afraid, maybe the Russians are going to be pulled back again, and the Russians come again, so where are we going to be? This way it's covered by the Russians, let's run. And he escaped, you know, from the...how you call it? He escaped from the Russians, that they released him from that...camp. No, how do you call it? (pause) I just said it.

**INT:** This is Chaim Meir, right?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He got freed. Like I told you, I pulled him out. What was there?

**INT:** It was like a labor camp or something.

**ESTHER:** Not a labor camp, from the prisoner, a prisoner camp. He got out from the prisoner camp, which he thought he's almost caught again. So he didn't want to stay. He just wanted to go. And I didn't want to leave him to go alone. I didn't trust anymore. I was afraid maybe something will happen to him again. So I went with him. And I made a big mistake that I did it. Because...mistake, you know?

**INT:** Why do you say that?

**ESTHER:** Because he didn't appreciate it after I got there. I was like a liability on them, you know. He didn't have anything, I didn't have anything. (laughs) And it was no place to get anything. So he felt guilty. So he was very upset about it. He said I should have not come, I should have stayed. You know, he didn't appreciate my whole being there with him. He got himself a girl, you know, and my brother got, my other brother, his wife didn't come home. And he heard, she had no children, and he heard that people who had no children, women without children, the women survived. Because she was young. And it's true. She survived. So my brother never even **looked** at anybody. There were people who wanted him.

**INT:** So he waited for his wife?

**ESTHER:** So he waited for his wife.

**INT:** What was the name of that brother?

**ESTHER:** Ben-Zion. Ben-Zion. He was very nice.

**INT:** Chaim Meir, was he married before the war?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He had a child and a wife.

**INT:** And what happened to them?

**ESTHER:** Well, she got deported and killed, just like the other one. The kid got killed, and she got killed and the whole family got killed. When he came home, he was so miserable that it was, again, it was my fault. You know, men is, he has to, it's somebody else's fault. It's not his fault. He really wasn't so generous with me, not at all. And I was very generous with him, in **every way**, in every way. Even when my uncle gave me some cigarettes to sell, you know, that I brought into his camp? I shared them with him. He had there room and board and everything. I didn't have to do it, because I was on the outside. I had to pay for my rent, I had to pay for my clothes. I had to pay for everything.

**INT:** Why do you think he reacted like that after the war?

**ESTHER:** My younger brother was the child whose mother died when he was five years old. And my father felt very sorry for him, and he was kind of spoiled a little. But as life was going on, and he got remarried, and he has a family and everything, he thinks of my mother like I don't know what. And he thinks of me, too. But at the time he was miserable. He came home...

**INT:** He had just lost his wife, too, and his child.

**ESTHER:** He didn't find his wife, he didn't find his home, he didn't find anything. But he was a man. You know, it still was easier. But I was a young girl. And there wasn't anybody to give any help. And you know, the Joint Distribution gave money. But there were some people, charlatans, who got the money, they used it for themselves, and that was it. See, I was a minor when I came home, and they were organizing to send the minors to England. A group of minors.

**INT:** You were sixteen?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I don't know what happened, and how it happened. They didn't do it. We were all excited about it.

**INT:** You were ready to go?



**ESTHER:** Yes! I would have liked to. You know, why not? To get out. As a matter of fact, maybe a year later I went back to Budapest. I said to myself, "What am I doing here? There's nothing to do." I was in such a misery, it was unbelievable.

But as I was coming on the road, you know, those 1,000 kilometer, I stopped over in Grosswardein. I don't know if you know. Neutbarod, it's called. And I stayed there maybe for two weeks, to recuperate a little bit. Because we had some relatives, and I found somebody there. And as a matter of fact, wherever I went, I had a big problem. The guys were without women. And there weren't too many Jewish women. And wherever I, they all wanted to marry. And I was so scared of a guy, I didn't even want to **think** about getting married. Who, you know, what am I? I'm just coming out of, you know something? I got my period when I was sixteen. I got it at maybe fourteen, and then for two years I didn't get it at all. And I was so thin. I was so...I had so many things on my mind. Who?

**INT:** That wasn't one of them.

**ESTHER:** And these guys wanted me to get married right away. And you know, real, very valuable. Later on I was looking for them, because other girls were jumping to it, you know, and I couldn't. It was a sad situation, because I would have gone for those people. They were extremely valuable, valuable people. You know, of means and everything. And they liked me so much.

**INT:** But you felt you weren't ready.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** You weren't at all interested.

**ESTHER:** And you know something? I'm not sorry. I feel just because somebody else wants me to do something what I don't feel like doing, it's not the right thing to do. But other people did it, and believe me...

**INT:** At sixteen?

**ESTHER:** Yeah! Sure! They got married at sixteen. And how. And they got married to guys who were twenty years older than them.

**INT:** Because they had no families left and no one to guide them.

**ESTHER:** Yes. And there were uncles whose nieces came home, and they made them shelter, and what do you think? They married them. Oh, it was so much...

**INT:** Is that allowed? An uncle to a niece?

**ESTHER:** It's allowed. I don't know. I saw them in Israel. They are doing very well. She has a boyfriend. (laughs) And the uncle was taking care. I was her...you know, the untermenschen. How you say, maid of honor or something?

**INT:** Yeah, maid of honor.

**ESTHER:** She didn't have her parents, so I took her to the chuppah. Me. (laughs) I was then sixteen years old. And she, too. She always, I saw her in Israel now after so many years.

**INT:** But how did you have the strength to resist that, you know, to resist the pressure to get married and to...

**ESTHER:** Oh, that was a terrible thing, too. That's why I say my after the war was even worse. Because I really, I didn't have anybody. I came, after the war I came these 1,000 kilometers. Finally I reach to Klausenberg. I have my feet frozen. My toes are like...like, you know, pus, loose pus. And I see for a week, they gave me [a medication], I'll never forget. And they wrapped me up, and it felt warm, and it felt that it pulls out everything. I felt better. And they come in, they say, "Tomorrow morning you are going for surgery." I say, "What surgery?" "Well, we have to take off these toes. They are not healing, and they are going to give you gangrene." I didn't even know what gangrene was. "It's not a good thing to have. You'll be okay." And I said, "I feel better with my toes." I say, "I think they're much better." "No, no, we cannot let it go." So what do you think I did? (laughs) Early in the morning? It wasn't early in the morning, it was during the night. I tore off my sheet, I tore my sheet in little pieces, and I wrapped my feet around, because it was January. You know, the snow and the bad weather. And I was looking through that hospital window, how far could I go to find somebody to let me in, to get out of here and get into somebody else's house? Because like I say, I always was lucky; people always let me in. And I had my coat, I mean, they didn't take your clothes away or anything. What did I have there? I had the clothes or whatever. And I packed up, it must have been maybe 5:00 in the morning. And slowly I cleaned out. You know, the nurses started to come, and this and that, and I just walked out from the hospital, limping. Very badly limping.

And you know something? I found somebody, and I called up somebody to tell them that maybe I had a cousin a long time ago there. If he is alive. And they notified him. They found him. He had come home already. Because he was liberated in April and I was liberated not in April. He was liberated in '44, you know, around December, or November. And I was liberated in January. So he was home. And he lived with a Christian lady. **Very nice** person. Very nice. She got me in, and she helped me cure my toes. And thank G-d, you know, if it's bad weather it bothers me. And my hands, too. But my hands were better than the feet. And thank G-d, I have my toes. So it was all this, you know.

**INT:** But **you** thought of that. I mean, you...made the decisions all along.

**ESTHER:** I'm telling you I come from a house, we all are like that. Look at my sister. She was nine years old, she jumped out of bed and broke the window to make place for the people to run out. I mean, because we grew up in that caboodle, you know? (laughs) So many people. You know, people say, "I'm having twenty people for supper," for Yom Tov or something. You know, twenty people, they start to prepare, you know, it's Purim, for Pesach, they put it already together. It comes Pesach, it doesn't work out, and then they bash up everybody. They are out of themselves. I don't know if it's good or bad. With us, my younger sister, especially. She could put together for 35 people you know, nothing. And in my mother's house, 20 people to eat and to sleep, it was no problem. I mean, that was minimum.

**INT:** So you think you got early training.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because we kind of were swiveling among people all the time. A lot of people. And you know, you don't know what you learn till it comes the time that you have a little...yeah, we saw a lot of things in the house. A **lot** of things. Because there was a lot of contraband. See, the Czechoslovakian Jews were bringing textiles from Czechoslovakia.

**INT:** I remember you said your father warned them.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my father was warning them. And you know, everything was going on in that house.

**INT:** Do you think you also learned how to trust or not trust people from seeing the different types of people that would come into your house? Who were people that you could trust. Because you said that in Budapest you always found a place to stay.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. No problem.

**INT:** It's sort of like you knew how to deal with people and how to figure them out.

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I don't know if I trust people. I can't tell. I really can't. See, I can't judge for myself if I'm trusting people or not trusting people. I really can't tell if I'm good in trusting or not.

**INT:** But somehow you figured out who were the right people to stay with, and who weren't.

**ESTHER:** I try, yes. Yeah. I try to...they know me for a very private person. I don't like to get involved with people that I could throw them away then, you know? I try to screen them, you know. Not screen them, I try to get along and nice. And then when I see certain things, like I saw somebody not so long ago. She's a good friend and everything, and I noticed she did a very good thing to a girl, supposedly. And she wanted that girl should marry her son. It didn't work out. She married somebody else. So now they are not in such a good condition. I don't know what. So she goes, and she calls up

her husband, that good friend for whom she did so much. She calls up the husband to tell him, "You know, you got to watch out, because your wife is trying to organize a divorce. And be alert." And I said to myself: Wait a minute. If she's so good to her, and she goes and calls up her husband, I got to be careful. Am I right or not? What do you think? Maybe it wouldn't work like that for me. Maybe for me she would be different. But I feel if somebody has...

**INT:** If she could do that to somebody else, she can do it to you.

**ESTHER:** A good friend whom she tried to help and do and everything. And she goes. I didn't tell her anything, you know. But I feel I got to put her on the back burner (laughs) because you never know what she's going to do to me, when she is so concerned and everything, and she's going to call up. Maybe you talk something, you discuss something with someone. She could call them up and tell them, you know? "You know what she said?" (laughs) No, I don't have that. I don't have that. I have very good friends, thank G-d. I hope, really, very good friends. But I don't have too many, because I didn't have time. I was working all my life.

And the war was really the bad thing, because I lost my mother, I lost my father. And I lost four, two brothers and two sisters. So it was very hard. Very hard. No matter how many sisters and brothers you have, if you lose some, it hurts. And then the coming home, like I say, it was terrible.

I almost married, I have to say, a guy, who was eighteen years older than me. A very, very wealthy guy. Very educated man. I almost married him, because I figured I'm going to have a nice home, because I heard my sisters, two sisters, survived. I figured maybe I got to sacrifice, because they have no place to go, just like me.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Like I say, I was sick (sighs) for three weeks, and **very** sick.

**INT:** We sort of have to catch you when you come down.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. (Pause) ...difficult. A lot of competition. A lot of...you know, you had to be good, and you had to be nice. And there wasn't from where, you know. I came back to Budapest in 1946 from Romania. And I organized there a kibbutz, Agudas Yisroel Kibbutz. And it was going very nicely, because we didn't have a place to put everybody in one place. So this house was, it had a very nice place. It had four rooms. And from those four rooms I made a beautiful kibbutz out of it. I organized it. I cleaned it out. I mean, I had people to do it. And the Joint Distribution was giving already rations. You know, it was better than being there, because there you didn't have anything. You were stranded with nothing. And I organized this kibbutz. I had very nice girls. We had 32 girls, only girls. And everybody was going to Israel, you know? The

idea to go to Israel. Not me. I didn't tell them, because I felt, I don't want to kill their enthusiasm. Because if they want to go, it's a good thing. But I didn't.

**INT:** Why didn't you?

**ESTHER:** I kind of saw Jewish people were eating each other. And I said, there it's a real space where everyone's going to chew each other up. And I'm not a fighter, you know, a dirty fighter. And I saw so much dirty fights between them, you know, the people who were going there.

**INT:** Like what?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I don't know how to tell you. They tried to pull out every little thing from each other's hands, from each other's place. And out-do. Like, for instance, a little thing, I mean, it was bigger than this, but I'll tell you just what I remember now. I mean, I was picked to be the Rosh Hakibbutz, you know, the head of the kibbutz. And truthfully, I could have done better things. I wasn't looking for it. I didn't **want** it. But whoever came in and wanted to discuss something and to say something in the interest of the kibbutz or the Mercaz, you know, wanted, they always came to me, and they always talked to me. And the fact that I was in Budapest during the war, and I knew the places, and you know, I knew what was going on before, so it was easier for me, you know, to fall into the more normal time.

And there were maybe five girls who didn't have the slightest idea what to do. Nobody wanted them. Yet they were boycotting me, I shouldn't be the president, the head of the kibbutz. I didn't want it. The intrigues, what they were putting up. The little dirty things. You know, the Romanian Jews were coming, were immigrating already towards Israel from Romania. You know, a lot of Jews were going to Israel after the war. This was in 1946, '47. And I spoke Romanian and Hungarian. So I was going to these places to see, maybe they need something. You know, I was Rosh Hakibbutz, and I figured, let me go and check out what they are doing there. Maybe these girls could help out there somebody. We got a pregnant woman, there are women with children, you know, to see what we can do. It always was a big problem.

So what happened? One family, unfortunately, was caught at the border. Half of the family was sent back to Romania, and three people were left on the other side. And there was a kid who was eight years old, seven years old, who was left on the Hungarian side without her parents, without anything. Now who could feel better than me how it feels to be without anybody? So they knew that I speak Romanian because the kid didn't speak a word of Hungarian. So they called me down where she was, I should try to translate the kid and talk to her, because the child is miserable. So what did I do? I took her to my kibbutz. And I figure that if she's in my building, it's easier for me, because there was no public transportation as easy. It was expensive. I could take the bus, but why should I go and come, and my time is valuable? I brought her into my kibbutz. But she was a little kid, and I had to take off her clothes, because she really was dirty from the trip and from everything, and I didn't want her to be in the room there. You know, you never know

what she brings in with her. So I wanted to give her a bath, which we had a bathroom. And I wanted to put some clothes on her. So my clothes was too big. So what did I do? I took from one of those girls the smallest. I figured, she wouldn't object. I'll take a little dress, till this thing is being washed out. I washed it for her and everything.

She came home, and she found out that this kid, I gave her dress to this kid. Not even a dress, it was a nightgown. She almost chewed me up. You know, and these are the things, just little things. And I said to myself, "That's not for me. That's too small a place for me [Israel] (laughs). I'm going to bump into all these people. They'll chew me up." I don't know how to fight, I don't know how to do it. I'm not going to go. I didn't tell them, but this, I made up my mind. And all these people were going there, and I tried to be helpful. But this is just a little thing, you know, what I'm telling you. And what I didn't do for those girls. And a lot of them were **very** nice, you know, good.

**INT:** Were they orphans, these girls?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. All orphans, yes. And there was a girl who was working for the opera house. She was designing clothes. She was much older, you know, "much older." She was 38 years old. But you know, by my standards, she was a mature woman. She wasn't married. Her father had a big statue in one of the biggest hospitals in Budapest. You know, very prominent girl. And she liked me very much. And she stayed in the kibbutz with me. And she was like my life support, so to say. You know, we were always teaming up. And all these people were so angry that I'm the Rosh Hakibbutz. And everybody puts me up there, so I was really like in a...it was the last thing on my mind I should want to be, because I had better things to do. I wanted to go to school, you know. In fact, I signed up for a seminary, from Bais Yaakov Seminary, and I was going to school, and I wanted to continue with some other things for myself, you know. They didn't leave me alone. They did not leave me alone. The Mercaz didn't leave me alone -- you have to help, you have to do. It's a shortage, and these people cannot do it. And you know, and here I was letting them filibuster me, which I was wrong. I was wrong. I should have taken care of myself. But the fact that I had that background from at home, that you always have to share, you have to do, you have to make, so I lost out a lot on that, to make for somebody else.

**INT:** What about your belief in G-d at this point, after the war? And even during the war?

**ESTHER:** After the war I believed **much more** than now. I believe in G-d, I mean, I think there wouldn't be anything without a G-d. People wouldn't be able to exist. Because I had many times that I didn't know which way to turn. And I said, "There must be. Oh, there is Somebody who is guiding me."

**INT:** You felt that during the war?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. During the war, and now, too. Even till today. Even as I was getting married, and even after I was married. I always, you know, you run into such a dead-end

that you...you just see the, you don't know which way to turn. Are you up, are you down? You even could fall. You trip on a little branch, because that's how weak you are, because you don't know how to figure out what happened, why did it happen. But then you look around and you start to look into things and you say, Ah. Not all the days pass in one day, and there is somebody who is watching over you, and there is somebody who is guiding you, and maybe if you do something wrong, you are being punished for it. You know, you remember these things. But who knows?

**INT:** So did your faith change, do you think, because of the war?

**ESTHER:** No, one thing what it changed to me, I think what it was going on by us, in the religious, in our town, you know, before anything. It was such an iron guard. It was terrible. Everybody had to shave their heads.

**INT:** Yeah, you talked about that, that...

**ESTHER:** Oh, G-d! It's a ridiculous thing. I mean, to me, if my brother-in-law would hear me talk, I wouldn't have a place in his house. I don't say anything. As a matter of fact, my sister Lily's very upset with me. That since my husband wasn't religious, and she feels now that he is gone, I should join the crowd there, you know. I should go to Brooklyn and live there and be with them, and be a part of them, and be happy. Because what am I doing in Union, and Union is nothing, and there's only Gentiles, and whoever Jews are there, they're not the real ones. You know, and I don't feel that way. I feel people, one people is devoting his time to have twelve children because the rabbi wants you know, you are not supposed to...maybe it's a good idea. But not for me. Maybe G-d wants there should be a group who produces a lot of children. That was a good idea at the times that they didn't have industry with all these things, but now it's really difficult.

**INT:** So it was really your feelings about religion were formed pretty much before the war...

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah.

**INT:** As far as you saw the hypocrisy.

**ESTHER:** My aunts were very religious. **Very** religious. They were saying Tehillim every day. And davening, my aunt? My mother's sister, who had one daughter only. **Every morning** she got up and she davened. But they didn't teach **me**. And that was very painful to me. Because there were times they had the time to do it, and they didn't. They were so involved with themselves, you know. And this happened to all our children.

**INT:** And the brothers got sent off to cheder, but you...

**ESTHER:** To cheder, yeah, to study, yes. And my little brother, even three years old, he was going off to cheder. Three years old he had to go to cheder, wake him up in the morning, in a winter frosty day.

**INT:** So you saw all this before the war, I mean, you were already a child and you were resentful that you weren't being taught anything, and that the boys were getting more learning than you were and that sort of thing.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And the hypocrisy of the women in the town saying, you know, your sister was sitting out with a boy, a Gentile boy. So but then as far as, but that's organized religion. But as far as belief in G-d, your belief in G-d as a child before the war, during the war as a teenager, and then after the war, do you think that's ever changed? Have you ever questioned G-d, or blamed G-d?

**ESTHER:** No, I never did. I never did. As a matter of fact, right after the war I was more religious than I am now. **Way** more. I still continued with the same thing what it was going on, you know, at home, with the same system, with the same thing. Like I almost married this rabbi. He was a chazzan and a rabbi. And you know, he was a real personality. Because the townspeople used to come to him for arbitrations, and you know, discussing situations. He was **extremely** wealthy. And he found two pounds of gold buried. And his parents were very, very wealthy. And he lost his wife, with two children. And he was a very good friend of mine, you know. I came home and I was so happy to find such an intelligent man, because I was in Budapest, and I saw different people. You know, you see things.

And I was so happy to find him, because we were discussing things, and he really was enlightening and everything. And all of a sudden, he told me he loves me dearly. And he wants to marry me. That broke up the whole friendship. I was so disappointed.

**INT:** You didn't want?

**ESTHER:** I didn't want him. I didn't want to get married. I just wanted to...

**INT:** You just wanted a friend, someone to talk to.

**ESTHER:** Two friends, to discuss situations, to see what's going on, to help a little bit. You know. Nothing. You know, he gave me, my sister-in-law had come home already, you know. My older brother's wife had come home. And she saw him. And she was overwhelmed that a guy like this wants me? And I must be very stupid if I don't go with him. And she was talking about it to the people, and to the neighbors, and to the relatives, you know, to his relatives. To his relatives she was talking. (laughs) So they told him back everything, that I don't want him. But he was very, very determined to want me. And as soon as he told me he wants to marry me, I hated him. Period. I just didn't want to get involved anymore with him.



As a matter of fact, he used to come. He was having a position maybe 35 kilometer away from where I was. And when he came home, and I saw him, he used to come to see me. And when I saw him, I used to hide in the toilet. I used to run into the bathroom, and he opened up the bathroom. He came in to see me. In the bathroom, I locked the door. I say, "You have to wait." (laughter)

So this is not a joke. Once I see him (laughs) coming from far away. And I ran into the house, and I told the maid to put me in, you know, we had those heavy quilts, because it's so cold there, and to bed me in, in the bed. Cover me up and everything. She must have hinted to him when he came in (silently pointing to bed) that I'm in there. So he came in and he found me in bed, and the bed was made very nicely. (laughs) That I remember. I had no place to hide. That's how much I cared for him. But my sister-in-law, my brother, they started up, such a dear man. And such a wonderful person, and what do you think you are expecting? I said, "I don't want to get married yet." "No, you have all kinds of stupid ideas in your head. He's such an intelligent, such a fine, you'll be going in all the spas and all the beautiful things." And then I said, my sisters might need a place to be, and I decided to get engaged.

**INT:** To this man.

**ESTHER:** To this man. I didn't decide. I was really...

**INT:** Pushed.

**ESTHER:** Pressed, you know, like the ancient times. You got to go, my dear. That's your civic. And I felt lost, because I was pretty much determined. I knew what I can take and what I cannot take. So I got engaged with him. He gave me diamond earrings. I swear they must have been at least six carats, the pair of earrings. I was embarrassed to go outside with them. (laughs)

**INT:** They were so ostentatious.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, (laughs hard) because who the hell am I? You know, a kid there. I didn't have what to eat. I didn't have a place to sleep, I had one sheet on the ground.

**INT:** But you had great earrings. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** I told him, I cannot take it. I cannot take it. And I gave it back to him. And I said, "You'll buy me tiny ones." Could you imagine? I was engaged to him, and I told him.

**INT:** You already told him you didn't want his first gift.

**ESTHER:** I told him, you know, in Hungarian and Romanian you don't say "You" to somebody, like your father, you don't. You say the third person. So I was engaged to

him, and I referred to him in the third person. I didn't refer to him, "You." I said "Ihr," you know? Could you imagine how in love I was? (laughs) And it came almost two weeks before the wedding. He gave me money to go and buy a lot of things, you know, and to do whatever. And you know, I had a funny dream while I was there. In Klausenberg. I went to a big city to do the shopping, to organize the house. He had three houses. He had a mountain with, I don't know, maybe eighty cows, where they were making milk and sheep, you know, and exporting to other countries. I mean, he was really...I came up once there, you know, just to visit. The royal treatment I was given. (laughs) I couldn't bother. I didn't care.

But I broke up, because I dreamt a dream, that he has somebody who is from a rabbinical, high rabbinical family, and the woman wants him. And he is in touch with this woman. That's what I was dreaming. I didn't know anything. And she wants him badly. And he cares for her a little bit already. And I said to myself, "This is such a funny dream. I'm not going to buy anything. I'm going home." (laughs) So I came home, he expected me to bring, you know, some stuff, because he gave me enough money to shop. And I told him the story, and he said, "You are so right. It's so true."

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** Yes. He said, "Because I hear you are very unhappy, and you don't want to get married. And I don't want to get involved," he says. "And if you feel that way, let's let it go." And I say, "It's a good idea." And he couldn't get **over** it. Do you know how much he spoiled me? I mean, he ruined my life? Because I could have gone out with my friends. You know, with boys, girls, you know, we were getting together. I had to stay home, because nobody wanted to bother with me, because they knew I'm going to marry this rabbi. And you know, it was the last thing on my mind to do it, but finally. So I had lost so much of my real life, that I would have liked to congregate with my friends of my own age.

**INT:** Be a kid. Be a kid.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. You know. Here is this guy hanging over my head. But you know what happened? I picked myself up from there, and I moved away. I went to Satmar. I had a cousin there, and I got in touch with him, and he told me I should come, he has a house, he has everything, and he was the son of my aunt that I told you who tells such beautiful stories? He was her son. And he said, "You come, and you don't have to be there, and it's okay."

So I got there, and I stayed for maybe three months, and he fell in love with me. I mean, you think I'm telling you a story. Believe me, this is the truth. I had so much **tsuris**. That was **tsuris**.

**INT:** You didn't need it. You didn't need it, right.

**ESTHER:** I didn't need it. But he wasn't pressuring me. He said, "Look, if you find somebody better, it's okay, but if not, let me. I want you. You are tops." So I want to tell you, it was a very...Oh, so I came to Satmar, and I got a letter from this Harfenes, and he writes me that he wants to see me at a certain spot, in this and this day in Bistritz. And I say, "What does he want to see me? I'm over with it. I had enough." Because everybody was on my neck. "Look at her, she doesn't want him. Hm." You know, (laughs) there was such a competition, and I...

**INT:** Couldn't care less.

**ESTHER:** It left me like, you know. I didn't need a Prince Charming. I wanted somebody on a level that I could look up to, but not, I didn't care for him. He looked like Pavarotti, I swear. He sang like him, too. He had such a voice. So he wrote me a letter I should make sure I'm coming. And what do you think the story was? He got married that day, the date that he gave me to be there, I found out then. He didn't tell me about it. And he had prepared a guy who he thought I would like very much, that he knew. And he prepared a certain amount of dowry for me from his fortune, because he felt guilty that I should forgive him before he gets married. I should come there and you know, this is what I, but I didn't go, and I didn't care. And I still, you know, till today, it never bothered me.

**INT:** It's good you didn't marry him.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. But what I want to say, it was so much tsuris. Believe me, this is okay. You know, people would say, "Oh, so what do you worry? You have such a, people wanted, these guys, they wanted you." It wasn't for me. I wasn't that type, you know, to **flirt** with them, and take and take out of them the diamonds. He wanted to give me a bracelet, it was this wide with all diamonds around. I said, "You hold onto it." You know, another girl would have said, "Fine, give it to me. Come on." And then kick him out or something. It wasn't my way of thinking that way. Because you were busy with other things. You were busy to organize a little home, a place where to be, and to have some people around you whom you care for. I cared for him very much as a friend. Like it would be my good father, or you know, like a good clergyman. He was religious. But he wasn't religious. This is what I want to say. He was, you know, a religious rabbi. He looked like a real rabbi.

But when I was trying to organize the house where I'm going to live eventually, you know, while I was engaged, I was sleeping with a girl in his house, because the house was already cleaned up. So my brother lived maybe two houses away, but it was so tight, and there was no place, and I figured the fact that I cleaned up the house, I had a girl who was happy to come. (laughs) She had to sleep maybe eight in two beds. So she came and she slept with me. We were very good friends. And what do you think he did? He came at night, which it was **never** in my **mind**, and he wanted to sleep with me, when he knew there is another girl. He tried to sleep with me. That was terrible. I lost even more respect from him, because I thought he's...but listen. A man is a man, you know. That's

why they say you can't have a man in the house alone. They say that, yeah, according to the religion. But I had a girl there, and I started to tell him.

This is what I say. That religion. See, the religious people, they did a lot of things that it wasn't supposed to be done, and to young children, you know? But in those years, I'm thinking lots of times, these rapes here with all these big to-do, you know, they make such a big issue out of it. There it was down the drain, you know. No talk. Finished. You don't say, you don't talk about it. I knew young kids who really were raped in their own homes, and the kid complained to the father, and the father said, "Ah, you are imagining."

**INT:** Kids from religious homes?

**ESTHER:** Yes. "You're imagining." You know, there are kids who could bring down on you a lot of things, kids. I know I have a nephew. He did so many... he did a lot of things, you know. Just tricky. If you don't take off your clothes, first makes you to do something. "Come on, let's. Your mother and father wouldn't know about it." And then, "If you don't take it off, I'm going to tell your mother about that story. All right, so take off this, and now I want you to take off something else." You know, I see, I hear every day something, from what it was. And people didn't talk about it. And the parents weren't tuned in.

**INT:** They didn't believe the kids.

**ESTHER:** They didn't believe the kids. And it was true. So that's why I say, it was a funny world before, and it's funny now, too. But I don't know what it was. A lot of people suffered. They didn't talk about it. I speak to a friend of mine, you know what she's telling me, which we didn't have that story. She tells me that it came Friday, they didn't have what to eat. This was **before** the war. The father didn't bring home anything. He probably went schnorren or something, and he didn't have anything. The mother wasn't working. See, my mother always could do something else. You know, she could speak languages, she could talk to people. You know, she could invite people over, she could talk to her neighbors. You know, she was always a fluctuating person. Not stagnant. Some people were so stagnant, and if the guy didn't bring them home the few dollars, they were out. So she used to cook Friday, her mother used to cook Friday celery and some carrots, that it had a smell, so that when people came into the house Friday, you know...

**INT:** It smelled like Shabbas.

**ESTHER:** "Oh, I made a good soup." (laughs) But they didn't have anything for Shabbas. And before the war in our house, it wasn't such a thing. We always had, and we always were able to give to other people to help out. Even the cows used to eat. You know, we used to make a drink for them, food, you know, what's valuable food, not to throw it away. So it was something nourishing, you know, food was not to waste anything. So we weren't hungry in our house. But later on, you know, from 1940 to

1944, it was...tough. Very tough. Like I say, we were eating barley. We had maybe kasha from corn meal, maybe. It was rationing. Or maybe a piece of bread. You know, we were really, a miracle. And then we had a few cucumbers in the summer, some lettuce, you know, in the backyard, whatever we had. It wasn't much. But we survived. You know, because we were together. If we would have been everybody on its own, it would have been a...

**INT:** But you weren't together during the war, and how do you account...

**ESTHER:** I feel I missed a lot, because I wasn't together with my sisters. I missed a lot in one way. But from the other side, I think, not that I think. I see that people are talking about it. Because my three sisters who were in the concentration camp, they are...more...nervous. More despondent, you know. More...they break, they blow up fast, you know? Right away they are. I think. That's what they say. It's not for me to tell, you know, because who knows? Maybe I'm just like them.

**INT:** But you think because you didn't have those experiences that you're different?

**ESTHER:** You didn't see all those, I mean, like my younger sister. What did she do? She had a wheelbarrow, and she used to take those dead bodies and take them to have them buried. And you know, they used to have to change around. So there was somebody, a Blockelteste, you know, someone who was the head. She felt sorry for her, so she used to put her away a little bit, you know, once in a while, put her on the side and give her something to eat. She had very good experience with a lot of people there. They tried to, you know, our own people, took cover for her to do, because they saw that she is the only one that survived from maybe 100 children in our town of her age. The only one who came home.

**INT:** How old was she? Which one was this?

**ESTHER:** Agie. And Lily, Lily had already more at that age. She's four years younger than me. Three and a half years. But Agie, she had luck, you know, ten years old. And you know, Graff Bernadotte wanted to take them out as exchange to Sweden. And the war just broke, just stopped. So they were taken to Sweden, that's how they go there, because they were minors. And they went to school there.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** Not only for me, it wasn't for anybody after the war. Because everything was destroyed. And there was no food. There was no clothes. The little bits of clothes was what the people were doing, weaving themselves, and spinning them out themselves. You know, it was nothing left. I don't know. It was carried out, cleaned out. And it was bombed out and burned out, you know. So it was very difficult. At that time, when I came home and I found a big hole in the ground, you know, instead of the house, they

were in Sweden. They were, they were learning in school. And my Lily had a nervous breakdown. She was in a mental hospital.

**INT:** Lily was. I thought Agie got very depressed later.

**ESTHER:** After. Because she had already three kids and her husband didn't make a living.

**INT:** Okay. But Lily had a nervous breakdown.

**ESTHER:** Oh, Lily was very sick in Sweden. Very sick. But at the same time, she had schooling, and they put her into a sanatorium, and she recuperated beautifully. I mean, look, she's conducting a business, she has a house, she is very generous with everybody. She does a lot of things. But she still goes to psychiatry. I don't go for that. I think that's her downfall. My opinion.

**INT:** How so?

**ESTHER:** Because once you let yourself into these people, you know, (laughs) there was a little incident I had not so long ago. I had a psychiatrist, very, very prominent customer. You know, he teaches in a university. I don't want to mention names. And he is really a skilled psychiatrist. And it came out a question about something, and he said, "You should have punched her in the face." Now, I didn't do it. Personally, if I would have been under his influence, I would have ruined the whole thing by punching in the face this particular person. I would have done the worst thing. But if you are under the guidance of somebody who is using his own mind according to the book what he read, who has, who didn't go all these things through. He studied them. But to really be in a situation, actual experience, you got to do it yourself. And if you make mistakes, you make mistakes. But when you make a mistake through somebody who is coaching you, it's very difficult. Very sad. And you could do it. Because as much as he knows, he still doesn't know enough.

**INT:** He's still not you. And he's not you.

**ESTHER:** He is not me. And he doesn't know the other side. He doesn't know. And I see a lot of psychiatrists, they ruin people right and left. I don't know how **you** feel about it, but I see a lot of people got into supposedly help.

**INT:** What about your sister? How do you see that?

**ESTHER:** I don't see that she was helped. I don't think so. I think she's getting more and more a casualty, and then she told her to bring the family together, you know, the kids together, and the home together. I'm so embarrassed, till today. Because you know, what we were talking, and I don't have to know the children's feelings with their parents, with everything. You know, all that is private between themselves. And she believes -- not that she believes, she's hooked.

**INT:** Has she been going for a long time?

**ESTHER:** Well, she always goes, I think. She always goes. And I don't think she goes. She goes mostly now, I think, she gave up a lot for a long time, because I was very close with her. And I used to always laugh at her, you know, that, how long more are you going to go to her? Stop it already. I say, "You need to know something? Go to somebody else, not to her. Change the course. Get another person." So she believes in the rabbis now. You know. They usually are cooling her down a little better.

**INT:** Oh, so she goes and talks to the rabbi instead. I see. This is Lily. Did your three sisters survive in Auschwitz? Is that the camp that they were in?

**ESTHER:** They survived in, no, in Bergen-Belsen, my sister from California. And I think Agie too, in Bergen-Belsen. No. Yeah, maybe. I don't know.

**INT:** So they were separated. They weren't together.

**ESTHER:** They were separated. That's the big problem. Because...

**INT:** I thought they were all together.

**ESTHER:** They got together, they were together maybe for three, four months, or six months. And then they split them up. And my sister Olga thought that without her they're not going to survive, because she was older, and she was very, you know, helpful. Organizing and doing things. And she felt if they separate them, it's not going to be. The end of it. So when they separated them, Lily and Pessie were fighting the Gestapos there, you know, those murderers. And they were beating on both of them. **Terribly.** Beating them. So my older sister Olga was thrown in between the dead people already because they figured she's gone, finished. So when these people from our town, or who knew her went to pick up these people to take them to the crematorium, you know, who were fallen down there, they noticed, she's still moving. So they pulled her out of there, and they brought her into a place and they tried to revive her. And for some lucky reason, she survived. She doesn't know. My sister doesn't know about it, what happened to her. Because she was out of it completely. But the people from our town who were working in the same place, they saw what was going on. So they cured her. They took care of her, you know, in the Revier, a little bit helping her. You know, they were hiding out. Because she was very good, my sister. She used to help them with a little soup. She was working by the soup a little, you know. She was helping these people all the time, whenever she could.

So they brought her back, and she survived. But she didn't know where my sister Lily is, and she didn't know where my sister Agie is. So Lily got beaten up, too, but not as bad. She was still, you know, on her feet. She was very, very sick too, but not like my sister Olga, who was laying flat there with the dead guys and dead people.

So what it happened, that beating was very bad for my sister Olga. Because they were beating her in the head. And then the ear was running. It still runs till today.

**INT:** This is the one who lives in California?

**ESTHER:** Who lives in California. And she is very, very, she had surgery after the war. In Munich. And they thought they're going to do something. In the meantime a nurse gave her the wrong medication. She almost got off her mind. And she had a lot of bad luck. She married a guy, and the guy didn't work out. He got into with her girlfriend, you know. And she had no children. They experimented on her. They removed her womb, you know. They did all kinds of things on her. So she really is a major casualty, physically, herself. And she's very abrupt and very, very difficult. Difficult. But one thing: she's very good with people when she sees they're in troubles. She understands them.

**INT:** She has a home or something in California, right?

**ESTHER:** She got a board and care home for people who have disabilities, you know, mentally. Young people. And the families of these people who have these kids, these families in that home, they are very good to my sister. They were very good, because they saw these people have such a good home. Because you know, you don't want to sign up a member of your family to a board and care home when you have everything going for them. But unfortunately, they couldn't handle it. They were casualties. You know, retarded or something. And they were living in her house, and she took very good care of them. So the families liked my sister, the way she handled them, the way she treated them. They used to bring her gifts. She was doing very well. And I call them the "Mishagoyim," you know. (laughs) They liked her so much. When I used to come there, they used to [say], "You, G-d bless your sister. She is an angel. She is wonderful."

And when she married the second time, the guy who lost his wife with three children. She raised the three children. And one is, I don't know. His wife was saying something about my sister. "Oh, you don't know. Your mother didn't tell you, didn't teach you." He said, "Don't you say that. If my mom said it, it has value, and it must be that way," you know, contradicting his wife. Having a fight with her. "If my mom told me," this is how he feels about her. And as a matter of fact, the younger one still lives home. He's, I think, 34 years old. He still lives with Mama. Yeah. Her husband died recently. And he's still home.

**INT:** But you say she's abrupt. So she's abrupt with you, but with other people?

**ESTHER:** She's abrupt. She doesn't, she doesn't think what she says. She could insult you, she could embarrass you.

**INT:** But yet to other people...



**ESTHER:** No, no, not to me. To me, I am the only one with whom she's on very good terms. No. But even with friends. She gets angry, she could take something and hit you, you know? Why do you make an issue out of it? So what? So you are angry. So he's angry, too. Leave him alone.

**INT:** She wasn't like that before the war?

**ESTHER:** No. No. I mean, she was very...capable. We needed to pick up some very good fruit from the top of the tree. She used to climb up and get it. Yeah, she was very, very. And with a bicycle in Germany, after the war? Speaking of after the war. She got married, and her husband was very sick. That was right after the war. And what do you think she did? With the bicycle she was distributing certain, a little butter, a little whatever she was buying. She was traveling twelve hours one way to bring some food, and then sell it on the bicycle, and then make food for her husband. Go in the back yard, chop some wood. And come in the house, make fire and cook it. And this was her life. That's how she was working. Riding a bicycle, as sick as, you know. But you know, we don't give in. You know, what you have...

**INT:** Apparently not. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** If you have something bad on you or hanging over you, you ignore it. You got to go and do it. (whispers) I think my daughter's a little bit like that.

**INT:** Puts it behind her?

**ESTHER:** She takes care of everybody. For herself, she doesn't have time. It's not good. I did the same mistake.

(PAUSE)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with a survivor. It's May 6, 1996.

I had a few questions from the last time. I was wondering if you could...you had mentioned that during the war you were going into the ghetto from time to time, and you didn't even know that your brother was in there. Now, could you talk about why you were going into the ghetto and what you were doing there?

**ESTHER:** Because I was free. And you could go in and take in things, bring out things. But you were investigated. I mean, you couldn't just give food to these people or anything. But I used to go in and take a look what's going on. And I saw all that misery. All that...as a matter of fact, where the ghetto was, there was a house where I had lived before the ghetto. That was on (street name), and that house became in the area from the ghetto.

**INT:** It was closed off.

**ESTHER:** Because the ghetto wasn't that they put up, took out the houses and you know, made the whole thing one big camp. It was individual houses which were occupied, and the people were there. It was a lot of misery. A lot. They didn't give them any food. Only what you had yourself, what you came in with. See, people had to move in with their stuff. And whatever they had, they used. And how long could you use it? So from time to time I used to, you know, not too often. Maybe I was there three times. **Maybe** four times.

**INT:** They let you go in? There was no problem going in?

**ESTHER:** It wasn't that they let you. I had no problem going **any place**. Like I told you, I had no problem getting a place to sleep. I had no problem getting any place. As a matter of fact, where my brother was serving in the military so to say, with civilian clothes, they made a razia. You know what a razia is? A, you know, investigating who is in that camp where the soldiers were. And they weren't soldiers, but they were called soldiers. And they wanted to investigate who belongs there and who doesn't. So they caught a lot of people who were coming in and going out, who didn't have the right identification, who were suspicious of being Jewish, you know. Who did **not** belong there.

I was there in my brother's place. I used to come in there all the time, you know, when they were typing in the middle, it was that place. Nobody paid attention. They took a look. I passed. And one day, it was, they closed all the exits, and the entrances, and the police, the Germans were surrounding the **whole** place, and checking out everybody, who belongs there, who doesn't, you know, to catch people and take them away. That was the purpose. And as I was on the premises, the boys got very scared, because they knew I'm not a Christian. I'm Jewish, and if they find me that I'm coming out from this place where they are supposed to be, they might question the situation and they might take me away.

So what did they do? The whole place was surrounded with a fence, more than eight foot, I would say. All around where they put all that debris, and all the people were working. So maybe three guys were stepping one on top of another and giving me like a ladder to jump over to the other side, not realizing that when I fell down there, it was, I would say maybe 1,000 Germans with Hungarian soldiers, with the bayonets, with tanks, with everything. It was like a...you know, they came to pick up something, you know, heavy. I picked myself up, and I saw what's going on, I said to myself: boy, I really came in here to a fire, and if they saw me jumping over the fence...But I picked myself up, and I kept on going like nothing happened. You know, they were just, they looked at me. I pretended I don't see them. I was just, not running, just...you know.

**INT:** Just walking regularly?

**ESTHER:** Walking. And nobody suspected anything. And you know, I'm thinking of that so many times, how lucky I was. Because I didn't have **all** the documents with me, which I always went with them, but it was on a Sunday. And it was around, I would say

around Shavuot time. That must have been, maybe it was another holiday. I don't know what. It was something. Maybe a Hungarian holiday. Something it was. And nobody stopped me. I just went home. I took the trolley car, you know, till I walked to the trolley car, it must have been maybe a good three quarters of a mile, walking through all those guys there. Nobody gave a damn. Nobody. Nobody touched me, because they were all, you know, with their own mission, occupied. I don't know what their "mission" was, to catch all these Jews there, you know, and to investigate. And to see how many they could pull out of there and take them away. So I had no problem. So that's why I say that wherever I was going, I could go in any place.

**INT:** But why were you going in the ghetto in particular?

**ESTHER:** Just I passed by. You know, you pass by the streets. And you could go in. I don't know, maybe other people couldn't go in. I really don't know. (laughs)

**INT:** This was after your family had been deported.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah.

**INT:** Yeah, way after that.

**ESTHER:** This was in October. October, or November. I mean, when I was going through the fence, this was around July, June, I would say. It was in June in the summertime.

**INT:** And your family was deported when?

**ESTHER:** They were deported in May, I would say the end of May. Maybe the beginning of June. I really don't know, exactly. My sister could tell you.

**INT:** So the conditions were bad in the ghetto then? You saw the conditions?

**ESTHER:** Oh, it wasn't so bad as my brother was telling me later on, because I couldn't tell. I didn't talk to people there or something. I just looked to see what's going on, because they were talking about this ghetto. I wanted to see who is in the ghetto, how the ghetto looks, you know, just curiosity. See other people, maybe they went to a movie in my age, or they went sightseeing. I was going in there. But this was only on the weekend, because during the week I was working. I got myself, I told you, the job as...

**INT:** Did you see anyone you knew in there?

**ESTHER:** Nobody. Nobody. Nobody. But see what it is, when I was going in there, it still was the beginning. So people still had something what they were bringing in with themselves, and I couldn't imagine how bad it was, because as you know, every day, every day it was so much dirt there, and the people were cleaning up, and you know, the plumbing wasn't good. And it was a lot of misery.

**INT:** And that's what your brother had to go through when he was in there.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yes. He was there. But I didn't **know** that he was there. But I don't even know if I would have known that he was there if I could have gotten him out. I don't think so. I don't know. I'm just thinking lots of times. Could I...I've got to talk to him about it. If he would have seen me there, could I have done something for him? You know, this is all things you don't talk about. I never talked to my children about it. I never. And the fact that I wasn't among the deported people, you know, people who were in the concentration camp, I wasn't among them, because mostly I was among people who were, you know, American people when I came here. And after the war it was such a thrown together, you know, from the hospital what I was, and after the hospital I came to Bucharest, and in Bucharest there were people who weren't in the concentration camp. You know, I always kind of passed places. And the fact that I wasn't, maybe I wasn't even looking for it. So I don't think I could have done **much**, but **maybe**, maybe it would have been a way of something to do.

**INT:** He was there for six weeks towards the end of the war, did you say?

**ESTHER:** It was, he was there...(sighs) I would say November, around November the third, the fourth, till January the nineteenth. So it was more. But see, what happened, my brother, when I told him, "Stay with me." Because when they attacked that place, and he got out of that barrel, you know. And I said, "Stay with me. You'll get a job. I'll organize you a job." And the lady where I was living, she gave him place, too, to stay there. And in the morning, what I did before I went to my job, I used to drop him off on the job where I gave him, in sewing and altering there, you know, anything. Because he had that place in Budapest, you know, what he was working and designing for all these people. So I figured in such a bad time, he might be able to go into a tailor and just, you know, serve his time there. Do whatever he can. So I used to take him from my house in the morning to the place that I got him the job. And in the evening, when he had to come home, I used to go there and pick him up. Because a young fellow alone, to walk in the street, it was something that he exposed himself: take me. Because he had to be in the army, or he had to be in the ghetto. Not even in the ghetto. He had to be in the army or in the military labor department.

**INT:** There were no men walking around.

**ESTHER:** No. Old men, children. But sometimes couples they were going to work, you know, doing a very important mission. The guy whom I found on the street, you know, that I told you, when I asked him what happened over there, he was like stray, hanging around, and I took him into my house. He was a priest. He was dressed, he used to wear (laughs) he got himself priest's clothes, and in the daytime he was a priest. So at night he was a railroad guy. It's so funny. I don't know if he's still alive, but he's in Brooklyn. We used to get together and have such a laugh.

**INT:** He was a Jew pretending to be a priest.

**ESTHER:** He ran out from the same place where my brother and his friend fell into the barrel. He was hanging on the street. He didn't know where to go. So I just came to see the place, and I saw him. I say, on my way going there, I saw him. I say, "Fritz, what are you doing here?" And he says, "I have no place to go. They were killing there everybody. I was running away. I didn't know where to go." I say, "Listen. You go into my place, and stay there till I find you a place, and then you are going to be able to do whatever you want to do." But he got in touch, you know, with... There were underground places that he must have known of somebody which I knew, too, who gave me the papers. And he organized the clothes, priest's clothes. And during the day he was, you know, and at night, he had to come home, you know, so he had to sleep over. So at night he used to dress up in railroad clothes and go to another apartment. So in the morning he came home from the railroad. So this is how, you know, he was like a public servant. So you could be, you could have a chance. But it was very, very difficult. We always, now we remember, how funny it was. (laughs) And here my landlady came home in the middle, and she threw him out. (laughs) But I was there already, and I told him he had to go, because I found a little place already where he should sleep and where he should go.

No, I was very active as a young, I'm thinking now. I always had something. I wasn't afraid. So apropos what you asked me about the ghetto, it was no...

**INT:** You weren't afraid to go in.

**ESTHER:** I didn't even think it's a dangerous part, you know. Why can't I go?

**INT:** Well, can we talk about that? Do you remember your feelings during the war, what was going through your head as far as fear or depression, or any... what kind of feelings were you having, just getting through your day-to-day survival?

**ESTHER:** That's it. That's it. As a matter of fact, I was very, very involved. I don't know, people always involved me. I had to do something. (laughs) You know, like my father involved me, so probably that was always, it was okay if somebody put me to do something, that means I had to do it, because the training from childhood. But I think it was very... could you phrase the question again?

**INT:** Yes. I wanted to know if you can remember your feelings.

**ESTHER:** Oh, about the war. It was very funny, because they were bombing constantly. So these people who didn't look, who were very recognizable, you know, that they are Jewish, real Jewish types, they were hiding in these bombed-out houses. But they needed food. They needed, you know, some lifeline from the outside. So there was this organization. It wasn't an organization, through my place, you know, what my brother was there, you know what I told you, they were taping and typing and...

**INT:** The newspaper, yeah.

**ESTHER:** But I didn't know everything what it was going on, because they were more mature people there, you know, older people. And I was just, you know, the kid. So they probably, you know, they didn't expose me to everything what it was going on. But as I'm thinking now, they probably told these people where to go and where to hide. And they, through the whole week, at that time we were selling out Jewish stores. I didn't work anymore, because I couldn't go there, where the knitting was. Like I told you the hour away? They bombed out the place. So through my brother's caboodle there, they said that these Jewish stores are closed, and they're going to sell out merchandise. So only Nazis could get permission. So these people got permission, you know, Nazi papers (laughs) they were printing. And they were selling out the Jewish stores. So I was put in one of those stores to sell. And one store, they had a pocketbook store, and we were selling out. And in the other store, I don't remember. What did we sell there? We were three girls and a supervisor. You know, and he had the band, you know, with the cross. And he was in charge. It really was from the underground. So that underground took the money and bought food.

So I was like a gopher, if I'm thinking now. I went out Duna on Tul, on the other side of the Duna you could only get food, because in Budapest you couldn't get food. So we were going, I had a friend with whom I was together. Like I told you, I shared a potato with her. She was with me, too. And we were going to buy food, and they told us where to go. And this was maybe ten hours away at that time, you know, with the train. We were going **easy** for ten hours one way, and ten hours the other way. And when we came there, we found out there is food, you know, the peasants. No more Jews there, you know. There were no Jews at all. And the peasants were very happy to sell something, you know. Because they needed a dollar, too, for little things. But they wouldn't sell for money. And we had a problem.

So what do they need? Salt. And salt was a very precious thing, because it was November, you know? And they were killing the pigs and the geese, and the ducks and everything. And they didn't have any preservatives because, you know, no refrigeration. And they couldn't, they didn't have salt to preserve things, so they were really in deep troubles. And if they put things in the chimney, you know, to smoke in the smoke houses, you need salt, too. So it was a big problem. So they told us if we would bring them salt, they'll organize food for us. And as a matter of fact, they'll organize it so that it's going to be all prepared, you know, in containers and boxes and everything, and we are going to be able to take it with us.

So where do you get salt? As I was coming on the train home, with very little, maybe a few fruits or something, we did very little shopping. Because that food was going to those places in the bombed-out houses. You know, this was like a feedback. So the food, it was a problem. So coming on the train to Budapest back, they bombed again. They were cutting, you know, the Russians were working **very** hard to destroy that area, because all the Germans were already concentrated on that (?), that's that area close to Austria. And the soldiers, a lot of them, were dispersed. They didn't know where to go,

either, because they didn't have their platoon. So they took a train and they were just going wherever, you know.

And I have met a guy there. We were two weeks, by the way, at that time, on the train. Because the train was going this way, and the train was going that way. And they couldn't pass by. And at night rockets were just hitting towards us, towards the train, but it didn't hit us.

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** He was telling us, we told him we're in trouble. I said, "What's going to be with the army?" And he tried to reveal himself, you know, that he wants to run away. But he doesn't know how. And we got very friendly with him, because I found out he has a sister that worked at (?), this is like Grand Central Station, you know. But it was Grand Central Station, there was another, like the North Terminal, South Terminal. So I went there to her when we came back. As a matter of fact, when the guy came, when we were almost home, I was almost home. And I thought he's going to come to my house, and I figured I'll shelter him till he gets in touch with his sister, because his sister didn't know about him. You know, this is all in two weeks. We had time, and the little bit of food that we had, we didn't know that we are going to be such a long time on the train. So I divided it to everybody, and we got very, you know, people liked me there, and they all were so **nice** to me.

But he disappeared. (laughs) As soon as I was coming home, you know. He probably thought it over that maybe he's going to be found. And he couldn't jeopardize. So he was looking to find maybe his place. I don't know. He disappeared.

**INT:** Was he Jewish?

**ESTHER:** No! Hungarian. But I got in touch with his sister. Because, like I say, I was a free person. So I went over and I told her, because there was no telephone or anything. And I said, "Listen, I have found your brother." You know, when she saw, you know, the brother is in the army, the war is going on, and I told her I was two weeks with him on the train, she...you know, it's a sister. She was just as concerned as anybody else. And she said, how, what, and I gave her all the descriptions, and we became like two sisters.

And they were bringing in the salt there. So every time I went there I got five pounds of salt, five kilo salt. Every time she came, she brought me five kilo salt. So I had salt accumulated. You know, it's so funny. It's such an unbelievable story, you know what I mean? But yet it happened. You know, I'm trying to think. As a matter of fact, we celebrated Christmas together. Because she knew I'm Gentile. I wouldn't tell her I'm Jewish, you know. She knew I'm Gentile, and we celebrated together with another few girls. And she was like holding onto me like to the most expensive coin, you know? And

her parents were away, and she couldn't get in touch with them, either, because, you know, like I say, the war was spread out.

And when I had the salt, we were starting to go again, you know, with my friend to Duna on Tul, and we brought salt. Well, it was no problem to bring food. The problem was only (laughs) it was too heavy to get it, you know? How could you carry? Everybody wanted salt. And I got maybe three, four places, you know, that they knew we are coming. And from that food, it was distributed, and we had some food for ourselves, too.

**INT:** But it was distributed to Jewish people?

**ESTHER:** To the Jewish people in the broken-down houses.

**INT:** Did you know that, that that's what you were doing?

**ESTHER:** Oh, 100%. As a matter of fact, how many times was I going in to those bombed-out places and see nebbich those people in puddles. The sewage was broken, everything was broken, but they were living there. They were really struggling, struggling, but they were afraid to come out, because they had long noses and dark hair and dark faces, you know, the real Israeli down looks. And I don't know. Like I say, I had no problem.

**INT:** This friend that you were going with to get the food...

**ESTHER:** Magda.

**INT:** Was she Jewish?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. As a matter of fact, she was Czechoslovakian. And she was running from Czechoslovakia to Austria, and from Austria, she was in hiding so to say with her mother and her brother. And then she came to Budapest. She was in Mishkoltz, and she got married in Mishkoltz. You know, she had a whole string of, she was very young, too, but she was maybe, I would say, five, six years. Maybe more. Maybe ten years older than me.

**INT:** So she was hiding on Christian papers, too?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Her name was Magda?

**ESTHER:** Magda, yeah.

**INT:** And is she the one that you shared the potato with?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.



**INT:** Okay, so how did you hook up with her? How did you meet her?

**ESTHER:** You know, I'm just thinking. How did I get together with her? I just, you know, it's so funny. It's a long string, because I met so many, you know. Like there were people, mothers, who had girls of my age. They wanted to pay my rent, I should just be with their daughter, with their kid together. Because they had the feeling of security. I don't know, you know, you might think I'm boasting my ego or something. Believe me, it's everything through. I didn't want to. Because I was afraid. I didn't know what kind of girls they are, and who they are, and they might give me away, you know. I always knew I'm not kosher. You know, this was with me. I used to worry at night, get up, I shouldn't talk something. I shouldn't say something. But as it turned out, Magda was married, and they didn't live together, because they couldn't be as a couple together. So he lived in another place, and she lived with me. We slept in one bed. And her mother was in another place with her brother, a young kid.

**INT:** How did you come to tell her, did you tell her you were Jewish and did she tell you?

**ESTHER:** Oh, she knew. Where did we meet? Some place we met. I think in a restaurant. We met. And you know, we were very sharp at each other, you know? If we saw somebody that we assumed, we used to say, "A musician, too." Tzintzenne is, you know, he is a musician.

**INT:** Meaning, "He's a Jew, also."

**ESTHER:** Yes. Music, a musician. So you know, we started to talk, and then, you know, there was a lot of talking around there. I mean, here people don't talk. There everybody.

**INT:** Was that helpful to you that you had this friend? Do you think she helped you?

**ESTHER:** Never. As a matter of fact, I have met her. We got lost. Because my brother, like I say, he came, and he said, "Let's go." So I lost contact with everybody. Because you know, one hour, if you didn't come home, you were already in another place, because the bombs and the shooting and the machine guns were going on. So we got lost. But after the war, when I came back to Budapest, I bumped into her husband. And he **insisted**, they had a villa in Mishkoltz. His father's villa. Very, very prominent people there, this Soltan. Kadar Soltan. Very prominent family. And when he found me, he **insisted**, I was in the kibbutz then, you know. And he insisted I should come to his house. And I was there for a weekend. And Magda was very, very nice, and she said, "You know, I never did for you anything. (laughs) I might as well do it while you're now here." You know, there are certain people who could do. She was involved with herself.

**INT:** She was the one that cried because she...

**ESTHER:** She couldn't give me, she couldn't give me anything. I never asked. I never thought she has more than she had, but whatever she found...

**INT:** But I mean a different kind of help. I mean emotional help, or just knowing that you had someone you could talk to.

**ESTHER:** No. Absolutely. I never had a problem with talking to, because people always approached me, always wanted to know. And my big problem was that I have too many people around me. You know, that was a problem, too. Because I was kind of in the shovel, you know? There was so much to do, that everybody needed such desperate help. And I was always getting hooked up with all these stupidities, that they could have done it themselves if they would have had to do it, but you know, it was easier to have somebody else to.

**INT:** Like what?

**ESTHER:** Like they came to my house, to my place. All girls from Budapest. They used to dress up real elegant. The war is going on, with makeup. You know, they were very well-to-do people. With makeup, with everything, nice clothes. The **finest**. Coming and visiting me, you know, I had met them. And their parent, the mother I have met. They brought me up to come to their house. At that time the ghetto wasn't yet, you know, filled up. And they wanted me to do for them something, to make them a place where to live, because they saw they are going to be pulled out, because the time was, you know, more and more it was squeezed in. And I told them. I say, "I could help you. I could organize papers for you. I could get you a place. But you have to do it by yourself. And if you are going to go with makeup, and with fancy clothes, and come to a place like mine, I cannot tolerate it, because I'm in danger. I'm not free of anything." And in spite of this, they still came. They didn't know any other way. (laughs) I wore a pair of pants with a little vest, you know, but I was clean. I had my sneakers. You know. I didn't have any luxuries, but I had the necessary things, and that's it. But they, in a time like that? I could have been caught like nothing. So that's why I say that I had problems, that they were always storming to me, to come. Maybe they'll meet somebody. I always met new people, and I had no problem.

As a matter of fact, when the Romanian Jews were coming after the war, to that camp, you know, to (?), I met so many people, because they wanted me to translate to them, because they couldn't speak Hungarian. I spoke Romanian and I spoke Hungarian. So they wanted me to translate. So where did I wind up? I was in the kibbutz. And I gave my bed to a pregnant woman. Because I saw in that horrible situation. And where she is, she has no place to wash herself, to do. It was hot. No conditions to be there, you know, not even the water was running right. So I brought her home. So it was a problem for me, because I had to sleep with another girl. And it turned out the other girl was a lesbian, and I didn't even know. I didn't even know what lesbianism means, you know? It just, as life comes on now, I start to think. And I was so embarrassed, here being the head of the kibbutz, and you know, I had to sleep with her, because I gave my bed to

this... You know, I had to always, I was too soft, you know. Too soft. That I'm thinking back.

**INT:** You were helping people a lot, though.

**ESTHER:** Oh, constantly. Constantly. Because, not because I...you couldn't, I couldn't do it any other way. Because I grew up in a house where you always had to do something for somebody. And they swarmed around me. They felt I could, and I really, if I could, I always helped. And I forgot about myself. And that's not the right thing to do.

**INT:** What about fear?

**ESTHER:** I had no fear whatsoever.

**INT:** You had no fear.

**ESTHER:** No. I had fear that I am going to be caught, oh, **many** times. Many times. I used to say to myself, "Who knows? I'm still going on like this." But I was involved with thinking of my parents, of my sisters. You know, and life didn't mean to me anything, because I lost my family. It was such a **horrible**, horrible feeling, (crying) to feel that you lost your family, you know, and a family that you cared for, that they cared for you. You know, sometimes you lose a family that they never cared for you. But as little as it was there, the tiniest thing, it was shared. It was, you know, worked out that everybody should have it. And everybody have no more than the other, or just as much as one needs. And it was **very, very** sad. So I didn't care if I am being caught.

They were bombing, and I was in the basement where I lived, already in another place, in Old Buda, not in Pest anymore. They were bombing. There was a little place, the house was maybe, I don't know...(break while she gets a tissue) In those years, you know. But a little house there and they were bombing, and everybody said, you have to go into that big house, it has a big shelter, you know, tremendous, maybe a six-story house was built with a tremendous shelter. And everybody said, next time the bombs are coming, we got to run over. It wasn't too far. It was like over the street, you know, like a good street walk. And I said, "I am not going. I don't need to go there." You know. The same thing was, I was working, and they were attacking that factory. And people, as soon as the planes came, they used to run, and there was a big hill and caves in the hill. Everybody was running in to the caves, and hiding. And I said, "I'm not going." I stayed. But then it was a little bit of a suspicion, because if somebody was staying, they accused them, maybe it's a spy who's taking pictures or something. I overheard, you know, talking about that, a big management. So I said to myself, I must go, because you feel, you know, you are not kosher. Maybe they didn't **mean** me. Maybe they meant other people.

**INT:** Why didn't you want to go at first? You just didn't care?

**ESTHER:** Because I lost my family. I didn't care. I said, whatever it will come, it will come. So I didn't go to that house. But one thing it happened. Too many people in that little basement, and I passed out. So you know, no air. And I wasn't an eater. I was very, you know. But air I needed. And I collapsed. So they got me out and the bombs were flying, so they threw me outside, you know? So I didn't care. You know, I didn't care. I was outside and the bombs were flying, and it didn't bother me. But at least I'm not in that suffocating place. I felt it's better to die with the air than to die in suffocation (laughs) even though, you know, this was my feeling.

And the same thing was all the way. That I did not... And I didn't go.

**INT:** What I don't understand is, you say you didn't care anymore because your family had been killed.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** But on the other hand, every day you were doing things to save yourself. So it's sort of a contradiction in a way. It's like...

**ESTHER:** I really didn't do to save myself. I was working.

**INT:** You were on Christian papers, and you were...

**ESTHER:** Yes. I mean, I was looking, I mean, this is one thing. Yeah, I know what you are talking. It's true. It's true.

**INT:** It's interesting, because...

**ESTHER:** But I didn't take big chances, you know, to hide. I did the main thing, that I'm not Jewish. The rest, with survival, you know, like other people were struggling to survive, like the bombs were falling, they were running away and hiding. I didn't, because I felt, nah, for me they're not going to do anything. And if it's going to be done, it's going to be. But it was too much to worry about two things, I think. Too much to worry about my surviving as a Christian, and surviving to watch for danger, for killing. Not killing, for bombs.

But one day, because I found out what they were talking in that factory, I went up to the hill, too. And the shells were flying from all over. It was a beautiful day. And it was unbelievable. You know, the machine guns were shooting, so it was like a rain coming down with bullets. Apropos you say I'm not afraid. So I said, "**No more** am I going to go. I want to die inside." (laughs) You know, it was always, the situation. "I'm not going anymore out. I didn't want to go till now, and I'm not going to go anymore." Because that was too scary for me to see how those shells, and people are dying, you know, and screaming and yelling. At least you get suffocated, you know, you fall, something falls on you, and I figured you die. But it's so fluctuating all the time. You know, you always took one situation at a time. You can't take it as a whole.

And like I say, once, because I passed out in the basement, and I figured everybody's running there. I'm going to go, too. You know what happened? That building collapsed, because the bombs were coming down **this** way, and it fell into the basement. You know, the real heavy bombs were going...

**INT:** On a diagonal.

**ESTHER:** On a diagonal. And the whole basement was destroyed. And you know, it was a **miracle** that I survived. Maybe, **very** few people survived. Everybody. And then I said, don't run. You know, there's even a song (sings it). No matter what, you run, you try to protect yourself. Whatever your destiny is, it's not going to avoid you. Your destiny is not going to avoid you. And I saw it so many times, really.

**INT:** You weren't **in** the basement when that happened, right?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Oh, you **were** in the basement.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure. I was in the basement. But there were a few people. See, I came in late, so I was in the front, because the basement was full of people. But it was place. Because everybody came probably from around, it must have been a new building or something, I don't know. Well, we had a lot of experiences like that. They had once in a...

**INT:** So you saw all those people get killed by the bomb.

**ESTHER:** Oh, many times. This wasn't...But you know sometimes I used to be so happy. Because the people were in the ghetto already. And I said to myself, "None of you killed." I didn't think there are Jews, you know. I always thought they are all cleaned out already. Because the ghetto wasn't bombed. Why wasn't the ghetto bombed? Maybe to the end there and I don't know about it. But I don't think the ghetto had fell bombs there. I don't think so. It's interesting. I've got to ask my brother, if he remembers.

**INT:** So can you talk a little bit about coming back? You talked, we talked last night about the long walk back, and how difficult it was for you. And you said several times that after the war was even harder than the war.

**ESTHER:** Terrible. For a young kid to be running around? And some people were settled already, because as you were coming, there were people who had their homes a little, they had fixed up a little bit.

**INT:** Families.

**ESTHER:** They had families, and I didn't have anybody. And I still walked. Until I got to the hospital I walked. And then I couldn't walk anymore, because I was really in deep trouble. And you know, the walk, the freezing of my toes was very bad for one thing. There passed a wagon, you know, with horses? And they saw I'm pulling myself. So somebody got off the wagon, you know, there are a lot of good people when you are in troubles. And they gave me the place to sit a little bit, you know, on the wagon. And there where my feet froze, because I didn't move them. And I was, you know, like this. And the frost was terrible. So they did me a favor, and I covered myself with a little shmatta there, but it wasn't, you know, no circulation.

**INT:** If you had been walking, you would have had more circulation.

**ESTHER:** I would have not come to it. So it was difficult.

**INT:** Could you talk about coming back to your hometown, and what that was like?

**ESTHER:** (Sighs heavily) That was terrible. That was terrible. I cried three months after I saw my parents (crying), you know, that train pass by, and they didn't stop. They were supposed to stop and get some food and continue. But when they didn't stop, it was **very, very** bad. And when I came home, it was just as bad. Because the house was all taken apart. And we had a big stable, and where the buses were coming in, making U-turns, you know. And it was a big place. Everything was taken apart. Whatever it was, the stable was made out of wood. Everybody pulled pieces. You know, whatever one needed, took. Because every little thing was a valuable thing. And the house was out, because we lived close to a bridge. And the bridge was bombed. You know, bombed or dynamited. And it was so close to our house, that the house collapsed. So once the house collapsed, the people who lived there, who were still around, they took whatever they could. You know, everybody, they had something. So there was nothing. Only the hole from the basement. We didn't have a basement, we had a hole, you know, where we stored potatoes and onions for Pesach, you know, and for seeds and for all these things.

**INT:** So there was nothing left. No possessions.

**ESTHER: Nothing.** Absolutely nothing. But my parents left some things with some neighbors, you know, Gentile neighbors. Very nice neighbors of ours. My mother was very good to them, too. All the time they were working hard, my mother always prepared something for them to have something to eat, you know, a bite or something. And they appreciated even that my mother **talked** to them, you know, because everybody was so busy. So they hid some things, like they took it for themselves, but when I came back, they tried to give it to me. It was some quilts, two quilts, which it was very handy. Quilts, thin ones, very thin ones. I'm sure there was some other things, too, that they didn't, they probably consumed it through the time. But they were the people who came with food to the ghetto, to my parents. You know.

**INT:** Oh, they would bring them food?

**ESTHER:** And they couldn't, they came once or twice, but you know, they weren't allowed, so they saw the problem. But they protested. I mean, they put their life in jeopardy. And that was very nice. But to find things?

**INT:** There was nothing. Where did you go after that? Did you stay in the town?

**ESTHER:** No, I didn't stay. I went out to the town where my brother was living.

**INT:** Which brother?

**ESTHER:** My older brother.

**INT:** Ben-Zion.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Both brothers lived there, both brothers. And there we found, like I told you, this horrible little house, the best house of the town, you know, that it was there. And (sighs) like I say, it had holes all around. No stove, no oven, no nothing, and it was already February. Bitter cold. And those mountains, everything was chilling. You know, I wanted to take mud. I had to watch when the sun is coming up, and put, I sign myself, "Oh, the sun is coming out. Maybe by 1:00, 2:00, it's going to be something melted that I could scrape off and get some mud in a pail." A pail, I don't even know what I put it in. If I had a good pail to store my mud in there. But always getting a little bit, and shmearing it up, (laughs) till I put this place together. It looked nice after.

**INT:** And you lived there with your two brothers?

**ESTHER:** I lived there with my two brothers, till this guy came along, you know, I told you, who wanted to marry me.

**INT:** Right. But what about Ben-Zion? His wife came back, right?

**ESTHER:** Came back later. She came in August. See, the war ended in May, and she didn't come till August.

**INT:** And where did she survive the war?

**ESTHER:** She was in Danzig. She was all over, you know, in all these concentration camps she was. But she survived okay.

**INT:** Did he have children, Ben-Zion?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** And that's how she survived. She didn't have the children.

**ESTHER:** That's why she survived. She had no children. But my other brother had a little girl, and his wife didn't survive. She got killed. So it was misery all around when I came home. There were thirteen men in that town, and I was one girl. And everybody cried on my shoulders. You say I didn't think, you know, I was constantly, everybody cried on my shoulder. And one guy, even tried of those, tried to sleep with me. You know, everybody went away and I was sure everybody is out. And he came and he started to talk to me, and he was almost older than, as old as my father, for sure. And I saw him, you know, like a man who had children, and I knew his wife and everything, and he attacked me. He threw me in in a bed, and I was lucky, the bed broke down, because it was such an old bed. It was **misery** all the way. Because I was so to say...

**INT:** Totally unprotected.

**ESTHER:** Unprotected, but I was pretty skilled to protect myself. But you know, they were embarrassed if I said, if I put them to it, and I really gave it to them, because I was pretty...

**INT:** Feisty, huh?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. So they said that I wanted to, you know. That I'm so, you know, there was all that, you know talking about me. Because you know, sour grapes, if you can't reach for it, it's...So it was really very difficult. But then my situation started to get better.

**INT:** But how did you fight them off? You shamed them out of it, sort of?

**ESTHER:** Oh, boy. Oh, boy. Like I got broken into that bed. I said, "Wait, they are coming. And I'm going to show them how you broke this bed with me, what you did. I'm going to show my brother." You know, I still was lucky, but other girls, when they came later on, they weren't so lucky. They had one house they designated for the girls to sleep there. And these guys used to come late at night with some food, with a little maybe something. And they just moved in with the girls, and the girls didn't have where to go.

**INT:** Jewish guys.

**ESTHER:** Sure, the guys from there, what else? You know, I was very, very upset. Because you know, I had an upbringing from way back home that you don't do things like that. It's a terrible thing. And as a matter of fact, we lived, my house was next to the priest from the town. Is it a priest? He was married, he had children. And he was next to me, and one day I spoke to him. I spoke to the priest. And the house where the girls were sleeping was next to him. So he, I don't know, I talked to him, and he says, "Yeah, you are lucky. You have your brothers. But those girls have nobody." I say, "Maybe you could organize something for these kids to have somebody to take care of them." I say, "You see what's going on." He says, "Yes." Because I say, "I see it, too," because you know through my window I used to see how these guys used to get out early in the



morning, around 5:00, 6:00. They used to just walk out of the houses, of the house there. And those girls had no way to function. They had nothing. They were their existence, so to say. Could you imagine, you come home after a concentration camp, without parents, without anything, and you don't have a shelter, you don't have anybody who should worry for you to give you a meal? It was...it was...terrible. But then, you know, people got smarter. They started to go to the cities, because they found out in the cities they were a little bit more organized. In the big cities they were a little bit more organized, so it worked out. So this is what I did. After I got this fiasco with that guy, I came to Satmar. And in Satmar I had this cousin.

**INT:** Satmar?

**ESTHER:** Satmar, yeah. I came there, and...

**INT:** But then he was after you, also.

**ESTHER:** Yes, but he was very decent. Very. I mean, he did everything possible. He made me shoes. He ordered shoes, clothes for me, I should look nice. Because from all that richness with the guy, I didn't get out of him anything, because I **hated** him. I could have had, like I told you, those diamonds. I didn't want anything. I didn't want he should bring me, I didn't want to see him, I didn't want to hear him. But then finally, you know, you get Madison Avenue into you, and you start to glorify things. But otherwise I didn't get. And I came to my cousin, and he ordered some very nice shoes for me, and he got me something what's fashionable in the city. Because he had a textile store. He was already set up, yes.

**INT:** Did he lose a wife?

**ESTHER:** He lost his wife and three children, yeah. And he was the most decent person I can think of. And as a matter of fact, maybe...

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Berel. Berel Malig. He moved from Satmar to Israel, and he was there, Rosh, you know, the top of the town.

**INT:** Rosh Hanikra?

**ESTHER:** No, he was the...

**INT:** Oh, he's the head of the town.

**ESTHER:** The head of the town, yes. He was, in Bet Gamliel. And then he moved to, what's the name, in Haifa. To the Vizhnitz kibbutz. It was a kibbutz, or what is it. You know, it's like a settlement.

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** [He said] to me, "If you feel like it and you care, but if you have somebody else." There was a dentist who wanted me. I just wasn't ready to get married. But later on, I'll tell you, was another downfall. Because, you know, the world settled a little bit, and I was still thinking for myself: Ich habe zeit, you know, I have time to get involved. Because I lost interest, you know, when everybody is on your head, and pulling you pieces, and you see all those bad sides from guys, you know...

**INT:** You lose your interest.

**ESTHER:** So it was very, very, very funny after. But then I came to Satmar. From Satmar I have met some very nice people, some friends of my cousins. I don't know if you heard of the Ulmans. Very, very nice. So one of the Ulmans, they had like a big mansion, in Grosswardein. They were top of the line people. And this girl was a cousin to one of the guys who was eligible, and she insisted I should come for Shabbas to her house, and she's going to introduce me to this guy. And something, you know, maybe this is the right person for me. You know, people tried to match me up. And I came there, and truthfully, I saw it's too much for me. They were way, way above my level, in education and in everything. But he said he wouldn't mind. I told him. I say, "Listen. What am I going to do here?" I was already seventeen, almost eighteen. I said, "I don't think so. I want to immigrate, I want to go to Germany and see what I'm going to do there. I don't want to stay here." You know, I saw....

**INT:** You had decided to leave the country?

**ESTHER:** At that time I had decided to get out, because my older sister was in Germany, in Munich.

**INT:** Now how did you hear about your sisters, that they were alive?

**ESTHER:** Through the Red Cross.

**INT:** You searched for them?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure. Sure. The Red Cross notified. So I found that my sister Olga is in Munich, close to Munich, and my two sisters were in Sweden. So I had in mind to go to Sweden, or to go to...because I corresponded with them. And I said they should come out, and they said, what am I going to find there? The catastrophe? Look it over again? We don't want to go anyplace. We want to stay here.

**INT:** Did they know what had happened to you? Did they know that you were alive even, or did they think that you...

**ESTHER:** Oh, they found out that I am alive, also the same time.

**INT:** Did they assume that you were dead, also, the way you assumed they were?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I'm sure. Yeah, sure. They didn't know what happened to me.

**INT:** Because they just knew you went to Budapest.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, they didn't know anything. No.

**INT:** So was that a happy time for you, when you found them?

**ESTHER:** When I found them? Sure. That's why I say I almost, that's why I decided almost to marry the guy, because I figured if they come home, they have nothing. Just in case they want to come. And...

**INT:** But they didn't want to come.

**ESTHER:** They didn't, but at the time, you know, they were in such a transit situation, that I figured eventually they'll come, you know.

**INT:** What made you decide to leave?

**ESTHER:** Out of the country? I'll tell you. I think my sister. From California.

**INT:** Olga.

**ESTHER:** Olga. I felt sorry for her, when I heard what the people were telling me about her, what she went through in the concentration camp, I kind of couldn't sit still. But I was in Budapest already. From Grosswardein, this shidduch didn't work out. I was in Grosswardein maybe for three, four months, and I got into a kibbutz in Grosswardein.

**INT:** Is that in Hungary, Grosswardein?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. It was Hungary. Now it's Romania. Grosswardein, the guy who organized that big kibbutz, it was a tremendous kibbutz, very well-organized, with good money and everything. And I got in there. And that was the best time of my life. But it was a downfall again. Why? Because when I came from Hungary, you know, those thousand kilometers? I was in Grosswardein, and this guy who was the president of the kibbutz wanted me. He begged me not to go home, to stay. You know, they were in the manufacturing of colors. All kinds of colors. Raw materials, and they made colors out of it. And they had a business that they were going with little railroads in the middle, you know, with little wagons. Was very, very well...

**INT:** What did they make out of it?

**ESTHER:** They made colors from stones, from raw materials. You know, everything in the color is raw material. It's from stones, from natural things they make it. So what they did, they bought raw materials, and they manufactured colors. So they really were in it. As a matter of fact, they wanted to train me, and to get into this line, because it was an upcoming thing in those years. That was in 1945.

**INT:** Now how did you get hooked up with these people?

**ESTHER:** I just came by, you know? And I was looking for people, Jewish people, who are home. And the Ulmans were a little in relation with my mother's family. So I remembered the name and I looked them up and I found them. They were so happy. They entertained, they didn't know what to do for me. And they wanted me to stay, and I just...

**INT:** But who hooked you up with the kibbutz where you were working?

**ESTHER:** Oh, with the kibbutz, this is what I wanted to say. With the kibbutz in Grosswardein. I came from Satmar, and in the meantime my two brothers moved to Grosswardein. And when they moved, but suddenly they came there. When they moved, I figured I have a place to be. You know, I could be with them. But it didn't work out. Because my sister-in-law, you know, it was many, many things there.

**INT:** Ben-Zion's wife?

**ESTHER:** Ben-Zion's wife. I can't blame her. She didn't have children. Maybe she tried it out with other people, you know, to have a child or something, and I was there like a bone in her throat. And you know, I could realize. So that was already where I fixed up the house. When she came home, I had the little home for her, and then I had to leave that home and go out. Anyhow, it wasn't important.

But when my sister-in-law gave me a hard time in the house, and the hard time came, my sister from Sweden, because I told her my hardship what I have around, she wrote her a letter that she should behave, and she should treat me nice, because I'm an orphan, and I'm of minor age, and you know, she should be kind. So that she never forgot, and I don't blame her. But she found the letter, I didn't. And she was reading it to everybody. So I couldn't take it, and I said to myself, all right. I was in Satmar, I know it's no good for me. (laughs) I was in Grosswardein, I got these people, I was introduced, I'll go to my brother till I see what I'm going to do.

So when I was in my brother's house, I saw it's no good, and I figured, I'm going to go to the kibbutz. But it was, believe me, it was the worst thing to me, that here is the guy who's the president of the kibbutz, who's supporting it with money, with culture, with everything. It was a very cultural place there. They did a beautiful, beautiful job with that kibbutz. And I have to go in, and the kibbutz was so loaded with people, because there was such a demand, and I had to make an application to be allowed to get into the

kibbutz. So you can imagine how I felt. (laughs) I felt like, I didn't have any place to go. It was the last resort.

So my sister-in-law kind of locked me out of the house, and I had to sleep no place. So what I did, Saturday, I went to the kibbutz. And there were all the girls, they liked me, and they said, "You could come and sleep with me." But how could you sleep there when you have no admission, you know. You cannot go. So you know what they did? They pulled me in at night through the window. I swear. And I slept. There were three people who wanted me to sleep with them. So they said, "You know what you do? You come to this angle, nobody will see. We'll open up the window, and you'll come in, and you'll sleep over, and in the morning we'll see Mr. Ulman, and you'll talk to him." And I had put an application there. He was embarrassed (laughs), and I was. We were so...But he got married to a beautiful young girl, very well, from a very, very fine family, he married. And she appreciated it, because you know, she was of the same level. And I was afraid to get into it, and I wasn't yet ready anyhow, you know.

So I got into that kibbutz, and in that kibbutz I was doing exceptionally well. Because I got myself a job in a knitting place, and I was learning, you know. They had, you know...

**INT:** What kind of classes?

**ESTHER:** They had Hebrew school. Not Hebrew, Jewish and Hungarian, but mostly with the Hebrew background, because they were getting the people ready to go to Israel. But I didn't have a problem there whatsoever. Really, they made me the head of the food department, you know? The shopping and everything. And they send out people with me, that whatever I sent to buy, and to economize. You know, I was like on the head of the food department. And that was, in those years, you know, it's like being now the head of I don't know what. Because food was the lifeline. The most important thing.

**INT:** How many kids were in that kibbutz, would you say?

**ESTHER:** I would say around, maybe 80. 80 girls, I would say, and maybe 60 boys.

**INT:** Did you ever know any of the kids there?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. I didn't know. No, no. I just bumped in. You know, I was in Grosswardein, I went there Saturday for a sichah, you know, and look around, and this is how I met people, and we got acquainted, and that's how I got into the kibbutz. And I know I have no problem, because he's going to take me. But how do I get in there after, over a year and a half later, you know, maybe almost two years later. To come, you know, with my tail hanging behind me. It was a terrible, terrible thing. Like I say, I goofed up my life in many ways. I didn't have enough confidence to really think for myself. It's always, you know, in a different place.

**INT:** But it seems that that's all you did, was think for yourself.

**ESTHER:** No, I don't think so. How?

**INT:** You got through the entire war thinking for yourself. You got through before the war thinking for yourself.

**ESTHER:** I think by not thinking for yourself, I think you do more for somebody else. See, when you think for yourself, you really do for yourself only.

**INT:** I see what you're saying.

**ESTHER:** But not thinking for yourself.

**INT:** You're saying, are you saying that you didn't make decisions that would have made your life better in some way?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I could have made better decisions, yes. Way, way better decisions. I regret it now. Because I had such opportunities, and I, you know, it's like...

**INT:** Like what do you regret?

**ESTHER:** Well, I would have had a much fuller life than I had after I got married. Much. You know, if you talk about marriage, it would have been completely...maybe not, who knows? But when I came back from Grosswardein, from that kibbutz, I went with a girl, and we were crossing all the borders.

**INT:** Wait. How long were you in Grosswardein?

**ESTHER:** I was maybe three quarters of a year, maybe more. Three quarters of a year. And then I packed up with a knapsack, and this girl said she's coming with me, and we were going together. Very fine girl.

**INT:** What was her name?

**ESTHER:** Ettie. But I don't remember her other name.

**INT:** You were going to go to Germany?

**ESTHER:** We were going to Germany. But first I was going from Grosswardein to Hungary, to Budapest. This was the, you know, the first stop. To Budapest. And then we'll see from there. But there were the Hungarian border to cross, from Budapest. No, from Romania. We had to cross to Hungary. It was a border.

**INT:** Grosswardein was in Romania.

**ESTHER:** It was Romania at the time, yeah. And we had to cross into Hungary. And that alone is, believe me, maybe five hours. Because we were going through mud and through everything, and how we were...it was a messy thing. Finally we got to...

**INT:** Did you have a guide? Or just the two of you?

**ESTHER:** No, I had a guide. But he took us through all the, you know, I had a...you put in one foot, and you had to pull out the foot to put out the other foot, and you were sinking in constantly, sinking in. We thought we'll never get out of there. And then the police were chasing, you know, on the borders, they were going around. And finally we got out to a place, where the police came. And they didn't realize that we are not of Hungarian, you know, that we are not doing it. Because I spoke Hungarian. And fluently, I spoke it. Now I forgot a lot. But I was very good, because I put an effort in to be as well-spoken as possible. So it was...

So when I came to Budapest, and I wanted to continue, I found some people with whom I was during the war. And they discouraged me from going to Germany, because it's messy, it's misery, it's this, and that's how I got involved with the kibbutz in Budapest.

**INT:** Oh, I thought the kibbutz was in Grosswardein.

**ESTHER:** Yes, but in Grosswardein was the kibbutz where I started in that kibbutz. But when I came to Hungary, there was no kibbutz. It was the Agudas Yisroel kibbutz, some place in one place a little place. But I found a house, a place, the rabbi lived downstairs, and upstairs there were four big rooms. And I took those four rooms, because there wasn't enough place to house all these people who wanted to be in the kibbutz. You know, there was no place to go. So that's how I organized that kibbutz in Budapest.

**INT:** I see. So this is a separate kibbutz.

**ESTHER:** That's a separate. That's from Grosswardein, and I had learned how the kibbutz is going from Grosswardein, because they gave me so much confidence there.

**INT:** Responsibility.

**ESTHER:** Not only that, everybody looked up to me. You know, when the meetings were coming up, you know, they had top people, top speakers. It was very, very well-organized, I mean, on a high level. And I got a little bit out of it. You know, I couldn't learn the whole thing, but I got a little idea, and I started to put it together, and I organized sewing machines. There I found out that some twelve girls knew how to sew. So I knew Budapest, and they made me something very nice to wear, and when I went out I told the people, they admired my clothes, so I said, "You want me to get something? You have some material? We have a shop, you could come." And I organized for the girls to do, they had so much work. But I went to the Mercaz, and I told them. I said, "Listen, I have there twelve seamstresses, and they haven't got any work, because we don't have sewing machines. We don't have anything." He said, "Okay. Maybe I'll

organize a sewing machine." I said, "One sewing machine I'm not going to take. If you can't give me at least ten sewing machines, I'm not going to start," because I figured they are going to start to make a war there.

So what do you think? In no time I got ten sewing machines, and the girls were working, and they were happy. And with the money, then the Joint gave us supplement. You know, they gave rations. And I organized the Joint to give the rations, and whatever we didn't consume, I found a place on the market. Because it wasn't too far from that, you know, every Thursday they have a big market there. So I saw they are selling beans, and barley, and G-d knows what, you know, corn. Things the kids didn't eat. And I said, "Look, I have a lot of it. Are you interested to buy?" (laughs) He said, "Yes. Where **are** you?" Because it was so hard to get. So we had a lot, because we were sending all these empty things, really, to these kibbutzim. Who is going to do it? I mean, this is good, too. And canned goods, what he didn't eat. So the guy used to come around. Not only did he buy my surplus, but from all the kibbutzim that we had around, I told them all, there is a guy who is going to come and pick it up, and we had money. So with that money we were going to the theater. You know, I distributed with the girls. We were going to shows. We were going sightseeing Saturdays, you know, Sundays. And we had the food that we wanted to have, you know, and it was distributed. It was very, we had a pretty nice atmosphere there. But some of the girls, like I told you, they were jealous. They wanted to tear me apart. Here I'm working so hard for everybody. And with the sewing I was working hard, too. I could have made the business for myself. You know, I organized. And I had to be responsible for what they are doing, and I was there to tell them what to do and how to do, and I met people wherever I went. They admired what I wore, and I right away had a conversation about it, and it worked out.

**INT:** How many girls in the Agudas Yisroel?

**ESTHER:** We had around, to the end it was 32 girls. But you know, it was so...it was funny, because it came the time that broke the camel's hair. There were maybe four people who came from Russia. And one of the guys came from my area, but I didn't know him, I didn't know who he was. I just, you know, we got in touch. And one girl was very in love with him. And she wanted him. And I figured, believe me, I didn't want him for no money (laughs). And I figured he got sick in the hospital, and she went to visit him. She didn't know how to go there, and she didn't speak the Hungarian language. So I took her there. And I have met him sick, and she was crazy about him, and I was very upset that he is so sick. He had some stones or something. And he never forgot me. He really fell in love. (laughs) I'm sounding funny, you know, with that business. (laughs)

**INT:** No, no.

**ESTHER:** (Laughs) I had so much tsuris! He liked **me**. And I gave him permission to come in and see her. And when I saw he doesn't want her, I didn't want him to come. And he had a brother who was engaged, and they were always together, and with these girls. All right. I said to myself, "I'm not going to take all this shit, accusing me, and I'm



doing all these things. I'm packing up and I'm leaving." You know, I didn't owe anybody anything.

**INT:** So that was the last straw.

**ESTHER:** And I left the whole thing. And I went to, again, crossing the border to Austria. And I'm going on the truck...

**INT:** Who did you go with to cross the border? Did you go by yourself?

**ESTHER:** It was a truckload. (laughs)

**INT:** Oh, a truckload of people?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, who knows who it was?

**INT:** Jewish people.

**ESTHER:** Jewish people, yeah. So I was on that truck, and all of a sudden, what do you think? I see this Isadore with his brother, with his sister-in-law on the truck.

**INT:** Who's Isadore?

**ESTHER:** The guy who this girl liked so dearly. Because we were talking. You know, I told everybody that I'm going. So he came.

**INT:** He follows you.

**ESTHER:** He followed me. And you know, it was the biggest obsession to me. I don't know, not obsession. I was very upset. I said, "What do I need him here? Now, you know, everybody will be, you know, they'll be right to say that he, you know, I take him away from her or something." It would have been the last thing. (laughs) As a matter of fact, he came with me all the way, till Germany, with his brother. Never dawned on me to marry him. I mean, I had all the...I was alone again, you know, with nobody that I knew. Anyhow, it was very upsetting to me.

But as it turned out, I came to Austria, to the Rothschild Hospital. I don't know if you heard of it. There were 60 people in the hospital, in that hospital. A big, big, giant.

**INT:** This is Vienna?

**ESTHER:** In Vienna, yeah. And they were all sleeping together, couples with children, with sheets hung up, and you know. It turned my stomach. I couldn't see that. So what did I do? I went to the Mercaz, and I said, "Look. Our children are gone. They all died. They got killed. Here we have a few kids who come from Romania, from, and they are trying to travel to Israel, and this is the facilities we give them? Why can't we have a

place to put the children, to take care of them till the parents arrange to go, because it's not a way to be, everything together." And I figured the kids need some education, because I knew I was missing it, and I didn't want these kids should have the same experience that I had. And I said, "The kids need a school. They need something, they come in, they should have a place, till the arrangements are made to continue to go."

Well, they gave me money, I should go to the camps, and I should canvas the people, because Austria had quite a few camps. And they were **miserable** camps, you know, in October, November, you know. It was, the sukkah, like a sukkah. It blew in and those big forests, you know, in the middle of the forests, and they made a big fire in the middle, and that was the little warmth that they got. It was **misery** in those camps. Misery. And I was canvassing. And we got a place, in Bindermiechel, they gave me a very beautiful place. Two rooms for the kids, and one room for me. So I got a very nice place. And when I got there, I started, my heart started to break. I said, "Why do I have to do that?" There was a mother who had one child, and she gave him to me, I should put him in that home. You know, I said, it's such an unsecure world, with coming, with going. Okay, the bombs weren't falling, you know, it was already peace. But my heart broke. You know, she has this only child. She came out of this horrible place from Romania, going to travel, and she gives this kid to me. I said, what do I know how good the kid is going to be taken care of? Because I'm not there to do it. Because there were other people who had to take care. I was just bringing them in. And I kind of...

And in the meantime, believe me, I could have built up there a school that I should have a name for myself for the future, because what I was doing. But it just didn't go with me. And here this Isadore, the guy who came from my town, like I told you, who followed me, he saw that I'm so busy there in Austria, and I'm busy with people, and you know, I always reached for the higher level of people. They were always, you know, involving me. And we were talking and discussing situations. Because they saw I have an idea, you know, that even though I'm not educated, but I had life spirit in me. And I said to myself: this is not, I don't know what to do here. And slowly, slowly, it worked quite a bit. But Isadore went to see my sister in Munich, because this was not far. It was in Austria, by Bindenmichel there, by Shteyer, you know, by Salzburg, and all you had to go, maybe 25 miles over the hill to go to Munich. And if you go over from the other side of the hill is already Munich. On this side is Austria. And I was on this side. So he went there and he saw my sister, not knowing that he went there. Because he didn't find himself. He figured I'm going there. He went, I don't know, with somebody or maybe by himself, because he was very good in direction, from Russia, what he was in the camps there.

And he came back and he told me my sister lost a baby, and her husband is very sick. And I am sitting here. Well, when I heard that, I said to myself, my mother used to say, "Charity begins at home." And I dropped everything. And I was so happy I didn't take some of the kids, you know, into that place, because I would have had it on me.

**INT:** You'd feel guilty.

**ESTHER:** That I would have, you know, I left them. But I was writing to them that I cannot come back. I just came temporary to see what my...but you had to go over the borders, and it was such a hectic. Oy. That alone is a nightmare, the border, how I came up there.

**INT:** To get into Germany?

**ESTHER:** To get into Germany. We were going 24 kilometers up.

**INT:** Uphill.

**ESTHER:** Uphill. And when I got on top, Isadore was taking me. When I got on top of the hill he says, "Now, wait a minute, from which side did we come? Did we come from this side, or did we come from this side?" And here the police, with those flickers, you know, with the big....

**INT:** Searchlights?

**ESTHER:** Not lights, they had those beams, flashing beams from all over, and throwing yourself on the floor. And then when you get up, you again don't know from which side you came. (laughs) And he kind of figured it out eventually, and here you are hanging, with your tongue hanging, you know, going up the hill at night time. We started around 7:00.

**INT:** It was just you and Isadore?

**ESTHER:** Just me and him. And like I say, he was like a dog, behind me. I never cared for him, but he felt close to me for another reason: that we come from the same town, we knew the same people. He was kind of, you know, lonesome. And his brother was staying in Austria, and he was supposed to come back to see his brother and bring him over to Munich. And he met my sister already, so he became a ganze, you know, he kind of, he knew already my family. He held onto it, because he didn't have any. And I didn't care for him as a guy. And there, (laughs) you know, they were talking that she introduced me to him, or I wanted to work out a shidduch. You know how words could work out, circumstantial evidence, and there is nothing, really. Absolutely nothing.

So anyhow, by the time I got to my sister, and I saw what's going on there.

**INT:** What was happening over there? She was in a DP camp in Munich?

**ESTHER:** No. She had a house next to Munich. She got the mayor's house. But it was full of mice. And no heating, you know, no central heating or anything. And what she did, she was going to, twelve hours by train, to Wurtzburg, Wiesbaden, Wetzlar, where she could get some food, you know. And then bring it home to Munich -- that was black market, black marketing -- and come back and distribute it. And then whatever she had left, distributed on the bicycle.

**INT:** Oh, you were telling me about that, what she used to do on the bicycle.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She distributed it on the bicycle, and whatever she had, a little profit, she brought it into the house and she used it. So before she can cook it or do something with it, she had to go in the back yard, pick some wood, and chop them up and make a fire, and then put the meal together, because her husband was laying in bed.

**INT:** Now what was wrong with her husband?

**ESTHER:** He had ulcers. And he, my sister married on the rebound.

**INT:** Yeah, how did she, she wasn't married before the war.

**ESTHER:** No. She was young. She was sixteen.

**INT:** So what happened? How did she marry him?

**ESTHER:** She married him, he was married before to a girl. He had experiments. They made experiments on him, and he didn't tell my sister anything about it, and he didn't tell the girl with whom he was married, the first girl, who met him. He **loved** her, he was crazy about her. But after six weeks, she left him. Because she found out that he had experiments on his testicles, and on his...they made a lot of horrible things on him, and finally he rebuilt himself after he got married. And she got the creeps. And she ran away from him. And then he had met my sister. Because he didn't have anything. He was really shocked, and he didn't care. So my sister married him, and my sister lived with him. And I think he was just heartbroken, still heartbroken for that girl. And my sister picked up his bad pieces, and dossed him up and tried to make life together, because she had a similar case. The guy said he's coming back, she should wait. He was going to Poland to find out if he finds somebody from his family.

**INT:** Oh, she had a boyfriend, somebody else?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And she didn't see him coming. So she felt, the hell with him. She married her husband. So they were both two disappointed people. But what happened, my sister's boyfriend came back. And my brother-in-law was in the house, and my brother had just come from Hungary to see my sister. And the guy almost collapsed there. He almost broke everything, that why did she do something like that to him? He told her he's [coming back].

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Ulcers, and depressed.

**INT:** What about Olga, though? She must have felt terrible when her boyfriend came back.

**ESTHER:** No, she was already very upset, because he could have wrote her a letter already at that time. He could have said something.

**INT:** He should have told her where he was.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because he said he is going to be back in six weeks, and he came back in three months. And he tried to explain her. Listen, you can understand his coming back in three months. He probably had to search, and find; until you go, until you walk, and...But she, she liked my brother-in-law. She settled, you know.

**INT:** Did you tell me that Olga also had experiments done?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Olga, also.

**ESTHER:** Sure. Oh, G-d.

**INT:** So she couldn't have children, either.

**ESTHER:** No, no.

**INT:** And he couldn't have children.

**ESTHER:** Maybe, maybe that was the...But I don't know. See, my brother-in-law didn't think that it has anything to do, you know, that he could still have a family or something. Who knows?

**INT:** So are they married till this day?

**ESTHER:** They were married for eighteen years. And they came to America. My sister did everything for him. He learned in Ohio, they went to Ohio. And he learned to be a butcher. He was an auto mechanic in Germany, but here it was a better thing to be in the butcher business, so he learned to be a butcher. My sister worked in a bar in Ohio, to pay his tuition for the, because he went to a school to learn how to be a butcher. And...he did very well. They moved from Ohio to Newark. And in Newark I put him together with some friends of mine, and he worked there for a while, and then he got into a good business, and they were, he was doing **very** well. But they had no children, so my children were like his children, you know, because we were neighbors, and we were doing, we were **very**, very close. He was very good to me. Very good to me. In fact, when I got married, I wanted to go to, with a plain dress. I didn't have any, where are you going to get anything? That was already in 1948. You couldn't find anything. So my brother-in-law was so upset that a girl like me shouldn't marry in a white outfit, you

know, something nice. He took a bicycle, and he was running around from one place to the other, where he knew somebody got married, maybe they have a white gown with something. And I did get, he did find it. And he brought it to me in the last minute.

**INT:** So did he die?

**ESTHER:** He got killed. But he left my sister, my sister had a girlfriend that she found from the concentration camp, in Newark. This was eighteen years later. And she was a conniver. She saw Mike has a good business, and my sister is doing so well, and she was jealous. And she knew Mike wants children, you know. And she knew my sister cannot have children. So she made a big mess. And he married her. He was never happy with her. And I don't know what happened there, but he had a butcher place, another butcher place. That business got out, and they didn't want him, and it was a lot of, they couldn't care less. Everybody was up in arms, what he did to my sister, you know. Because my sister worked so hard. And when she came here, she tried to help. And you know, he kind of got involved with this woman, and the woman had two children.

**INT:** With him?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Oh, she already **had** children.

**ESTHER:** She had a husband, with two children, and she broke up her marriage, and she had it against him. It was a ganze, it was a horrible, horrible thing. And for me, it was a **terrible** thing, because Monek and my sister were really like my extended hand, because they were doing so well, and they were so devoted to me. And when I moved to another house, I was pregnant, Mike came and he helped to paint the house. You know, everybody, my sister. It was, you know, we were doing...

**INT:** For each other.

**ESTHER:** Things together. He even wanted to buy me a car. My husband didn't want to. But it was a very good thing. And when this came in, it was really a breakdown on the whole family, because he was a good man, and he had money, he was generous. He gave for everybody who needed. And my sister was generous, too, so it was big, big troubles.

But you know what happened? She got artificial insemination probably, and she had the baby, maybe a year later after he married her, a boy. And it worked out with the kid for maybe two years, three years. And he worked in the butcher place, and she went in to work there, too. And colored, two colored people came in and they killed him. So the word goes that she put it up, because he wasn't happy with her. And I don't know, there were big fights going on between them, because for every little thing, she used to say, "Monekel, you are not going to be a father if you don't do what I tell you." (laughs) You know? Because she kept it a secret that that kid is his. So she made him into a father, a

real father. Which it was stupid, you know. And he wanted to hold that image. So it was a lot of bad work there.

**INT:** She was bad news.

**ESTHER:** In the meantime, my sister was...he played her out all the way, because had to be split up everything, and he cheated on her with the money, with everything, because she laid hand, the girlfriend was, she knew all the things from my sister. And you know what my sister did for her? She was poor, living in the Bronx. She bought her a frigidaire. She tried she should move to Jersey, because she said she would do better if she moves here. In the meantime they were making phone calls, you know.

**INT:** Which sister?

**ESTHER:** Olga. Olga. The girlfriend. The girlfriend was such a good friend with my sister, and she found out all the ins and outs, and whatever. She used to cry to my sister, she doesn't have this, and she doesn't have that, and my sister bought her a frigidaire. And she didn't want her husband should know, because she felt, you know, it's not the right thing to go and buy a frigidaire for a friend. But she told him every little thing that my sister said to her. And I don't have to tell you how it goes. So my sister really had...

**INT:** She had a rough life.

**ESTHER:** And then she married this guy with the three kids.

**INT:** Oh. And that was a happy marriage?

**ESTHER:** It was okay. She liked the kids.

**INT:** She raised them.

**ESTHER:** She raised them, yeah. Even now, one guy is doing exceptionally well, and the other one, too. One is a little on the slow side. He was, his mother took all kinds of drugs, because she had a tumor in her brain, and she took very heavy medication when she was pregnant. Unfortunately, the kid got affected, but he's, you know, he drives. He's on a low-key. He's married, married a nice girl, on his level, you know. They live in Staten Island. My sister made it possible to have a house. He bought a two-family house in Staten Island, and he's working a little, and she has a job. She's a teacher in a yeshiva some place. So my sister is doing, you know. And now she gave up that board and care home, and she's still able to do, so she's sorry.

**INT:** She's still in California.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She wouldn't come this way.

**INT:** So how long did you stay in Munich?

**ESTHER:** Well, after I came to Munich, my brother-in-law was in that school, in the ORT school where he was learning auto mechanic, you know.

**INT:** Olga's husband?

**ESTHER:** Olga's husband, yeah. And he knew my husband, and he knew Fisher. And he told my husband that his sister-in-law's coming from Austria, from Germany. And he didn't know me, but he gave him a very nice description of me (laughs), you know, from what he heard, from what Isadore told him, you know. So he tried to make a match for me with my husband. But I came to Germany, I didn't have any registration. I came after the deadline. They wouldn't register anymore any new people in Germany. So I had to wait out to get a new name, and new rationing cards. Because before you have a name and rationing cards, you can't be registered to immigrate, in case I want to immigrate. At the time I wasn't that far, you know, I was just landed and that's all. And as I came in Austria, I gave down my clothes, because we could have not come through the hills, you know, with my clothes. Never saw my clothes again.

One of my girlfriends with whom I lived in Bindenmichel, you know, where I had that little home already for the children, I got this girl in to sleep with me. This was Isadore's sister-in-law. And I felt sorry for her. She slept in one of those open camps. So I said, "Listen, you could come and sleep with me." And what do you think she did? When I gave down the clothes, my things, I saw, she spoke Polish. She was a Polish girl. I mean Jewish Polish. And she was in Hungary during the war. And I remember, you know, if you don't know what's cooking. But you know, I saw, they were hinting she shouldn't, the guy shouldn't say anything I should say, I should hear, or I should see. And she made all that arrangements. But I didn't think of it. You know when I thought of it? After my clothes didn't come back. Everybody's clothes was given back in Austria. In Salzburg. But my clothes didn't come back. I was left blankety-blank. All that beautiful clothes what the girls were sewing for me, you know, I should be like a model to show my clothes? Everything was gone. And you come to a place where your sister is struggling to make, there was nothing. She didn't get rationing. And my brother-in-law is sick. It was, you know. And here I'm coming in with nothing. Just I had the coat on me, you know, what I had to, the immediate thing. And my shoes and a blouse and a skirt. That was my whole...

**INT:** Wardrobe.

**ESTHER:** What I had left. And you know, at that time, in '48, '47. The end of '47. Everybody had already something. You know, they were working already. You know, even I had something already. And here I'm left without anything. A young girl with a sick guy there with this house. Wherever, you know, if you lay down, the mice were crawling on the sofa. And they were multiplying unbelievably, and there was no trap. From where would you take a trap? There wasn't. Or poison, or anything. Only what you were hitting, and how much can you hit? And I want to tell you, I used to go to sleep at night, and it was terrible. (laughs) Finally we invented a place how the mice should



fall into the water. We took a big barrel with little pieces of bread or something, and we made a trap, and they used to fall in. Oh! It was. If I tell you what I went through to come just to Germany after I was already somebody in Austria. You know, I was the one who organized the kids. I was in Budapest what I organized a place. You know, I had something already behind me that I had a little...I knew it could be better. And here I'm down the drain again. And it was the worst thing I could ever see. Because my sister. It wasn't true that she had a child, she just told him to feel worse about it, so that she could get me there, you know. If I would have not come to Germany, I would have made out very well in Austria. But when you come into such a sad place, you get sad. Your credentials go down, your whole life is down, and you come such a long way, and where are you? No place. And here I'm not even being registered. I have to wait. I have to go to a camp to Felderfink, to wait out my time, maybe they're going to register a new group. How did they register? Only people who were leaving for Israel, and they had people similar to my age, and to my existence, you know? So they took that document, and giving it to me. Because there was no way to register new. You know, original. So I got again a false name, a false place, with misery, with horrible, I'm telling you, it was so bad. So bad.

Then my son-in-law said he has to pick up some pictures from a place in Munich. And this was four kilometers from Munich where my sister was living. And he said he's going to Munich to pick up the pictures, I should come with him. And I dressed up with my thing, and I washed it out in the evening and I put it on in the morning. But my sister had a dress. And we were wearing it. And she had to go someplace. She's shorter than me. I had to let it down when I wore it. When she was going someplace, I raised the hem. But you know, when you are young, the bosom is shaking -- we didn't have bras -- and it wore out here. So what did I do? I cut off a little piece from a sleeve, and I put patches on. And this was the changeover.

And my brother-in-law said, "Listen, we got to pick up these pictures. There are some nice people, so pull yourself together." I said, "Okay." I go. My husband came in. There was Fisher, and then my husband came in. And it was the Yom Haatzmaut, I remember. And my husband was so enthusiastic. He had a mouthpiece, you know, and very intelligent, you know. And it didn't even dawn on me for one minute that this is what my brother-in-law wanted to pull me together with. He was older than me. He had a wife, he had a child. What the hell am I coming here? You know. No clothes, no nothing. (laughs) Everything was down. It was very, very, very difficult. But I persevered.

And as a matter of fact, when I was going to Felderfink, everybody thought I'm a rich girl. I must have money, because I have relatives in America. Because, you know, I wear my blouse, I ironed it out, you know. I was always with, not with the gloom face. I was very depressed in Austria, I have to say, in Salzburg. I was...I don't know. I came to a complete downfall when I found out I don't have the clothes. But then when I came to Munich and I saw how down my sister is, I was down in me, but I tried to hold on, because I didn't want her to break down completely, you know. So when I have met my husband, I came home, and maybe six weeks later my brother-in-law said, "So how do you like Fisher? Which one do you like better? Fisher or Albert? Or Abrasha?" I said,

"They are both nice guys, but I think Albert is more interesting than Fisher." (laughs)  
You know, this is what I said. But not knowing that there is something that my husband got in touch with my brother-in-law. And Fisher got in touch. Fisher came to find out what's going on, if I'm around. And you know where I was? I came from Felderfink, and I was stuck on a train for three hours.

**INT:** What's Felderfink?

**ESTHER:** Felderfink, my sister lived in Feldmocking. But Felderfink was a big lager, a big camp. Very big camp. It was already an established, nice camp. And I came from Felderfink around 8:00 in the evening, because like I say, I was hanging around there, that maybe they are going to call out for a name to give me. And the train, the line, was mixed up. So the train where I took was a dead train. But it was moving. And it couldn't go through for some reason, not because they were bombed or anything, but for different. I was three hours. And then I said to myself, how long can you wait back and forth? I got off the train. It was already maybe 11:00 at night. And I look around. There was maybe two guys, railroad guys. And I say, "Look. I got to go to Feldmocking. To Munich." I say, "How am I going? It's something wrong here." He says, "Well, the lines changed and they are trying to put another train. And I think that's the train what's going to go." So I say, "Should I get off the train and go on that train?" Because I didn't want to go to another train where they are going to take me for three hours back and forth again. "No, no," he says, "This is going to be the train that's going to go to Feldmocking."

Okay. I came, and my sister balled me out. "What's the matter?" "Where are you so late at night? I was worried." So she didn't even give me a chance, because she's very abrupt. She says, "You know, Fisher was here." I didn't even remember Fisher. "Fisher was here. He wants to know if you are available." And here my brother-in-law gave me such a write-up about my husband, that he was such a big man there in that school and everything. "And he wants, Albert wants to come and see you." I said, "So what? What's the big deal? What do you make such a," I say, "I don't want Fisher. I don't want Albert." I say, "I'll find myself somebody." I say, "I just got here." I was there maybe seven weeks. I say, "I have time to look around. I'm not ready for anything." I even had sometimes in mind to go back to Hungary, you know. Not to go into so much hardship and hardship and hardship. And she was so upset that Albert wants me and I'm so indifferent. So six weeks later I figured, "Okay, they are all so up in arms." He came, my husband came to see me. And he was all over that he wants me. And I think maybe three months later we got married.

But he gave me money to buy. He said, "Okay, I want to introduce you to my friends in Munich." He had very interesting friends, all teachers, you know, all on the upper level. And he says, "Dress up nice." I said, "Okay." (laughs) So I put on my sister's dress, because you know, I was tired of that skirt and the blouse. He says, "Don't you have something else to put on? Dress up." I said, "This is what I have. I told you they stole my clothes. You know I don't have anything." Well, he had no choice. He promised

those people to take me. He showed me up. So they all liked me, and he felt very much, you know, and they all, and then my sister-in-law, he had a sister in (?) and she came. And when she saw me, oy, oy, oy, she wanted to make a wedding **immediately**. Because she was afraid he might go around with some Gentile people or something. You know. It wasn't so bad. He could have married somebody, Gentile, too.

**INT:** What was he like? What attracted you to him? What made you decide to marry him when all the others you had said no to?

**ESTHER:** I think it was...no thinking. Just plain washed out.

**INT:** You were tired.

**ESTHER:** I was tired. And he kind of was so...I thought he's affectionate, and I figured he's a mature person, had a good position.

**INT:** Was he much older than you?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** No, I mean, was he much older than you?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. He was thirteen years older. Could you imagine? (Laughs) With all my traveling and going and coming? And I don't know. I thought maybe he's going to be very good to me. You know, I'll be secure, he'll protect me. Because I was always, you know, I always had to do something for somebody else, and I started to think it would be nice if there could be somebody to care for me, and who's really sincere with me. And my brother-in-law gave me such a high opinion about him, because he was in that school. And...

**INT:** Can you describe him a little bit? What were the qualities that you liked about him?

**ESTHER:** Well, one thing: he was very intelligent. He had a very nice way of speaking, you know? Very, very clever. And he was capable. But very stubborn person. And he knew it all. And especially a woman didn't add up to anything. Nothing. She must, you know, a piece of furniture, and you stay there. He never let me work. I wasn't supposed to. But yet the money he was making...it was his money. And I, being so, going through a life that I worked and I dealt, and I was with people.

**INT:** You were independent.

**ESTHER:** I said to myself, "Why should I make such a hard life and he is so tight and so, so...very, I wasn't used to see in my house or in any place I was, I didn't see such a, such a **tightness**."

**INT:** How do you mean, "tightness"?

**ESTHER:** He [said], "You just don't need. You don't need."

**INT:** He wasn't generous, is that what you're saying?

**ESTHER:** No. He was generous with strange people. Very nice. I mean, he would do them favors. In fact, a guy was calling me up the other day, who worked in the place where he was working. He was very good with underdogs, you know? He was very good with underdogs. Because he had two colored people, that they used to do very menial work in the place where he was working. And he saw in them some intelligence. So he trained them a lot of mechanical things. You know, vital mechanical things. Electronics how to work, and how to do, and he took his time. And they were picking up very fast. And one guy, he's telling me, this William who called me, he wanted to find out how his family is doing. And he said, "You know, I would have not had a house if not for your husband." I said, "What did he do for you?" So he says, "I had \$3,000, and I needed another \$7,000 to make a down payment, to buy the house. And I needed somebody should vouch for me that I'll be able to pay the mortgage. Well, your husband worked it out," -- Albert, he called him -- "Albert worked it out for me." He talked to the boss, and he told him that he's vouching for William, to give him an advance of money, the \$7,000. If he's going to stop paying, or he's leaving, he's going to take over the difference. But my husband would never do. But he wanted to make the situation easy. And then when he moved in, he needed electrical work, and air conditioning, and all kinds of things. So he spent there two Sundays, in his basement, helping him out. Telling him how to do, what to do, you know. And he said, "If not for him, I wouldn't have the job now." And his brother, too. So the two guys, so many years he's dead, you know. He says, "I'll never forget Albert."

And there were a lot of people like that. You know the fact that he was teaching in Munich, he had a school, he was the first to take the prizes. You know, there you take prizes, not the students. The teacher, the best teacher gets the prize. Whoever accomplishes the most with the students gets the first prize. And he was very good with them. But good with them in one way: They had to be there five minutes to eight. Sit. No monkey business. You got to be there. And if you came in five after eight, you had no place. You were locked out. "I got caught, I got this, I got that." He didn't want to hear **anything**. Your day is lost. You have to learn. He was very German. Order, you know.

**INT:** Very strict.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** Could you explain his background a little bit? Where did he come from and what kind of family?

**ESTHER:** Well, he comes from Lithuania, and he had a very good background. He went to high school, Hebrew high school. But no religion, you know, just Hebrew. And he was in the kibbutz. And he was in the kibbutz with his wife. He was married. His wife was a nurse. And they were in the kibbutz working. They used to get together with the idea that they are going to immigrate to Israel. And this was, what's his name, Ben-Gurion was very close with him in many ways. I mean, he was younger than Ben-Gurion, but he used to come in there, and you know, they used to have a lot of, I don't know how and what, but they used to pass each other.

**INT:** Ben-Gurion used to visit in Lithuania?

**ESTHER:** To visit the kibbutz, probably.

**INT:** What town was this?

**ESTHER:** Kretinga. It was a very close-knit town. But then he was in Kovno. There where he lived. He got married at eighteen with this girl.

**INT:** He was eighteen when he got married?

**ESTHER:** When he got married, yeah. And he had a child, a five-year-old. And the child got killed. They selected the kids there in the ghetto, and then his wife was taken away, and he was in labor camps. And he was in Lager One, he was in Dachau. He wasn't in Auschwitz. Because he came out in 1944 from Kovno. I don't know how it happened, where he was working or something. You know. He was very good with strange people. He never took his time in the family, you know, to tune in to anything. Only if it was something bad, he saw it, and then he couldn't get rid of it. (laughs) He was very difficult. **Very** difficult.

**INT:** How would you describe your marriage to him over the years?

**ESTHER:** Well, every marriage is difficult. I mean, you have to make compromises. (Sighs) He was...tough, I have to say. Very, very tough. Because a lot of people said, you know, if they wanted to make a connotation of their husband, "I'm not Esther. And I don't want an Abrasha," you know? (laughs)

**INT:** Oh, great. He was the example.

**ESTHER:** They just, you know, that they wouldn't go for all these things. I mean, he was very, very difficult.

**INT:** Demanding? Stubborn? How would you, what was tough about him?

**ESTHER:** Everything. There wasn't one thing that you could do good for him. And if it was good, he forgot it in five minutes, it's over. Nothing.

**INT:** Critical? He was critical?

**ESTHER:** More than critical. Very, very...I don't even know how to say it. But he was...a very, very difficult person. Unhappy. And supposedly he was very happy. Supposedly he was very happy. But he really wasn't. He wasn't a happy person.

**INT:** How did you deal with that?

**ESTHER:** I got very busy. I got very busy because he didn't want me to work. Because he wanted me, you know, to write down how much I spent for onions, let's say. If everybody got \$18.00 a budget, I got \$12.00. And he wanted to have everything, you know, the way it's no problem, I could do it. No talking about it. So then I had company and I said, "Look, your family came from Israel, they are living here. I cannot manage on what you are giving me." He didn't hear. Didn't hear. And it was very hard, you know, to have. So I said to myself, "Why do I cause all this misery?" (Laughs) You know, me, guilty. I said, "Why do I cause all this misery?" Because this was to him a place where he could control, you know, with a few dollars there. And then I said, "This is not worth it to me." And to break up a marriage, it wasn't in my existence.

**INT:** You didn't think of that?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** That was never a possibility?

**ESTHER:** Even though my family, even my brother-in-law came once. Twice he said, "What is this? Get in the car." Like this, he pushed me. He says, "Get in the car and get out of here. Enough."

**INT:** This isn't the same brother-in-law who introduced you to him, is it?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Oh, it was? He was singing his praises in the beginning.

**ESTHER:** He says, "Get out and run. Believe me you'll do better." I know I could have done much better after. I could have. But I had already, you know. It was very difficult, because I got married to him in...

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** Fisher married, the two of you married together, the two couples married together. And Fisher was your husband's close friend.

**ESTHER:** Close friend, and she was a close friend, too, because anything it was going on, as a matter of fact, he was splitting up the two. That was his domain. So he always made a little skirmish between me and them, so that I shouldn't be there. Because he always liked to have like a garden for himself. You know? Or if something, we had to go someplace, yes? I organized a couples club for instance, yeah? We used to meet once in four weeks in somebody else's house. We didn't have money to entertain outside. So we did it very nicely. We all put up nice things. One day he is not going. "Why aren't you going?" "I'm not going. I can't, I'm busy with the work. I got to see how it's working out, and I can't go." "Fine, you can't go." So what did I do? I figured I'll take the kid with me, you know, my little kid was maybe five years old, six years old. So I figured, what's the big deal, I'll take him along. And when my friends were bringing their kids with me, it was no problem. But when I took my COSRD with me, she was a little bit, my girlfriend was a little bit stunned. And she was right. Because she wants me to be, you know, free. To have a little time for myself and not to be with a child there, and it's grown-up people.

So what happens? My husband comes home, and he tells me, "I'm going." So COSRD was already dressed to come with me. If I would have known he is going, I would have arranged for a babysitter, and it was no problem, because my next door neighbor would have taken him. It wasn't anything to worry about. Well, I had to take him. You can't tell the kid now, you know.

**INT:** You're not going, right.

**ESTHER:** Dump him. So I come into the house there, and my girlfriend sees that I brought, and all the guests are there already, because he had to skirmish around, you know, upset me. Always upset me when I went, or when company came in the house. Always making it so I shouldn't be, you know, I shouldn't act good. It couldn't come out, it should be a kasha. Even she [COSKRM, her daughter] used to say, "Dad, you come home. If you can't do anything good, leave us alone. You know, stop it." And I came into that house and she says, "You brought COSRD? How come you brought COSRD with you?" I say, "I didn't know that Albert will come." I said it to myself, because I didn't want to reveal, you know, the story that he didn't want to go, he didn't want to come, and what am I going to talk there in front of the people now telling my problem. I'm coming in there. You know, I put it down. I say, "Why, is it such a big problem?" She says, "I don't know." And he goes like this with his two hands. [In an angry tone] "You didn't tell her that you are taking COSRD with you? How come you didn't tell her? You should have asked!" You know, right in front of everybody, when he is the cause of the whole thing. This is how he was all the time.

**INT:** This is how he operated, huh?

**ESTHER:** This is how it was. You know, always putting me in a...

**INT:** Blame. Blaming you.

**ESTHER:** And I couldn't argue with him, because he was always right, you know. And to argue, it would have been a big echo, echo, you know. He would have always had something more to say, and I didn't want to disturb it. I liked to keep the peace and quiet and everything.

**INT:** You didn't see this in his personality before you got married?

**ESTHER:** I did. I did, a little bit, I saw it. I'll tell you why I saw it, and I wanted to send him back the clothes. Because he gave me money when I got engaged to him. I gave him the word. So he gave me money to go and buy clothes. And you had to travel maybe ten miles, ten hours to go to a place where I found out they are sewing, and there is material, too. So it took me around two weeks to be there with the money. So I wrote letters to my sister, and my sister waited for him to come around. He never came. In two weeks, it was four kilometers away, to come and find out what's going on? How come you are not...did you hear something about your sister? My letters didn't go to him, he says. When I came home, and I said to my sister, "Did you hear from Abrasha? Was he here?" She says, "He wasn't here." I say, "He wasn't here?" He didn't come around to inquire?" "No." I started to cry like a baby. I said, "I don't want to get going." I say, "Here I'm going to pack up all these things." You know, I wasn't the one to grab from the guys. You know, there are women, "All right, I have it, I'll keep it." That didn't mean to me anything. I figured, whatever I need, I could do it myself. I don't need somebody to point with a finger that I gave her, she took. It was wrong. (laughs) I tell you.

**INT:** You could have had some great jewelry! (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Had I, would I be in the situation now, I wouldn't, because I paid the price for it. And it's not for free, you know? It's not that he gave me. I earned it.

But I packed the things up after I showed my sister, and I put it back, and I want to take it back to him. I don't want anything. I don't want to hear about him. He opens up the door, and he came. And he finds me that I'm crying, you know, and I pack up the things and everything I need, I made a mess out of it, and I wanted to throw it out from the window, but I said, "No, I got to give it to him. Let him give it to anybody." Well, he came in, and he apologized, and he had all kinds of reasons. And I said, "I wonder if I'm not getting into a puddle like this," I was saying. But here I told everybody I'm engaged, and the clothes and everything. And I said, "Keep it up. Keep on moving."

**INT:** But what made you make the decision to get married? You said you were just tired. Was he wearing you down as far as, you know, pushing you to get married and you just were tired?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, he did push a lot. He right away wanted to get married. He said, what's the use, to come here and go there. I have the place. He had an apartment. No, he had a room. And it was a lot of...

**INT:** Were you in love with him?



**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. One thing, I liked him very much, yes. Oh, I would never marry somebody if I don't like. Yeah. But that's why I was, you know, I did like him a lot in the beginning, especially. As life was going on, it was a problem. A big problem. Because I got busy.

**INT:** I'm sorry, you coped by getting busy is what you said.

**ESTHER:** Oh, that's the only way to cope. That's why people don't divorce now. Because they want always somebody else who should drag their problems. I saw I have a problem, and I couldn't figure out what to do in the beginning, because it was **very** difficult. He was really. He used to come home. It's embarrassing. "What did you do today?" I say, "What do you mean? I had to clean, I had to..." And one thing I'll never, I mean, he should rest in peace, but this was really the worst thing that I think of. You know, when I came to, when I got married, when I came to the United States and I was married, I had a kid already, you know, seven weeks later. But in the evening they gave courses for English, for spelling, for writing, you know. For history, for something. And I wanted to go. And I used to say to him, "Come home. If you come home..." because he always got involved. Always came at his time. I said, "Please try to come Thursday and two days a week. Try to be home that you could stay with Steven and I should be able to take the lesson." Boy. That's all I had to **say**. "I'm going to work a whole day, and you'll be going to **school**? What do you think?" You know, I said to myself, why not? I say, "Look, the house is clean. It's cooked." "I'm going to come home in the evening, and I'll find the kid and not you? And you'll be going to your **learning**? My wife is **learning**?" You know, that idea, making out of me that I have **some nerve**, and he knew how to do it. He had some command on...

**INT:** He was good at that, huh?

**ESTHER:** Oh! He was **great** at it. And it was sad. I mean, like I say, I missed out a lot. But thank G-d. My kids...

**INT:** Did you go to the class?

**ESTHER:** No. G-d forbid. Had I worked already, oh, I would have gone. Because I didn't look into marriage to divorce. I just looked how to make in this, you know, on the same territory, how to work out the best of what's there. You know, big things. I could have gone to school. But then when I started to go to learn my trade and everything, that was a big problem. He was talking to everybody that I'm running around. And he was making it difficult. His cousins called me up. "Esther, I have a sister, too, but she doesn't go every day to..." I used to hide. I used to wait till he goes to work, take Steven to school, take COSKRM with me, go to my sister, to the places with her. And you know.

**INT:** And work?

**ESTHER:** Learned how to do.

**INT:** How many years were you married when you decided to do that?

**ESTHER:** Oh, well, it was quite a few years. Because Steven was ten. And COSKRM...Steven was ten. It was maybe ten years after.

**INT:** And what made you decide to do that, to start a business?

**ESTHER:** Because I did before. As I was in the house, I used to do, I'm very good in decorating, I have to say myself. I have a feeling for things. So I used to do beautiful trapunta bedspreads. And I used to do cornices, you know. I never learned how to do. I just saw, you know, and I got an idea that I could do it, too. And I had an idea how to design things, how to...So I started to work a little bit, you know, and that's how I got my few dollars extra. Then I found a decorating place. I did my own curtains, I did my own slipcovers. I had, you know, something to show. And I was able to do nice things. I worked not full-time, but you know, wherever I got a job, my friends, my this. But it was very difficult, because I had to go in the evening. And give estimates, and take measurements.

**INT:** Wasn't he against that?

**ESTHER:** This is what I say. So I said, he was against anything. So I said to myself, I didn't like it myself, because I figured the kid is home, and the child is home, has to go to sleep, and maybe to school. I said, that's not a good thing for me. I'll be hanging around all over, on people's beds and walls. (laughter) And my kids will stay home and wait for me to come home? I don't want that. I didn't want. Because I remember my mother **once** wasn't home when I came from school, and I was running around all over to find her. And I always have that feeling in me that it's not a good idea to leave kids and go, you know. You can't do it all the time, but I said, okay, my sister was doing wigs. And I said to myself, maybe that's a better thing.

**INT:** Which sister?

**ESTHER:** Lily. Well, we all are in it now.

**INT:** Right. But she started it?

**ESTHER:** No, Lily and Agie, both. See, they were living close to one of those places, and they were learning. They gave them, they needed a few pennies. And by right, everybody envied me from my sisters, that I have a better life than they have. Because their husbands weren't steady job. My husband had a steady job. They weren't steady. But through the year, they made more, or they got more than I got. But I didn't talk about it. I always kept, you know. Even my friends. They never knew what a hardship I have in the house. Only when they came in unexpectedly, and he was in his moods, you know? Then they used to.

**INT:** Was he ever happy?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I know he didn't have a good life with his wife, either. The last woman.

**INT:** He wasn't happy with that wife, either.

**ESTHER:** Got big problems, yeah.

**INT:** So it wasn't the war necessarily.

**ESTHER:** As a matter of fact, it wasn't the war yet. He accused her of running around with somebody else, and he did it. (laughs) He was very good at that, skirmishes. He was a fast guy, but colorful. Everybody liked him. You know, he had a lot of color to him. But...difficult. That's all I can say. Exceptionally difficult. I mean, everybody has difficulties. Believe me, I could see marriages and marriages. You make it go.

**INT:** But this was a tough one.

**ESTHER:** Well, a lot of them are tough. But at least you know, not to let the wife go to an evening class in the evening, to keep you like a prisoner there. And always something skirmish. Oh.

**INT:** Was he affectionate with you?

**ESTHER:** He was **exceptionally** jealous of me. Terribly. Whoever saw me or said a good word, he figured he's going to take me. He's going to go after me till I go. (laughs) He was, not sure of me. You know, he was afraid that eventually...he was very clever, you know. Very possessive. He figured what he does, I could do too, probably. He got to watch out. He was very...he was difficult.

**INT:** He was very possessive. But was he affectionate?

**ESTHER:** I don't know how to call it. No. He wasn't affectionate about his kids, either.

**INT:** I was going to ask you.

**ESTHER:** I don't know. Maybe the kids could tell you.

**INT:** But you didn't see it.

**ESTHER:** No. Always somebody else's kids got to go and polish their shoes. You got to learn from them. You don't do, you don't know. Always "you don't do, you don't know." And you know, I used to say to myself, I used to hear people's kids are taking drugs, and they commit suicide. You know, you hear these things. And I said to myself, "G-d, it must be that a mother is like this and the father is like this, and the kids just can't

take it. So they have to do something." Because I used to say to myself, "If this goes together, and the kids grow up in a house like this, it's a catastrophe." Not that I'm talking the good things about myself, but at least when I saw that horrible tension and everything, I used to take them out. Or if there was some critical thing to discuss, I never did. I was afraid. Because he always blew it out of the context. He always came up, and I don't know how to do it. Everybody else knows.

**INT:** So who made decisions in the house? Always he? Or did you make some of the decisions?

**ESTHER:** I would say maybe subversively I did quite a lot. Because where I lived in the house before, in Hillside, he decided to buy the house, and I was very upset about it. It was my judgment was much better at the time, because I wanted to move to the place where I'm living now. In those years I would have saved money, time, and energy. So I bought a house here, he didn't want to move. He was very clever, because he knew I'm working, and I have money, so he figured I don't need a house. Because he knew **I'm** not comfortable. He's at work, he has his people. So he played a lot of tricks. His money was his money.

**INT:** Not the family's money.

**ESTHER:** And my money was his money.

**INT:** Oh, and your money was his money, too.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. So it was really, he was really...but listen. I made it in many ways. And I was, one thing I'm not sorry -- I was very loyal to him, which he was not. That I can say. But otherwise, it's okay. Maybe I deserved it because I threw away so many good chances and everything.

**INT:** So he wasn't faithful to you, is that what you're saying?

**ESTHER:** I don't think so. I don't think so. Maybe yes, maybe no, who knows, you know. But...I had a few incidents that...but you never know. Like I say, with this Isadore I could have been accused, too, that I wanted him, and I had nothing to do with it, you know. So you never know.

**INT:** What about your decision to have children?

**ESTHER:** He didn't want children.

**INT:** He didn't want children. Why not?

**ESTHER:** He finally, you know, I had my child. He was 33 years old.

**INT:** Steven is your first, right?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And his cousin came to pick me up from the hospital, and he had to hold the baby. "In my old age, I got a baby." You know, I'll never forget it.

**INT:** That's what he said?

**ESTHER:** Instead to be happy, you know, that G-d helped him, he has another child. He wanted to be alone, and live and dance on a plate for everybody, you know, and be happy-go-lucky. And all the misery was building.

**INT:** Then why did he want to get married?

**ESTHER:** It was easy. I don't know why. He really should have never, never gotten married. The woman with whom he was living, I found out later on, that's why his sister was so happy, that he found a nice Jewish girl. And I didn't even...but like I say, you fall in. Your own people, sometimes, they mean well, and if they would have just left me alone...But you know, it was like, getting out. My husband knew some very good people. And what he did, he got my sister a job. He got my brother-in-law a job with an organization from the Joint. They got very nice salary and nice packages. And things started to go better. Because he built up. You know, he brought them into it. He got the job for this Isadore too, you know, because he was in the family, so to say. And he was very good to organize for my family. But for me, he was a **misery**.

You know, my sister didn't know. She is **so angry** with me. Why didn't I say it? Why didn't I talk? I pretended, you know. Because I had so many people who were, you know, it sounds funny. Wherever I went, I could have had my pick. I could have had. And I wanted to find them. But I figured I'm not settled, because marriage to me was a very serious situation. I'm not marrying just, you know, going to have a flirt. I wanted to make it go, with a base, just the way I knew, the wrong way. And here I fell into such a hole in the wall. Oy.

**INT:** It's ironic.

**ESTHER:** You know, he accused me, he had a sack of flour in the back of the closet in that room. (laughs) I never gave my sister. I was too stupid. I was afraid, too, to take some flour from there and give my sister. I would have never done it, because I was afraid of him. He really was holding me. He was very nice, like I say, he gave me money to buy clothes. He said, "Do you want a big wedding, a small wedding?" You know, all these...traps. But really, after, if I wanted to buy a pickle, he said, "You don't need it. You don't need it. Ah! Come on." Or I wanted to go shopping, or I wanted to do. Always, it's his doing, you know. He controlled me. I used to say, "You know, I'm so cold on my feet." "Ah! How could you say you are cold in your feet?" (laughs) "How do you know I'm not cold?" How does **he** know? But this is the type.

**INT:** Very negative personality.

**ESTHER:** Let him rest in peace.

**INT:** So you say that he didn't want children, but how did you feel about children? Did you want to have children?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I wanted to have children. In fact, after I got married, I was very upset. I lost 35 pounds more, maybe 40 pounds, I lost after the wedding, and I was pretty slim when I got married.

**INT:** Because you were depressed about it?

**ESTHER:** I was, I saw. I fell into such a hole.

**INT:** Right away you knew you made a mistake? Boy.

**ESTHER:** Ach! G-d. But I figured I like him, and you know, there is some love involved, and it's going to get better. But I got pregnant the same time I got married.

**INT:** You were still in Europe?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, in Munich. And I was very upset, that I was bleeding, and sick, and I saw what he is, and everything. It was misery. And I lost the pregnancy in the sixth month.

**INT:** Sixth month?

**ESTHER:** Sixth month. They had to take it. It didn't develop, because I was bleeding. Like I say, I lost so much weight. And I was in the hospital for eight weeks. Because they took the pregnancy in pieces, you know? And I was infected inside. And I was **extremely**, extremely sick. And there wasn't too much medication at the time, you know. It was sulfur, and that weakened me down. It was a problem. And they told me that in my condition, I shouldn't try to have children, because it's going to be very bad. Because what I have, I'm all infected inside. Until this is going to heal, and sometimes it never heals, because if you start with the pregnancy again, it might flare up again, and it's a very foolish thing to go. And you know me, coming from a big family, I wanted to have a child.

So I got pregnant with Steven a year later. And I was very happy about it. But he didn't show any...any affection. I was so upset about it, you know? As a matter of fact, could you imagine? Oh, I shouldn't tell you these things. My relatives brought us, you know, his relatives. So the day I was bleeding, and I was in this apartment. Finally I moved in. I found a little place, and it worked out, I fixed it up just in time. Everybody helped me. His family came and helped, because they were afraid I'll have the baby in their house, and then it's going to be a mess, so I had my own place to bring home the baby. And I'm busy there, and I'm bleeding, and I have the cramps and everything, and it's Sunday, and he's going to Fisher's house. He's in Fisher's house. But he used to go usually to his

relatives and visit them. And I was busy Sunday. You know, the whole week I was alone, but Sunday he went to his family. So they used to insist I should come with him, he shouldn't leave me alone. And they were very nice in that respect. You know, there was one cousin who, her husband was a doctor, and she was very involved, because she was afraid I shouldn't fall into a clinic or something, you know, because I didn't speak the language yet. But he was...busy with his job, and you know. He had his own problems. Not my problem at all, you know, to get involved or anything. So when he saw I'm bleeding, and I tell him. And I don't know. You know, the first time with a baby, because the other one, it was a different situation. He went to Fisher's.

So my cousin kept track on me, this doctor's wife. She says, "How are you doing?" You know, calling me up. I say, "Gertrude, I think I had some blood last night and today, too, a little bit." She says, "Yeah, so wait another little while, and let's see what's developing." In the meantime, my husband, instead of going to Fisher's first, he went to Gertrude, to visit with her. And she said to him, "Esther is bleeding. And Esther is expecting the baby. What are you doing here?" And she sent him home. Instead of coming home, he went to Fisher's. And he knew already, I mean, his cousin sent him home. So he went to Fisher's. And there somebody, another friend of his came in there, and they were drinking coffee and talking and discussing things, you know, with his wife and everything. And I'm home alone there.

And my cousin calls again. She says, "How is it going?" You know. Every hour and a half, two hours, she called me to find out. And I gave her the descriptions. And she says, "You know what I think? You should come over. Dave should examine you." You know, my cousin. Because I had two other gynecologists who took care of me. My cousin arranged it for me. He says, "You better come with Albert." I say, "Albert is not here." She says, "You want to tell me? He was in my house this morning. I sent him home." I say, "He didn't come home." "So where can he be?" You know, **she** got alarmed. And I'm still cool, because I know he's going to come and go whenever he feels like it. Nobody's going to tell **him** what to do. So she came with the car to get me, not to leave me alone, which I'll never forget. You know, she's really. She came with the car, picks me up, and I say, "The only place I think he could be is in Fisher's." And he lived on an attic some place, and I wanted to live in an attic, too, to be for myself, you know, when I came. But he wanted to live in his family's house, because it didn't cost him anything. And I didn't see it that way. But he did just what he felt like doing. He wouldn't rent, because it's going to cost him money. There he has everything. Even though I suffered, and I'm uncomfortable, and I don't want to be with all those people who smoked like chimneys and everything. It's no big deal.

So I come upstairs there. I said, "Gertrude, do me a favor. I cannot walk up," I say. "It's three floors." You know, I was already. "Can't you go?" And she says, "No. You go. It's not going to hurt you. Do your best, go." I came there, they were drinking coffee, and laughing, and, I mean, these are the things that were going on, you know. So, what can I say?

**INT:** And that was with your first.

**ESTHER:** With the first kid. And then when I came home from the hospital, I had a blood clot in my foot from, you know, a lot of aggravation. I was two weeks in the hospital. So in the two weeks in the hospital, my older son, after the bris, they put him in a different place, and usually they take him home. But there was nobody to take him home, so they left him in the hospital. So I waited for the kid to be nursed in the morning, around 5:00, after the bris. They don't bring him. And I started to scream. I say, "What's going on?" "No, he went home," they tell me. I said, "There's nobody home. My husband has to go to work, and nobody's there to take care of him." Then they found the kid in the nursery. He was the only kid during the night after a bris by himself there. Could you imagine? Because why couldn't he work out something to come? He didn't even bring me from the bris a piece of laykach or something, to say something. They had fun there with all the women, all the men, all the family and everything. And I was just another thing there. This was the way...I think most of the men were doing things like that. Not most, but a lot of them.

**INT:** What did this child mean to you, your first child?

**ESTHER:** Oh, the whole world. Because really, I didn't have anything for myself all these years. Because here he brought me to America already, and I'm in a strange place again. I mean, instead to give me like, the Fisher's had an attic room, and they were for themselves. I could have had the same. Could you imagine? I envied them that they were on the attic by themselves.

**INT:** What year did you come to America?

**ESTHER:** 1949.

**INT:** And your son was born in Munich?

**ESTHER:** No. Here.

**INT:** Oh, he was born here.

**ESTHER:** Seven weeks later after I came.

**INT:** Oh, that's right. You were pregnant coming.

**ESTHER:** I was pregnant. And you know, I was a terrible woman, because all the family used to get together in this doctor's house, to come to see me and how I look, and talk. But they were all smoking. And I was changing the climate, it was hot. And I wasn't a smoker. And I just felt I'm...they used to leave the window open this much, because they wanted that smoke. So what did I do? I used to pick myself up and go in another room. Or once it was really bad. The park wasn't far from there. I left them smoke and talk, and I just sneaked out and I went to the park, because I felt I'm fainting.



**INT:** Where did you settle when you came?

**ESTHER:** In Newark.

**INT:** And you moved in with his family? Which family?

**ESTHER:** No, his family, he had a big family here. He had two uncles, and they all had children: one had three, and one had six children. And one, they were both gone, the uncles. But the aunts were around, and they were very nice. But there were quite a lot. They all wanted to be the doers, you know. But really, they were always very critical, and very, you know, always looking down on me. And there wasn't much to look up to me -- (laughs) I was pregnant, with, you know, strange country, with no language. With a guy who doesn't support you. You know. But how pleasant could I have been? But this Gertrude, my cousin...

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** ...in this situation like this. You got to give her some, a little space, a little sympathy, a little place, you know. And she was very nice. And her mother was nice, because she wanted we should come to her house, you know, stay there till we find something to do. And I didn't want to go. I said, "Tanta, please don't tell him you're a relative. Don't tell him anything. They're going to go from the HIAS." Because I heard things, people went to relatives, and it didn't work out. I said, "Please don't." And here I'm expecting a baby, and they didn't know that I am expecting. I don't think even they knew that he's married. He didn't tell them. He just told them he's coming. So he didn't want to make any, you know, big deal. Because if they would have known that he's coming married with a kid, they had so much stuff there, they could have put away things, they would have prepared something, you know. But he kept it a secret, because he figured maybe something, you know, this smart thinking. Anyhow, everything was going on my cheshbon, if you know what it means. And it was very, very hard. That was a hardship.

**INT:** Did you have any friends, or anyone you could talk to when you came?

**ESTHER:** Who, me?

**INT:** Anyone you could dump on? You know, just talk to?

**ESTHER:** I was embarrassed to talk. I felt, you know, you cannot say things like this what you go through, because how are people going to feel about you that you have so many problems? You know, people run away from you if you tell them the problems.

**INT:** Not even to your sisters? Were they here at that time?

**ESTHER:** I didn't tell my sister, either, no. I didn't. Because my sisters had **their** problems. My sister had a problem, she was in Ohio there with her husband, who worked in a bar, who tried to help him out, he should have a profession and work. My other sister had two children. No, one child.

**INT:** Did they all move to America soon after you?

**ESTHER:** They came before me. They came in '47. And the poverty I saw by them. And I saw the religious schlep, what they had from way back, you know, with all that, oy. What a...and hardship. And you know, my brother-in-law, Agie's husband, was making a living from a carriage, from a baby carriage. He was selling eggs.

**INT:** Oh, you told me. Right.

**ESTHER:** You know, and my sister had already two kids, and the older kid was born with a problem. After the bris he had an infection, and it settled in his hip. He needed a cast till the neck. Oh.

**INT:** So they all had their own problems, and you didn't [want to bother them with yours].

**ESTHER:** Oh, they had so many problems. And I was the one who was supposed to have it very good. Because those guys, one was a chazzan, and he worked part-time, but he brought home the same amount like my husband brought from the bakery. He made 90 cents an hour in those years. And it wasn't too much. And he had to save \$15.00 a week from that money. (laughs) So it was, and I had it good, you know, because he always had the rent to pay. But they were different. Whatever they had, they used. They bought a Persian lamb jacket. Whatever they felt. They had the money today, they bought. I wasn't like that. If I found a dollar or something, I tried to put it away. In fact, I saved \$25.00 for my sister from all that meager thing that I was getting from my husband. Maybe in a half a year I squeezed from here fifty cents. I don't know what kind of an occasion it was, I should have to give a gift. And believe me, it was food out of my mouth. I washed my clothes by hand. I had a dryer and a washer in the basement where I lived. I couldn't use it.

**INT:** This is because you didn't have the money to use it?

**ESTHER:** He didn't give me.

**INT:** He had it.

**ESTHER:** He had it. Yeah. You know, because I figured 25 cents was a half a pound of butter, and a half a pound of butter was taking it for the whole week. So that was money. And oh...

I can't even **believe** it that I was staying in something like that. My own son, the little one (laughs). They were talking, you know, my younger son. And I don't know what, it came up, because something worked out well, and he admired me how it worked out. I say, "So what, COSRD, you think I did okay?" "Okay? You didn't do okay. You should have run out of here a **long** time ago. You don't do here okay anything." Because I should have, I would have been okay if I would have left the whole thing and gone, then I would have been okay. But who knows, you know?

**INT:** Well, what about with your two other children? So then you had a daughter.

**ESTHER:** I had COSKRM, yeah. You know when I told him that I'm pregnant with COSKRM? Maybe six months I was pregnant.

**INT:** He didn't know?

**ESTHER:** I didn't tell him. Because as soon as he knew I'm pregnant, I lost six pregnancies between Steven and COSKRM.

**INT:** Oh, no.

**ESTHER:** Six. The last one was in the end of the fourth month. And it was...I gave up to have children anymore, you know. (laughs) As a matter of fact, one of my neighbors, I moved into a new house, one of my neighbors moved away, too, and we were talking on the telephone. She didn't come around because I was busy, she was busy. She said, "What are you doing?" I say, "I'm doing okay. I'm trying to straighten up the house." I was working at the time. I got myself a little job decorating. And I was pregnant with her. The job saved me. The pregnancy, I found out later on. And I say, "You know, Ann, I didn't tell you, but you know, I'm pregnant." She says, "I'm going to hang up on you!" Because she was door to door with me. And every time she used to see me bleeding, and troubles, and everything, you know. "What's the **matter** with you? You are back again." I had a very big aggravation. I don't know what it happened, that I started to bleed just like this, and the doctors assumed that I'm pregnant, and I said it couldn't be, because we weren't together for a long time. Ah, you forget, you this, you that. So I was operated, and I wasn't pregnant in the tubes. I wasn't pregnant. I was just, you know, exhausted. And they kind of lifted the bands. It was all torn down from all the pregnancies, you know, everything was so, they lifted. But they said I have a fibroided womb, and I should have it out. And because of my sister, what she had, I said, "**No**, sirree," I said. "If you find a pregnancy in a tube, it's one thing. But if you're going to remove my womb," three doctors, I made them sign. They should not touch me. I'm taking my chances. And they didn't. And I was a fibroided womb. Then I had, got pregnant with COSKRM. That was the sixth. After that I had one miscarriage, and then COSKRM.

I was going to the doctor to tell him, because I moved into the new house to tell him. "You know, I think I'm pregnant," I said to my cousin. "Dave, I think I'm pregnant. You must give me something, because now I moved into the house, and there's so much to do,

and I have so many things on my mind. I know I'm going to lose the pregnancy. So you do something for me early, because I don't want to get into it." He says, "Listen, if you are pregnant (laughs), and you think it's going to be a healthy pregnancy, you are not going to have aggravations, keep your mind to yourself. Things will work out. And if it's not a good one, you wouldn't be able to carry it. No matter what I'll give you, it's going to go." And it was true. And I didn't take anything. And I was going for a scraping just before I bought the house. Because I had still like, I was sick inside.

**INT:** A lot of bleeding?

**ESTHER:** Not bleeding, but sick, painful. In the meantime, I was pregnant with her already three weeks. If I would have gone for a scraping, I would have gotten rid, and I never bled, I never. Just because I had the job, the little job there, the decorating.

**INT:** How do you think that helped?

**ESTHER:** Because I had a few dollars. I didn't have to aggravate myself, you know, because it used to cost me **blood**, you know, that every time, you know...

**INT:** It really got to your insides.

**ESTHER:** How do you feel. And I didn't know what to do, where should I go. You know. And here I found out they like me, and they want me to stay longer. And I was working till the ninth month.

**INT:** It made you feel good. Work was important.

**ESTHER:** The work **wasn't** important. The **money** was. The money was important. Because I had a lot of work in the house. Because don't forget, I moved into the house, and nobody, you don't get a decorator. I did everything alone.

**INT:** But you didn't have that aggravation of fighting with him about money.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The money was, then I found just...a tool to yank, to get some satisfaction out, to make your brain...not to think, you know? To move up.

**INT:** That's what he was doing to you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, a lot. A lot.

**INT:** And how many years until your next child?

**ESTHER:** When I told him I said, "I had to go to the doctor today." "What do you have to go to the doctor?" I said, "Because the doctor told me I'm pregnant." "Pregnant? What, pregnant?" "Yeah. He said in maybe two months I'll have the baby."

**INT:** He was shocked, huh?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, because as soon as I said, "pregnant," it was a problem.

**INT:** He wasn't happy about it.

**ESTHER:** So then COSRD, that was the fiasco. I got pregnant. You know, I got so sick. Because I got pregnant after COSKRM. You know, when you don't want all the pregnancy, it usually stays. So I was pregnant till the fifth month, the beginning of the fifth month. And he used to wake me up and say, "You got to go and do something about it. You better do something." Because he saw my business is going. I had in the meantime, you know, started to work, and COSKRM was ten years old. You know. Truthfully, I wasn't crazy about it, either, you know, but it's there. What am I going to do? I don't want to believe in going and doing things after what I was going through. So I didn't go. And I didn't do away with it.

**INT:** Was this right after COSKRM? How many years after COSKRM?

**ESTHER:** This was, she was maybe three years old, two and a half years old. And I did do away, and I was...very, very sick after. Heartbroken. Why did I let myself be, you know, lowered down like this? And in those years, it was a hardship to do. It was...

**INT:** Well, where did you go? I mean, it wasn't even...

**ESTHER:** There was in Bergen County was somebody who was recommended by somebody.

**INT:** But you could get very sick.

**ESTHER:** Oh, was I sick, for a year. And he thought I am already out of everything. You know. But I was so young (laughs) and I was still young. So I got pregnant after that. And he really, "What are you going to do about it?" I just turned around on the other side, and I said, "No talk." There was no talk for seven months, six months.

**INT:** You didn't talk to him.

**ESTHER:** No. Because I figured, you act foolish once, twice, the third time you are just plain stupid. How stupid can you be? You know, I figured I still have a little brain ticking there. I have the two kids. And I said, "What am I going to do? Put myself out, do something that I went through in such a misery, with pain and suffering, and the idea that you do, you know, it's...all right, I didn't. So the kid was born.

**INT:** That was COSRD?

**ESTHER:** I worked, my business was already in the house. Very, very well. I mean, I was doing well. And I didn't blame him that he didn't want to have another kid, you know, because I was working already.

**INT:** How old were you with the last one, with COSRD?

**ESTHER:** COSRD is 28. I think I was 39, almost 40.

**INT:** So he must have been, so your husband must have been in his fifties.

**ESTHER:** 53. Yeah. It was pretty late. And Rockefeller had a kid, and I had to explain him, "What are you feeling so bad about?" You know. He came two days later to visit me in the hospital to look at the kid. Couldn't. But he didn't, you know, succeed with his way of law and order. (laughs) You know, he can't talk, what is the law and order.

**INT:** So did you just make a life for yourself and your kids sort of separate from him?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. I mean, I tried to engage him as much as possible, but it was always a...a blow up. Everything, you know, every little thing by him, everything had to go, you know, straight. And if it didn't...he wasn't willing to make it straight. He didn't know how.

**INT:** He didn't know.

**ESTHER:** He just had to roll straight. But when it came to straighten out something, I was much faster to do it, because you know, I had experience, life experience. He didn't have so much life experience as I had. He was with people here, but in a different way. You know, women have different ways of coping with life. But it was, like I say, nothing is easy. It was a **very**, a lot of people, you know, his own cousin who I told you was so nice and everything. She said, "You know something? If somebody had a reason to divorce, you have ten." But this didn't help me.

But one thing, I wasn't miserable. I really wasn't.

**INT:** How did you manage that?

**ESTHER:** Because I had a lot of different, like I worked, and the people were very happy with me, and they came in, and I made good money. And they wanted me, you know. And always very appreciative, and leaving me tips, big tips. (laughs) You know, when you count on twenty cents, what did you do, I gave you a dollar. I was for twenty cents onions, I bought a stick of butter, and you know, put it down on paper. I had to write down and add up, and it had to come out to the same amount. Otherwise, where is the rest?

**INT:** And you didn't have to do that anymore. You were making your own money.

**ESTHER:** And I said to myself, what am I worried about? Do your own thing, and that's all. He wasn't happy about it. He always, you know, I used to go out for shows and demonstrate, you know, and bring in customers. (Sighs) He was...unbelievable. Really. But I didn't care. Once, I always arranged it before, or before he came (laughs) or after he was relaxing with the paper or something, I used to just have everything prepared and...

**INT:** Roll it out there.

**ESTHER:** Roll it out. My kids were very good, I have to say. Thank G-d. They helped me.

**INT:** How?

**ESTHER:** In every way. In every way. I mean, COSKRM, she was a little girl, maybe five years old, six years old. She used to see I have the hair, you know, showing, demonstrating to the people, "Do you like this, or like this?" I had a living room like this in the basement, very nicely fixed up. Just like this. So people used to take it and show to each other. You know, they were sitting, "What do you think about this?" I had mirrors, and I had a shop there, I was making my things. But the things got out of my hand. So she came down and she just looked around. I never told her. Looked around, picked up the things that somebody shouldn't take it. She used to say, (in a whisper) "Ma, it was left on the sofa." You know, she must have been -- this is not exaggerated -- maybe seven years old. So they used to, the style was boxes. You know, the people put the wigs in the boxes. And I used to have in the garage, big garage, the boxes in there. And I used to keep a few, you know, immediate ones in the house. So I needed boxes. And I had people, and I couldn't go out to take note how much I have there. You know, to count the boxes, what he's bringing in. So I said to COSKRM, she must have been seven years old, no more. I say, "COSKRM, try to go and see how many boxes he's bringing, he's dropping off." So she took a look, he has a carload of boxes, and I had there maybe a few boxes still hanging. She said to me, "Ma," I asked her, "How many boxes did he bring?" (laughs) She said, "I couldn't count what he brought, but I know you have seven boxes there. I counted the boxes in the garage." You know, she counted, because that's less.

**INT:** Right. (laughs) That's cute.

**ESTHER:** (laughs) She had a pencil, and she wrote down seven boxes. "So I want you to know there are seven boxes of yours. The rest is up to you." So you know, this is help. You have to put up somebody to do it. And it was a time that the baby, when what's his name, COSRD, was an infant, and I had very good help, a woman. But I didn't like what she was doing. Because COSKRM used to come over to the baby, and she used to hit her, chase her away. And to me it wasn't worth her.

**INT:** Oh, she used to hit COSKRM.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. "Stay away!" She used to dress him like a little prince, three times a day. The house was sparkling, everything. She was very good. But one thing, as soon as COSKRM came to the baby, she gave her a zetz. And I saw it, and I told her, "I don't want that. This is not in my house, it's not important." You know, I said to myself, the kid is going to grow up, and I'll work later on. So I had already a few dollars before COSRD was born, you know, of my own money. So I didn't want to put up with anything. So she didn't stop. She felt her little prince. She used to pull him. He was born in January. She used to catch the sun. See the sun, take the crib over to the sun, the kid should have the sun, and take care. But I fired her. Because I did not...why do I tell you that?

**INT:** Because you didn't like how she was...

**ESTHER:** No, one thing, I always tried my kids should, you know, be helpful, and I was helping. I protected them. I really did.

**INT:** From their father?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Just in general.

**ESTHER:** Just in general. I mean, why should somebody push the kid away when she wants to play with her brother? And I didn't like that. And if somebody else would have said, "Listen, she's taking care of the kid. She's cleaning the house. Let her stay away from the kid." I wanted they should warm up, they should be together. She loved him. You know, it was sweet. She was always helpful. She did for him **so much**, for her brother.

**INT:** How much younger was he?

**ESTHER:** Ten years. It was the biggest thing I could do for her, that I had COSRD.

**INT:** She was excited about it?

**ESTHER:** But my husband for three months didn't talk to me, after. Angry. And you know, he used to cry upstairs, and I was in the basement already, you know, working. Because supertime, from 5:00 to 7:00 it was quiet. I didn't want to have any bells, anything. I didn't answer. But after that I had to go downstairs and prepare, you know, for the next day, and for taking her to school, and you know, it was a lot to do. But one thing, I did not...the kid used to cry upstairs and I was downstairs, and talking to customers. He never tried to quiet him down. He was upstairs. He didn't do anything.

**INT:** Just let the baby...

**ESTHER:** Purposely, he should...



**INT:** That you should come.

**ESTHER:** No. Not that I should come. I should get annoyed. I should get, you know, punishing me. And who do you think enjoyed him more than anybody else? He. He had so much fun with that kid.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** He was so good to him. He was the only kid that he really was good to him.

**INT:** Why? Why COSRD and not the others?

**ESTHER:** He already retired early, and he was a **very** clever kid, you know, very smart. Everybody thought him very, he had the vocabulary, so easy. And whoever came in the house, you know, liked him, and as a baby. And my husband **loved** him so. He used to entertain himself with him. But he should have done something else for him. He should have kept him close to him, not watch television together. You know, to teach him. But he was teaching strange people all the time. He never had the patience.

**INT:** But not his own kids.

**ESTHER:** No. No. I think that was going on a lot in those years or something. Who knows?

**INT:** What goals did you have for your children, you personally? What did you want for your children?

**ESTHER:** I wanted them to know everything. (laughs) You know. It's good to know. And they should go to school and study. And I didn't have to push them too much. They were doing it on their own. I never had to do for the kids, to encourage them. You didn't do your homework or something. I never. Even COSRD. Never. COSRD is one thing, he used to do his homework here, you know, on the edge of the table. I used to say, "COSRD, how could you do homework on the edge of the table? You have a desk. Sit down and do it." He turned around, he did it. Finished. He was very, very clever. He had a gold medal in science, in high school, when he graduated. He was doing pretty good in Columbia. You know, they were doing fine.

**INT:** So education was important to you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And how did you raise your children? Were you affectionate towards them? What kind of discipline did you use?

**ESTHER:** I really didn't have to discipline them a lot. They listened. I don't know, I didn't have a problem.

**INT:** They were good kids.

**ESTHER:** I really didn't have, they were...very rarely that I had to discipline them. Very rarely. Most of the time they didn't tell me anything, you know. (laughs) They were doing it on their own. And they were always ready to help. You know, you bring it, you take it. You know, little things. You'll be surprised.

**INT:** Did you have close relationships with them, and do you now?

**ESTHER:** I think so. Now, I hope it stays good, who knows. You know, with children you never know. But thank G-d. My older son is so good to me. He's like a...like a godsend thing. I just hope he stays well. He's good to his wife, to his children, to me. To his sister. You know, he works very hard. He's...he's working, he's a quarter to six out of the house already, because he works on Park Avenue and 59th Street. Until he goes through, you know, all that traffic, so he's trying to beat the traffic. So you could talk to him already 8:00 in the morning in the office in New York. You know. He is in international law. And they built up a very beautiful business. I hope it's okay in the future, but he's doing well.

**INT:** I didn't ask you. For whom did you name your children?

**ESTHER:** Well, Steven is named after my aunt, what brought us over. You know, Gertrude, the cousin? Her father. His name was Sheftel. So it's Steven. Because I couldn't name him after my father, because my husband's name was Abram. So I combined my mother's name, and my uncle, which I never met. But they did it, you know. They figured, and they called, they made a name Steven. What did I know? I was seven weeks here. I didn't know anything. So they really were in charge of doing things. (laughs)

**INT:** So you didn't really name him, they did.

**ESTHER:** They did, yeah.

**INT:** And what about COSKRM?

**ESTHER:** COSKRM is named after my husband's mother, Hoda Masha. And she was Harriet M. No, she was, yeah. M. Harriet. But there was a lady who always came around. She said, "You know, you are named after the same woman I'm named after." And I couldn't stand her (laughs), so I called her COSKRM. I wanted Harriet, but I called her COSKRM. And you know the Fishers, whatever I did, they were always, you know, that I'm no good. Because my husband used to put up always something, like you know, a few nails in between. It came out now, because now we are the best friends, you know, after. So I named COSKRM, Harriet M. She named her girl Harriet. I named

Steven, I had a Steven, she named Stephanie, her girl. And whatever I did, they always, she always tried to, you know, in an uppity nose, but following my line all the way. And what she didn't, she regrets till now. Because she never took her kids to Hebrew school, and she didn't feel they need it. And now they are congregating in the place, you know. And one daughter married a Gentile, an Italian guy, which she is not happy with him. Now, she is not all Jewish, but she's not happy. So I told her, there are plenty of son-in-laws who aren't Jewish, and you would like to kill them. I say, it has nothing to do, because he is not Jewish. But now she gets a little bit more on the Jewish. You know, she's sorry that she didn't send the kids to Hebrew school.

**INT:** She has regrets now?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And for whom did you name COSRD?

**ESTHER:** COSRD again, after his father's father. D. Nachum. His father, and my grandfather. Nachum.

**INT:** What was the role of religion in your house when the kids were growing up?

**ESTHER:** Well, see, my husband never wanted to go to a shul. He never belonged to a shul, but I did. And at the time, I didn't have money. I used to go, you know, to Yizkor, and I used to go to shul Shabbas, you know, when it used to be speeches or something. I used to take the kids. But then, as I started to work, I took them to Hebrew school, and I joined the shuls. You know, very nice shuls. And I became...

**INT:** Did they go to day school at all?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, for sure. Sure. COSKRM graduated high school, and Steven. COSRD, too.

**INT:** So that was important to you, that they have a Jewish education?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I thought so. I thought so. I figured, they don't have to do it. They don't have to use it, but I want them to know. You never know. Like I said to COSRD, he is resenting it a little bit. I say, "Listen. You learn so many things about different cultures and everything. Why shouldn't you know something about your own background?" I say, "You are illiterate if you don't know something about yourself. It's terrible." I say, "You could know anything, but if you don't know something of yourself," I say, "It's..." So he...He's the one who shakes it off a lot. He had a lot of, he acquired a lot from his father, because he was eleven years old when his father retired. Ten years old. So he has that...what I tell him, you know, it's a little bit off course.

**INT:** Oh, okay. He knows what's right.

**ESTHER:** And G-d bless my daughter-in-law, she had a lot to do with it, too. Anything I said. Because we were pretty, she used to live in my house a lot. So also, you know, looking at it from the negative point, whatever I told him. And I think it worked a lot on him. He would, like he says with himself, he's smart enough. He said, I say, "You know, COSRD." He doesn't care for his father. He didn't care for him.

**INT:** Who's this? COSRD?

**ESTHER:** COSRD. No. He didn't have any love for him.

**INT:** And yet he [the father] loved him. Interesting.

**ESTHER:** And I say to him, "COSRD, you know, it's so funny. He didn't do **half** for Steven and COSKRM what he did for you. Why shouldn't you like him?" "Oh, but he wasn't home." He always says. "He wasn't home at the time. You forget, he was working." That means he was on top of him all the time, and he didn't benefit by him being on top of him. So he feels a little bit like I felt from my old sages there. You know. He felt he could have taught him, he spoke very beautiful Yiddish, my husband. Very beautiful. He should have taught him Yiddish. He could have discussed things with him about different things. He never did. He just showed, "Come sit down. Watch television." Yeah.

**INT:** Oh. He didn't spend time talking to him. He just spent time...

**ESTHER:** Sitting with him, yeah. And that was the wrong. And if I said something, he always said, "No, don't listen to her." So he really was between...

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** I wanted to ask you, looking back over your life, how would you say you've gotten through your life and you've coped with all the hard times you've had? What did you use to cope through all those times?

**ESTHER:** Truthfully, a lot of what I saw from the family. I saw my aunt, who lost two children. She had four children. Her husband was in the First World War, he didn't come back. She had to struggle on her own, a woman alone. She didn't have anybody to help her. My grandfather was married to another woman with a lot of children. Her mother was away. She didn't have anybody. And she struggled, she knitted. Her house was clean. She organized children to come from shul. She was Shabbas, every Shabbas she dressed up like a princess. You know, the real Victorian look, beautiful, with skirts around and chin in here, and looked, everything was sparkling on her.

**INT:** This is Baba, right?

**ESTHER:** Baba, yeah. And invite the children, and give them a little tea, the tea wasn't tea. The tea was from brown sugar. She browned the sugar and made tea in a beautiful glass. And I saw that you could manage, I mean, under worse circumstances. And her kids weren't home. She had the two boys, one was already out. You know, because she was older, and I was young. The kids weren't home. She needed me to come and stay with her at crucial times. She must have had something on her mind when she insisted my mother should let me be there. It must have been something. Maybe somebody invaded her, or maybe somebody stalked her. You know, all those things I didn't know at the time, but as I was going through.

And then I saw my other aunt, who married off her only daughter with a guy. She gave him a dowry and everything, and he still didn't make a living. And he was smoking. And he took the pushka money. He was a big, big tzaddik and everything. He took the pushka money, what my aunt saved every little penny to put in there. And accused me of taking it, when he bought cigarettes for it (laughs), you know. So it was a crucial time for me. I'm a kid there, maybe eight years old, and I'm being accused of stealing the pushka money.

**INT:** You didn't tell me this story.

**ESTHER:** And I was so...you know. And his sisters live in Boro Park. He was a, she did for him everything, and he was a cheat, a nobody, a nothing. He wore a beard, he was a teacher, you know, he taught children. He was learned, but he was a nobody, really, in life. And then I saw what real life has to be, a nice husband. Because my uncle, my aunt's, Rochel, her husband was something like a prince. He thought of her the nicest things. And when I came there, he slept on a different spot, to give me the place to sleep with my aunt. You know? That was, you know, good generosity.

**INT:** These are all your mother's sisters.

**ESTHER:** My mother's, yes. And then I came to my father's family, and I saw what's going on. They were dancing. And what do they have Shabbas? Nothing. A few seeds, pumpkin seeds. And we were sitting and talking and dancing, you know. They knew how to dance very well. And jokes. And...

**INT:** So you learned to do a lot with nothing, or to work with your hardships.

**ESTHER:** You work out your hardships. One of my cousins married a very funny guy. He was...but she made it go. He was, he loved her very much. He was a shoemaker, and he made beautiful shoes and everything. But oy, to sleep one night with a guy like this. He was...and I said to myself, such a beautiful -- Faiga was her name. Married a guy like this. She could have not had too many choices, or something must have gone wrong. Look with what she is...you know, in my memory as I was going on. So he looks better. (laughs) You know, I always made comparisons. And I saw, I saw a lot of things.

I saw a guy in the city where I lived during the war. This beautiful, beautiful girl married a guy, a religious guy, and this was in Budapest before the ghetto closed in. She was gorgeous, but he was a Rav's son, but he was something very bad. He was drooling, and he looked like a cow. And he spoke like a cow. And it was like this. And when he was walking, he was running from him. And she married him, because his father supported the family. She didn't have children. I don't know what happened, maybe later on they were taken away or something. But you know, I saw from what people were making up that I always came back and I say, "It could be worse." You know? So it's not enough reason, you know, to break it up. You got to find another way. A different way. This is what, and the time goes, you know?

And truthfully, (sighs) looking back at it, I think, I feel, that I conquered a very bad thing by not breaking it up, and this way the kids came Shabbas together, you know, to meals. The father was there. We were discussing, not leaving out things. There was nothing to do there. I mean, out of it. Only what they could see themselves, but no discussion about your father did this, or...he used to always [talk]. I made a beautiful Pesach for his family. "Ah, you didn't make it." You know, nothing. Made nothing out of it.

**INT:** He would never say anything nice about it.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** But you had these role models. You had...

**ESTHER:** I don't know. Who knows? What do I know? Do you think I know? I don't. Maybe you could know better.

**INT:** I'm asking you. Maybe you've thought about it and you have an idea how...

**ESTHER:** I really can't tell. I really can't tell. I know my mother struggled too, with ten children, you know, with all these things. But I don't think that was enough, because I saw other people, so many other people. You know, I saw a **lot**. You know, there wasn't a day that I shouldn't be at least among fifty people. So who knows where, who gave me the...the incentive. I came in Germany when I got married. My husband was teaching, and there was an Internat. I don't know if you know what that is. That's a place where the students and the teachers live in the house. See, all the higher echelon lived in that house. And I saw what it was going on there, a lot of...I saw this woman who was cooking. We were cooking on a mutual stove, you know? She had, how many, four kids. And her husband. And they didn't come home. And she was so naughty, and she upset everybody. And then you said to yourself, "Look at this. We should be happy she's not hanging somebody or whipping somebody, because look what she lost. And she's existing." (laughs) She used to take off the pots, you know, you put up to cook? And certain things have to cook, if not, you take it off in the middle, it's gone, it's no good anymore. She came in, she just pushed over everything to the side and put up her cooking, and that's it. And if you were thinking your food is cooking, or you are baking

something, you came in, you found your pot all the way in the back, you know? No fire, no nothing. You had to start over from scratch. And you know, it was a lot of...

**INT:** You met all kinds.

**ESTHER:** There wasn't anything, really, if you compared it here, it wasn't good. And now I have a chance to look into all these good things here. People are not happy. People are...I don't know. They feel so overworked all the time. So tense. They're not happy either. So what is the really...I can't tell. I am not educated enough to be able to elaborate on something like that.

**INT:** When you look back on your life, what would you say were the successes, and what would you say are any regrets you might have?

**ESTHER:** The success, the best thing I could do, because maybe I was brought up to work, that I was building my own. Eventually, you know, I did for this, for that. If I would have started it earlier for me, I would have done much better. But thank G-d I started, still when I had a little energy. And I was able to buy the kids the nicest things. No trouble, you know? If my husband saw Lord and Taylor's. "You bought at **Lord and Taylor's**?" You know. I said, I didn't say a word. Just next time I tore off the label, he shouldn't find it, and that's it. I didn't talk about it.

And the same thing was with the house. I found a place. He didn't want to move. I gave a deposit. And I figured this is a good place, because it's close for people to come to me, you know, for location. Close to Route 22 and it's close to Morris Avenue, and I got the corner lot, you know, and we put up a house there. So my husband said he's not going to spend one penny. So believe it or not, it sounds funny, but it's true. I put the house for sale, that I worked, you know, in Hillside? And I put a deposit in the other place. And I sold the house for \$19,000, the agency, you know, with the real estate. And they were bringing people, and showing, and here I'm working, and with the kids. You know, it was such a messy thing.

So what do you think? I go out one Sunday, there is a little parade. I met three people. (laughs) I told them. I met them at the pool or something. I said, "So how are you?" They all noticed me, you know, I didn't remember who they were, but they remembered me. "How are you doing?" I say, "Nothing. I'm trying to sell my house." "Yeah, what, when?" I made the connection. I sold myself the house for \$25,000, and here the agents, "We got a **tremendous** offer. \$19,500." And I would have had to give him commission. Tremendous. And these people bought the house like this. And I have already, we had to pay off a certain amount of mortgage, and my husband said he wouldn't pay one more penny for the mortgage than he pays now. Because for him, that house is good enough.

So what do you do? I had some money accumulated, which I could have used for myself, you know, to have more help, or work less, or you know. So I said, got to move. Because the place is too tight, too small. And I had bought another piece of land not far from me, an old house. And I figured there we are going to build, a two-family, maybe

for renting. But I got to move towards Union. I wanted to Livingston. But he didn't want to go. He says, "If you go to Livingston, I'm not moving at all." So I made a compromise. Because the Fishers were living close there. And it's cheaper, the taxes. So he was always going for the more, you know. I always looked to make another few dollars. He was always looking to spend less. So I gave a deposit for that lot, and I sold the house for \$25,000, and I had to add to bring it to the same level, because the house was something like \$48,000. So I had some money with me, which it was the wrong thing to do. I should have really bought the house in my own name.

Then was the time, you know, to make a drastic move. Cut it off altogether. But I said to myself, What am I going to do now? Break up a marriage? I have the few dollars, let's make a new house, a new home, maybe things are going to work out better. It's going to be a nicer home, it's going to be easier to handle. You know, always looking. It wasn't. It was very bad. It was the wrong thing to do. Because after we moved, and I was so happy. You know, it was a big improvement. It wasn't so much, but to me it was. One thing, what was the big improvement? That I have everything on one floor, the kids. Because one is here, one is there, you know. I don't like that. I like to throw my eyes in and see, you know. Because you are busy. You have no time to go upstairs and check out. They could hide till you come. They hear you coming. I wanted to be in control. Because it was going around drugs and this. So that was to me such a good thing.

In the meantime, Steven was going to college already. You know, he was out of the house, going out of the house. And it was getting a little bit looser. And he was telling me, "You think this is the house? I could have a **much** better house without any effort." This woman is begging him to move in. You know, after I struggle. And just the move alone, you know, because I was working already. I had to keep appointments there and divert my appointments to this place. And the moving, and with the kids, and I still had to chauffeur the kids to school. It was **every second**, you know. And he is coming up with a story like this. Well. That was...a cutthroat, you know? It just lit me up. And I said, how stupid I was. I paid \$20,000 I put into something like this. I stripped myself from everything, you know, and put the money in.

Well, I kept the business, but it was so difficult, because he wouldn't do **anything**. And you know, the telephones, which I was there already for seven years in the business, they promised me that I'll have the same phone in my new place. In the meantime, it was a new area, and the telephones weren't, the lines weren't taken in. And it took such a long time, maybe two weeks, till I got my, maybe more, three or four weeks, till I got my telephone in. And when I moved in, there is a variance, I haven't got a variance. They don't let me work. And I worked from the house. There I didn't assume I'll have a problem. They petitioned me. (laughs) So here I'm back in another hole. He didn't give a **damn**. Nothing. So what did I do? With the three-year-old kid, I was going half and half, and I looked for a store, for another store, temporarily, because I said to myself, I'm going to go through a variance? That would cost me \$5,000. I paid it. I got a lawyer, and it went through. But till it went through...

**INT:** But totally without help.



**ESTHER:** Oh! He was happy that it's a kasha. Kasha. He can (laughs). So this is what I want to say, it was constantly a kasha.

**INT:** But looking back on your life, what do you see as your successes, and what do you see as your regrets?

**ESTHER:** The only successes, I hope that I think my kids are good to me. Because I see other kids are very bad to the parents. Some parents, I don't know. Some kids don't even call them up. They don't want to hear about them. I hope I never have...that experience.

**INT:** And that doesn't happen with you.

**ESTHER:** Well, thank G-d. But you, you know. You never know, life goes on. You never know what life brings. But this is to me a great...you know, because they could get angry with me, too. Because, you know, I made them help me. I didn't make them. They did it, really. I really didn't make them do. I have to say. (laughs) You know, Steven, he had to babysit COSKRM. So he was ten years older. So I called him, I don't know where he was, and he calls. "Are you going out or something?" Because I had to go for these shows to demonstrate. "Are you going out?" I say, "Yes." He said, "But I don't want to babysit tonight." And I counted on him. And I said, "Steven, if you don't want to babysit, it's no problem, because I have somebody." And this was true. Because I always surrounded myself, see, where I lived in Hillside it was easy to get help. And I wouldn't impose. If they didn't feel like doing, it was no problem. See, it's different that you say...

**INT:** You have to stay home.

**ESTHER:** Stay! And what do you mean? You're not going to give me this business, or something. So you know what happened? He came. I say, "Look, I'm glad you tell me, because if you can't make it, I'll have Barbara, or I'll have Roberta, or somebody's going to come." So he said, "No, you know what? Maybe I will come." He was very good to his brother. He was so good. Could you imagine? I had once a court case from an accident, and the help didn't come in. And I had this kid, he was three years old, and I didn't know what to do. Steven was in college, in Rutgers. You know what he did? He took him with him in college. Would you believe it?

**INT:** That's wonderful.

**ESTHER:** The idea only. This is what my kids did all the time. Took him with him, and he was good. He gave him a pencil, he told him to, you know, he bribed him up a little bit, and he was happy he was with him.

**INT:** Did you worry about your kids, or were you anxious or over-protective towards them, and worried about, or fearful of losing them?

**ESTHER:** All the time. All the time. If there was, see, my husband had a habit to talk about, that oh, he's not doing. This is not giving. And etc. I never, when I have seen that he talks something, I always interrupted him. I thought it's the **worst** thing a parent could do, to go and expose the child's shortcomings in public. I mean. Other people do it, you know. They make a joke out of it or something. I don't like that. And I felt it's not the proper thing, so I didn't allow anybody to do it. As a matter of fact, Fisher has a daughter, she's six months younger than COSKRM. How is she younger? Because she found out that I am pregnant, because she didn't think she's going to have another child. She didn't want to have any other children, because one, that's enough. And she's much older than me. She's eight years older than me. So she decided against it. But when she found out I was seven months, six months pregnant, (laughs) so she...

**INT:** Quickly got pregnant.

**ESTHER:** She got pregnant too, and she had this girl who is six [months younger], and she named her Harriet. And you know my COSKRM, not that I should say, she was better looking than Harriet. **Way** better. She had a different personality, and everybody, we were going together or someplace, they always gave her the attention. And you know, mother doesn't like that. I mean, it wasn't my fault that my kid got more attention. Everybody came, "Oh, is she gorgeous. Is she cute." And she used to smile. (laughs) She had a way of...And he used to always make a derogatory remark on COSKRM. "You said this to my daughter. How come you say it?" And I used to say to him, "John, if you mix in between the children, take your kid home. I don't want them here." I was always, you know, cutting him off. I even threw him out once, from the house. Because his wife used to always droodle him up, you know, prepare him against me, because Albert and her were very good friends. And I didn't like it. It wasn't a good relationship there. But how far it was going, and what it was going, I don't want to look into it, I'm not interested.

But he always knocked -- look, we were there for Pesach in her house, for Pesach or something. And my son said something. He must have been maybe thirteen, fourteen years old, talking about something. And she said, "Who do you mean?" And he pointed, "Her." You know, on me. And she, in front of everybody wanted to show that Steven didn't speak correctly. "What do you mean, 'her?' Doesn't she have a name, isn't she anybody that you could name and not 'her?'" And you know, trying to show all that etiquette. You know, kids, he was very well-spoken, believe me. He had a beautiful vocabulary. Not that I should tell it, but anybody who knew Steven knew. He spoke well and proper.

My brother-in-law used to take him. Not the one from Newark, but from New York. Lily's husband? He had five boys. He used to take my COSRD, my Steven, to shul, and put him up there. "Ah, azoy boychik, a feine yingel," you know. He, look, he deals with people inter[national], how shall I say, foreign people. He learned languages, international law and everything, and people fly in and they come. I mean, he's kein ayin hora doing very well. Because he has a very good personality, in business, very correct,

very straight, very to the point. All worked out. He did some work in Chatham. Something about property or something, which is not his line. They said they never had something so clean cut and so orderly put together as he did it. They were talking about it. And this is how he is.

But always criticizing, John, used to criticize. Not her. Because she put him to it, you know what I mean? She put him to it. And I didn't like it. "Albert, (laughs)" you know. Anything they did, the kids. But you know, it turns out they didn't even come to his funeral. Fisher's kids didn't come to the funeral. Everybody's kids with whom we were friends together came. Now, I don't know what happened in that line, because he was always rooting for them, that they know, and she knows how to do. And I have to go and polish her shoes, because I don't know how to do things, and how to make. And in the meantime she was striving to do everything that I was doing, till today. She has such an admiration for me. I don't care what she tells me, but, you know, she's very friendly now, very nice. She sends him in if I have a problem or something, he should come. And he's a good friend of my husband, that I noticed. And she was, too. For a long time. But I don't know what happened the last year. I don't know with her daughter, or what happened. That's not my concern.

**INT:** But I wanted to ask you if you feel that because of the war that you were any more anxious about your children, or worried about your children?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Even till today, you know. I am too, this is...I am over-protective a little bit, maybe. I am. I am.

**INT:** Do you watch Holocaust films or read books about the Holocaust? Are you able to do that?

**ESTHER:** Not really. No.

**INT:** Were you ever able to communicate your experiences about the Holocaust to your children?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** You didn't talk about it? Did they ever ask you?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I thought they go to school and let them find out what's in there.

**INT:** But you didn't want to tell them.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** What about your husband? Did you talk to him about it?

**ESTHER:** I never talked to him about my experiences, either.

**INT:** You didn't. Did he know what you had gone through at all? Did he ask you?

**ESTHER:** It didn't matter. It really didn't. It would have been a waste of my time to talk to him about whatever I was going through, because he would just, you know, shut off. Because I wasn't in the concentration camp. I was just on Christian papers, so it couldn't be as bad as he had it, you know?

**INT:** Did he talk about his experiences?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah, he was talking. But not to the kids.

**INT:** Not to the kids.

**ESTHER:** No, among his friends. They used to get together. As a matter of fact, one of his friends with whom he was together just died. He was...93 years old. And his wife was twenty years younger than him. And we belonged to the same Hadassah. In fact, she said she has some pictures that they were together, you know. But my husband worked with her husband. He was a lawyer. In the concentration camp, I don't know, they were doing some electrical poles, they were working on, you know. The Germans knew there's quality, so they put them to quality work. And they had a German guy who took care of them, who brought them some food. Because they needed him, you know. They needed the people to do that qualified...see, my husband was doing, before the war, he was in the hospital. He was in charge of all the hospital of Turingen, and you know, of whatever it was going in. Automatic and things. He was in charge, and he had some people working under him. Yeah, he was pretty, he was sharp. He knew about machinery, about tools, about everything, yeah.

**INT:** Do you ever have nightmares about the Holocaust?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, many times. One thing, I feel very bad when I threw away my Christian papers. I always wake up, why did I do it? Now I'm in problems here, and they're going to make a checkpoint, and they're going to check me out, and I don't have the papers. And I knew I threw them away (laughs) and I'm so upset about them. Why did I throw them?

**INT:** That's in your dream.

**ESTHER:** In my dream, yeah. I didn't throw them away. You know, when they stole my clothes, I sewed it in here in the pads, I wanted to have it. And it disappeared. But I always feel that, you know...

**INT:** That insecurity.

**ESTHER:** I don't have, and why did I do that? Oh, I feel lots of times I go through those checkpoints, and I say to myself, G-d. And then when my brother was caught from that camp after he got out, and they threw him into the ghetto, before he was thrown into the ghetto, he was in a camp where they were lining them up, you know, the ones who were found. And they were beating them. It was unbelievable. It was in a military, in a...how you call it? Like a prison, where the military is sleeping, you know, barracks. But it was a camp. There was the hospital, there was everything. And my brother was tied out like this. I could hear the screams. I was going there to find out, maybe I'll catch him. Because I heard they took the people from there to this place, and then maybe they'll take him to Germany. In the meantime, they couldn't take him to Germany, they threw him into the ghetto, and I didn't know. But I knew they were there in that prison place, in that military prison place, and they tied out his hands in the back, and they were beating him, and the blood was just coming out of him. And I knew what they are doing, and I couldn't do anything. I was just outside. And I heard screams, and I figured maybe somehow I'll see him, and he could be my boyfriend, you know, because I'm not Jewish. So I figured maybe somehow I'll be able to get in touch with him. But he was very, very **massacred**, and they threw him in. After he came out, he was telling me what happened. He got into the ghetto, it was already a heaven, because they didn't knock him, they didn't beat him.

**INT:** Did you have nightmares about that?

**ESTHER:** Oh! All the time. I hear the screams. Terrible. I mean, why take a guy like this who's not guilty, they took his wife, they took his child, and now they are beating him for what reason? He was in the army there, they invaded that place. They bashed up everybody. Whoever ran away, give him a break. No. They caught him, got him to that military outpost, and they, a lot of people didn't survive. And what did they do? Nothing.

**INT:** Do you still have nightmares?

**ESTHER:** A lot. An awful lot.

**INT:** At more stressful times in your life, or just all the time you have them? How frequently would you say they are?

**ESTHER:** Quite a lot. But you know, it takes over. It takes over. You have so many other things that hit you that you cannot have everything, you know what I mean? It fades out. But at certain times it roles back, and it comes back to you. Because life, you intermingle with families and with this and with that. You have your own...attending to do. You know. And things are not so easy.

**INT:** Why do you think the Holocaust happened?

**ESTHER:** (Pause) It's a good question. Unfortunately, there were quite a few things. The major thing was that these strangers, you know, there is not, whoever would have

been there beside the people who lived there, yeah? They established a community of their own people, and there is a stranger. You know, I'm thinking, when you marry off a child, it's always the other person's family that it's no good, that does something what's not right.

(END TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** How to help themselves, how to get out. They were working very hard. They had, you know, manual professions. They tried to maintain their families. But there must have been some people who did a lot of things, too, you know, major things. Like signing over their property when they were drunk. Doing things. And you don't just have to do one thing. It's like with the religious people. Yeah, right away, he's a religious man and look what he did. You know. It's the same thing with the Jews. There was no reason.

**INT:** So you think that's how the anti-Semitism started?

**ESTHER:** This is how it started. And you know, the Jews were always excelling. They were the hard workers. The Jews didn't have any farms. Very rarely. They had farms, but it was worked with the Gentiles. So it was very...I don't know, truthfully. I'm not an expert to know. Because I was very young when I left the place.

**INT:** But do you blame G-d?

**ESTHER:** I don't. I don't think so. I think everybody suffers for it's own thing. Who knows? Maybe you have to. I would never blame G-d for it. I never find to blame G-d. I never saw to blame G-d. I don't know why. I was always grateful to Him. You know, somehow it always came up, because in the long run, something worked out. So why should I blame Him? Like I was so sick in the hospital, you know, for three months, with an infection after the first pregnancy, and I knew I'm not going to have any more children and everything. That's why I took that woman from the...from the camp who came from Romania and she was pregnant? I felt so sorry for her, that look what she goes through. And you know, when I couldn't have any children, I said to myself, "I don't know. I helped that woman. I gave her my bed. I'm sure G-d is going to help me." You know, this was my attitude. I'm sure G-d is going to reciprocate. You know, somehow, I always had...

**INT:** You were optimistic.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I always had the feeling that He'll do it. (laughs) You know, He'll do it. If you do, He'll help you. It was, that was my motto.

**INT:** What you give comes back to you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I think so. I think so. It comes back all the time. Sometimes, you know, you maybe have different expectations of what you are going to get, but you do get back.

**INT:** Do you think the Holocaust can happen again?

**ESTHER:** I think so. Very much. And you know, I'm thinking, that's what I'm thinking a lot in my nights and everything. Where is a good place to go now? You know? There was no good place to go when the Holocaust was going. Because there was Romania you could run in for a little while, you know, before they caught you. We could go to South America. You know, you could go to Shanghai. A lot of people were going. You know, it was place. Now I say, "Where could you go where they want the Jews?" I don't think there's a place.

**INT:** Israel.

**ESTHER:** Israel doesn't, how much place do you have in Israel? What, they're going to conquer? America wouldn't even allow it we should do it, believe me. I don't think the people are going to allow all these Jews should get there and conquer their lands. Because Israel is very small. And if everybody comes there, where are they going to be? It's ridiculous.

**INT:** I see what you're saying.

**ESTHER:** It's not enough place. That means we have to go into the Orient, or go to China, or to Turkey.

**INT:** So you don't see that there's any safe place.

**ESTHER:** I don't find it, no.

**INT:** Do you think there's a lot of anti-Semitism now?

**ESTHER:** I think so. A lot. Could you imagine, I have a woman, she goes to Jehovah Witnesses. Now who are they? They are relics, nobody. I take her just because she cries to me. She calls me 5:00 in the morning, she says, "Esther, I haven't got a penny to my soul. I can't buy my food. You must help me out. I want to come to work for you." You know, work for me. She causes me so much trouble! (Laughs) I could get somebody for the same money to do a much better job, but I feel sorry for her. She's homeless, and I remember the times when I didn't have anything. And I say, "What is it going to hurt me if I give her a few hours' work?" Just to let her in the house is already...she's not all there. She was brought up in a convent, I think they beat her up a lot there. Anyhow, she tells me, you know, I can't work with her. I have times I cannot, you have to be right on top of her if you want her to do something. Otherwise she could take this chair and put it on top of the dresser there, you know. And then come home and you see what you have: a mess.

So I tell her, "You know, Dolores, I have no money." I don't want to tell her that she's annoying me. That I could give you some food or something. She doesn't go for that. She says, "Yeah. Your husband left you probably with a big insurance policy, and you have a house and you have a business. And you have money, and you cannot help me out with a few dollars? That's what the Jews are doing. That's how the Jews are." I say, "Dolores, you know so many Gentiles, so many Christian people, why don't you call them up, they're such good people?" "They don't want me." I say, "But I should be stuck with you, because you are a Jehovah Witness, you have no home, no nothing, and because I am a Jew, and I let you in, so the Jews are the no good ones?" You know, I get so angry with her.

Now, this is nothing. I mean, this is just...but you could sense that from a low-level place like that she is coming, where they meet, in Jehovah Witnesses, and they are talking about the Jews, how they have the money, and how they have everything. Who are they? They don't do anything. Are they working, the Jehovah Witnesses? I'm not familiar with them, but could you imagine even there, it's in that the Jews...

**INT:** So you see it as being everywhere.

**ESTHER:** Oh, sure. Oh, sure. And the intellectuals, sure. They keep quiet. You know, Chatham is such a beautiful town. It was created by Jews from New York. Tailor people from the sweatshop. He had some money, he bought a big place, I don't know, something like 70 acre land in Chatham. They put up a community. But only Gentiles. And they wanted to buy the high school was for sale. So the people, it's close to Livingston. So the people wanted to buy, because it's a nice area. It has transportation, nice people live there. They wouldn't sell. They made demonstrations, they put up all kinds of signs at the baseball games and everything. I happen to own property there, and I know. (laughs) The people who sold it to me, the guy had to know a way to Florida, because, and I wanted to buy off another piece of property next to it, and she wouldn't sell it to me, just because I was Jewish, I know for a fact. So she sold it to the next door neighbor, who cheated her. She said, "I wish I would have sold it to you. But I was so influenced not to sell to a Jew." So the Jew pays more money, you know. But wherever you go, you encounter it.

And I'll tell you, nowadays, the Jews build a lot, they take up land, and they put up properties, and they sell it, and you know, it builds up. They call it the Jewish Mafia. So who knows what they are building up there? Something is building up. And you know what it is, too. The times are so bad, because it's not because of the Jews. Because the world is changing. It's a transient time. So it's the Jews are the guilty ones. It's not the Jews. It's the world. You look into the colored people, don't they do it?

By the way, about the coloreds, you know, they think they are such a fine people. I worked originally, when I started my business, I got a place, a very beautiful place, colored people. They were doing a lot of hair weaving and styling wigs, because they have poor hair. And this woman was very smart, Mrs. Moldrow. She was marching on Washington, that's how prominent of a person she was. And her hairpieces, she always



made them friends, not good enough around here. So she found me. And I used to work for her, and she paid me very well. But I had to bring the work to her in the shop. So I saw a woman came in with a wig for styling, and she was tied up on the phone. I said, "Mrs. Moldrow, what do you charge to style a wig?" She says like this, "Charge her \$14.00." I say, "Mrs. Moldrow, \$14.00?" From where I live in Hillside, it was a solid white community with beautiful shops. \$3.00. I say, "Why do you take so much money?" (laughs) I started to question her till she got off the phone. She says, "I need the money for my children to send them to private school, that they should become somebody. They'll drink their money up, and they are not going to have anything. But I send my kids to private school, and I need the money." So taking it from a poor girl who didn't have \$14.00, she had to go without hair, maybe she had to pay out, so she made a down payment, I remember, \$2.00, a down payment, and she's going to bring in another down payment. She bought a wig from her for maybe three times the price, she could have gotten it by a Jewish family. And this is what they do to their own people. If they are on top, believe me, they use them to the bottom.

**INT:** Oh, this was a Black woman?

**ESTHER:** Black people, yes, a Black outfit. And she was a big lady who was marching for the colored people on Washington.

**INT:** And she wasn't willing to help this [woman].

**ESTHER:** Nobody. Nobody. Just grabbing from them as much as possible. I remember she took me to Father Divine. You must have heard of him. She was a big to-do by Father Divine. And she liked me very much, you know, so she invited me. She says, "I have a luncheon with Father Divine. Come with me." The beauty parlor wasn't far from there. I think, what can I lose, I'll see Father Divine. I heard of somebody. He was in white clothes. (laughs) And all these people were hailing him, and eating the corn bread. (laughs) You know, it was an experience for me. And she was a big to-do. Yet she was siphoning up from the poorest. And she was the one who was working for the colored, and marching on Washington, and telling everybody how the colored people don't have a home, and they don't have...

**INT:** And she's not helping her own people.

**ESTHER:** And she was not helping her own people. She was helping her own children. One was a retarded. She needed money for that, too, she told me. So this is what the coloreds. And this is what they are blaming the Jews for everything. I mean, it's true, the colored people were working for the Jews. But who gave them jobs? Nobody else wanted to bother with them. Now the Jew is the guilty one. You know, I can't believe it, that the coloreds are blaming the Jews and they pick on the Jews.

**INT:** And you have Farrakhan now.

**ESTHER:** Farrakhan? That's something which shouldn't be allowed. But he is in it, and I think slowly, slowly, America wants him, to keep him, and to hit the Jews.

**INT:** You think so?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. They are feeling this way: The judges, the lawyers, and the doctors are in charge of the people, and they are all Jews.

**INT:** That's what Farrakhan thinks.

**ESTHER:** All the people think. Anybody I talk to feels that way.

**INT:** Oh, really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They feel that way. All the Jewish doctors. You know what the Jewish doctors, they say. The Jewish doctors make them sick, and the Jewish doctors do this, you know.

**INT:** You hear this from your clientele?

**ESTHER:** Not from the clientele, no. They wouldn't talk to me like this. But I hear it from other people. I hear what they talk, what they...

**INT:** So how do you feel when you hear these same anti-Semitic things that happened to you fifty years ago?

**ESTHER:** Very bad. I heard that the first time, when my son was going, Steven was going ice skating. The river wasn't far, and it was very cold, and they were ice skating. And he was ice skating, too. So he came back, and he said, "They chased me off the ice because I am a Jew boy." When I heard that, I said to myself, my G-d, after **all** my coming and going, and struggling, my kid is a Jew boy, thrown off the ice? You are back in the olden times. And then I saw already. That was a **long** time ago.

**INT:** So it will always be with us, you think.

**ESTHER:** And if it's not going to be the Jews, it's going to be another group. Somebody different, somebody dressed up in different clothes. You know, maybe another type of a Jew, but it's sad. Very sad. But what can you do? So what can you do to avoid it? What **can** we do? What's to be done? I think now the Jews are more prominent than they were, ever. Because they, you know. You could see them all over in the professions. And it's a lot of troubles in this America, with work, with labor, and other people are competing, and they assume that the Jews are the ones who take the jobs. And the Jews are just in as much trouble.

I went to the rabbi last week, and this friend of mine who's very sick, she was telling me, "You are going to the rabbi?" I wanted to take her with me. He was in Williamsburg. She

says, "Tell him my children," -- who were doing very well, I know them all -- "they are not making a living. They probably will have to close down the business soon." They were in plastics, something, I don't know what. They made a good living. She is very sick, and the son has five children. One son is getting married. The daughter's not doing bad, because her husband is a doctor. But otherwise it's big troubles. They have a house with a mortgage, with five kids, sending them to yeshivas. And no money. And so who is guilty for that? We have to say it's Farrakhan who's doing it. Yeah, we have to say Farrakhan is doing it. That he has no jobs.

And a lot of people in Springfield, it was a very nice community, you know, but it's shading down. And I see them all over. In West Orange, there were people who were doing a beautiful, you know, a nice living. Low, very low. They have no money. And it's no jobs.

**INT:** So that's when the anti-Semitism gets bad.

**ESTHER:** Sure. Why did Hitler have the Jews? Because he needed space. You know, that was the big problem there. He needed space, and he needed work for his people. So where is he going to get it from? From the resources that he has. He's not going to dig a mine up and get the gold out of there. He'll take the gold which is produced already. So the Jews had gold, the Jews had a home, the Jews were capable. So he figured, that's a good source. We'll use it. It was a great decision about it, I'm assuming. It wasn't there, but I'm sure there was a lot of discussion before they engaged in the crematoriums, and all these killings. I wouldn't be surprised if there was an international meeting about it. I wouldn't be surprised. And nobody said a word about it, but it was talked up, in England or something. So that's life, what can I say? We are out. We are noticeable. And look, the Gypsies were persecuted, too. What kind of a source were they? They didn't have too much. Why did they do it? And it was something else, too. They were using the Polish people, too. They tried to, as soon as they would have finished with the Jews, they would have started up with all the other...

**INT:** Slavic peoples?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah! They were anti-Gentile. They couldn't take it. The Osten Juden, and Osten Christian. It didn't work out. But who knows who's next to do it?

**INT:** Is there anything else that you would want to add to this interview?

**ESTHER:** I hope we don't have to go through things that I was going through and a lot of other people who had it maybe worse than me. Because I'm sure there were people who were thrown out of the train, and they were left on the railroad, and nobody to see them, and no place to go, and no food to eat, and worried they shouldn't be seen. I know somebody who had that experience. And what can I say? I hope our children, children's children, shouldn't go through with what we went through. And the bodies I saw, I hope nobody has to see. Because on the Duna, when they were throwing these Jews in and shooting them in there, and I thought it's freedom already, all that shooting during the

night? In the meantime, I get up in the morning, and I see all those bodies, and I couldn't figure out. I figured those are the Russians, the Germans who were fighting. In the meantime, they were the Jews from the houses which were segregated, you know, where they could come in from 11:00, come out from 11:00 to 3:00. Those were all the people who were shot and thrown in the Duna. And it was a terrible, terrible experience. I hope our children's children shouldn't go through it. That's all I can say.

**INT:** I want to thank you very, very much.

**ESTHER:** Well, I hope I didn't mumble too much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)