

## Summary of Oral History: Oral history interview with Louis Muller

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### Louis Muller Childhood

Louis Muller was born Lajos Müller 12 April 1934 in Bratislava, Slovakia, to Anna Müller (née Kovacs) and Vilmos Müller. Louis had one sibling: a younger sister named Hermina (Mimi). From 1934–1939, Louis resided in Bratislava. From 1939–1956, he resided in Budapest. During the Second World War, he used the name Louis Pap while in hiding (he had false papers issued under this name). After the war, he trained and apprenticed as a master upholster, becoming a Kárpitos Szakmunkás, completing his training in 1950. He then completed an intensive one-year high school program, graduating circa 1952, following which, he attended the University of Physical Education, Testnevelési Főiskola.

In this video, Louis describes his family's arrival in Budapest from Slovakia, soon after which his father was taken to a forced labor camp and then to the concentration camp, Buchewald, where he later died. Louis explains that his mother was also taken away but managed to escape during the journey and survive. At age 10, during the height of the Second World War in Hungary, his Christian aunt Kati, arranged for him to receive false papers. And in a very gutsy move, she accompanied Louis to the train station where, through flirtation with Gestapo officials, she managed to get Louis' papers signed, officially assigning him a false Christian name, ensuring his safety in the process. Around that time, Louis describes how his beloved uncle Misi, protected the family's money (in the form of gold). In the middle of the night, he and his uncle dug a hole in the dirt-floor basement of their apartment building, and hid the gold in a box, for later retrieval. For Louis, war stories as a boy included his mother carving the meat off a horse that was found dead in the street, to be made into a soup, as well as one incident where, during a visit, he and his sister quietly stole chocolate from a little-known uncle who was apparently hoarding food.

Louis describes the Soviet liberation of Budapest and the challenge of finding food at that time, including how, even as Soviet forces were liberating parts of the city, Germans were still shooting Jews in other neighborhoods. Just a boy, Louis witnessed this, as he hid in fear of being caught. Post-war life included living with the loss of his father, and his family's home being divided into units by the now-communist regime. His mother encouraged Louis to learn a trade, to become an upholsterer, as his father had been. And he received his credentials as a master upholsterer at age 16.

Soon after, he took advantage of a new government initiative for disadvantaged youth, a one-year high-school program, following which he enrolled at the University of Physical Education, Testnevelési Főiskola, where he was now studying to become a gymnastics coach. Although he received scholarship funding to attend university, he also earned money on the side, doing upholstery, which was considered behavior unbecoming of a loyal communist. Soon discovered, his actions led to the speedy removal of his scholarship. And when he spoke out, he was reported and tried in a kangaroo-court, immediately expelled from university, and picked up by the military police, as he was now forced to serve in the Hungarian army.

## Louis Muller Army

Louis Muller studied at the University of Physical Education, Testnevelési Főiskola, but did not graduate, as he was expelled for political reasons and immediately drafted into the Hungarian army.

In this video, Louis describes how, after being picked up by the military police, and forced to serve in the army, he was placed into a communications unit. In one military skirmish, he broke his leg, ended up at the hospital, and was sent home for a time to recover. On crutches, he met Eva, who he would later marry.

Laid up in the military hospital, because of the broken leg, opportunity soon came about. The military doctor who removed his cast found out Louis was an upholsterer, and asked him to do some upholstery for him, giving him several days leave from the army, during which time Louis would meet up with Eva. Soon, he began to develop a reputation as an upholsterer, and he received further jobs from more senior officers, granting him more days of leave and more time with Eva.

In the army, his background as an upholsterer landed him in the tailoring shop. A high-ranking official asked Louis to make him a suit, which he did, leading to more days of leave. And when a large swimming pool was completed on the military base, Louis was asked to sew bathing trunks for the soldiers, for which the senior leadership was grateful, and for which he received more days of leave.

Soon, he was pushed well outside his area of knowledge or ability. When the cook on the army base became ill, Louis was ordered to take over. With no experience cooking, his first few meals were failures, and he gave the leftovers to a local farmer as pig-feed, bartering for milk and wine, which he served to the unit, and which was well-received. And again, he received much leave from the army allowing him to visit his beloved Eva.

## Louis Muller Revolution

Along with Eva Berger, Louis Muller escaped from Hungary in December of 1956, during the failed Hungarian revolution. From late 1956 to early 1957, Louis resided in Linz. It was there that he married Eva Berger in a civil ceremony on 29 December 1956; two days later, on 31 December 1956, he married Eva in a Jewish ceremony that took place in Vienna.

In this video, Louis begins by describing the later period of his army duties, just prior to the Hungarian revolution, including a near-death experience where, two soldiers playing a game with a grenade mistakenly blew themselves up, nearly killing him in the process.

He received his discharge from the army just as the revolution was breaking out. But in the chaos that ensued, where there was a general lack of clarity about who was on who's side, Russian soldiers at one point, shot at a truck he was in. And soon after, he and his peers, who were simply trying to leave the military base in Kecskemét to return to Budapest, were detained and briefly placed in a makeshift jail.

Back in Budapest, on the suggestion of a friend, Peter Krausz, Louis and his girlfriend (later wife), Eva Berger, and her family decided to escape from Hungary. A paid smuggler helped them. They took a train to the Austria-Hungary border, slept for a few hours, and under cover of darkness, walked to a less secured section of the border, and crossed. Knowing that the border was being monitored and that it was zigzag in shape made for a harrowing experience, where they were unsure if they might end up caught by authorities, returned to Hungary, and possibly imprisoned.

Together, they made it to a small Austrian town, they registered with the Red Cross, and went on to Vienna, aided by JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services). They were instructed to go to JIAS in Linz, where they received the help of an initially-reluctant Simon Wiesenthal. About a week and a half later, Louis and Eva had a civil wedding ceremony in Linz, immediately followed by a Jewish ceremony in Vienna. After two more months in Linz, along with Eva's family, Louis and Eva received visas to Canada. They were flown to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

#### Louis Muller Canada

From 1957–2022, Louis Muller resided in Toronto. There, he ran Louis Interiors, a fine furniture-manufacturing business, which he established in 1961. He and Eva had three children: William Muller (born 4 January 1958), Robert Tom Muller (born 5 April 1964), and Steven Muller (born 29 March 1969). In 2015, Adath Israel Congregation (Toronto) issued a certificate of appreciation for Louis's service to the synagogue. Listed as an Honored Member in the Who's Who Among Top Executives, he passed away in May of 2022.

In this video, Louis discusses his and Eva's early years in Canada as Jewish-Hungarian refugees. Following Eva's relatives, they took residence in Toronto, briefly staying at a convent, in accommodations set up by the Red Cross. Louis found work as an upholsterer, and soon Eva became pregnant with their first child.

After numerous altercations with his boss surrounding wages owed to him, Louis decided to try to find work independently. He started by doing small upholstery jobs in the garage of their home. But in winter, heating the small space with a stove proved dangerous, worrying both himself and Eva about safety. Soon, he found modest commercial space, receiving his big break by a successful business-owner who ran a drapery shop. Grateful for a complicated job he did for her for free, she would send him many customers seeking upholstery work.

He founded Louis Interiors, moving locations a few times within Toronto. Initially, long hours at work meant conflicts with Eva, who struggled with his work-related absences, but he felt financial pressure to take care of his family. He grew the business progressively, becoming widely recognized internationally for complicated upholstery work. His oldest son, and later his grandson, joined the business.

Louis describes great love and affection for his wife Eva, his 3 children, and his 9 grandchildren. He passed away 8 May 2022.