

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Annotated transcript

**Interview with Malvina Burstein
October 11, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Malvina Burstein, conducted on October 11, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

In October 2016, Malvina Burstein's daughter Miriam Burstein provided the Museum with this annotated transcript, clarifying and adding more detail to her mother's statements.

[[]] designates notes by Miriam Burstein

MALVINA BURSTEIN

October 11, 1995

01:01:04

Question: OK. Let's start by your telling me your name, date of birth and where you were born.

Answer: My name is Malvina Burstein, and before was Malvina Grünfeld. I was born in Trebišov in April the 17th, 1913. [[April 17, 1913 - her birthdate. She also knew of Czech records that say April 27, 1913. And during the war she would make herself 3 years younger for her 3-years-younger boyfriend (he wanted it so) and some records show 1916.]]

Q: Tell me a little bit about Trebišov.

A: Trebišov was a small city, shtetl. It's 7,000 people. Mostly were Catholics and 200 Jewish families. Mostly Orthodox. Everybody Orthodox. They had a one *cheider*¹ [[in her village they would pronounce with ``I'' sound, in America many people use ``A'' sound]], one synagogue, one teacher and one *mikveh*².

Q: Was your family religious?

A: Oh, yeah. My family was very religious. My father was a rabbi's son, and my mother was a rabbi's daughter. And everybody – mostly everybody was religious in that community.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family and your family life before the war.

A: My family before the war, we had a restaurant and my family, we had eight children. I was the youngest of eight children. And my father was a *melamed*³ before he got married, and my mother was only 15½ years old when she got married. I was the youngest from eight children. The oldest sister was married to a cantor in Galanta, which is a very, very big yeshiva [[In Galanta was a very big Yeshiva. Helen, her oldest sister lived in Galanta with her husband Bela and their 9 children (by 1939)]. And the other sister [[Lenke]] was married in Brno [[to Rabbi Nusen Elias Grunfeld]]. He was a rabbi. And my other sister [[Zali]] was home with her, nine years old boy [[Shaul Yechezkel]], and my other brother [[Adolf (Avraham, Vrumi) had smicha (was a rabbi)]] two years older from me, he was a rabbi. He was still a *yeshiva bocher*⁴, [[and her brother, Yitzchak (Icu) fled to America in February 1939 and became Irwin Greenfield. Another sister, Sylvia, left the family in 1922 to come to America.]] and that was my family.

¹ Orthodox primary school (Yiddish)

² ritual bathhouse (Hebrew)

³ Hebrew school teacher (Yiddish)

⁴ yeshiva student.

Q: Was your lifestyle fairly comfortable? Do you have good memories?

A: I would say I was loved by everybody because I was the youngest. So usually I was spoiled. And I never forget Shabbos⁵. We had one chicken, divided for two meals. Friday night and Saturday lunch, one chicken. So one of my sisters gave me always her portion of the white meat, and I spread it on the plate it should be big that I had plenty meat. But it was – Vegetables, we had plenty. And potatoes, we had all the time, ready in the back yard. And meat, we had once a Shabbos, as I said. White bread, challah, was also once a week, but was Shabbos. And fish, my brother [[here in America, looking back to those times]] couldn't forgive me, forgive himself. We had a river in the back of our yard, and we went only for the fish Friday, *I'koved Shabbos*⁶. We were poor, but very proud. She didn't want charity. My brother who was nine years old [[Irwin]], my mother took him to the *cheider*, and he ran away. So the teacher says, "Mrs. Greenfeld⁷," he says in Yiddish, "I know you're not – you don't have money. Your husband is in the war [[he was drafted into the Hungarian army in WWI, and he became a prisoner of war afterward WWI in Sarajevo]], but we will pay for your son. He has to be in the *cheider*, a family like you." And my mother said – they said, "We will pay for him." My mother said, "No, I don't want paying, but I take my son every time.]" [[--And he ran away!!]] Honest, very honest, decent people. Everyone in my family. My father is – when the war broke out, he went to the Sarajevo [[part of the Hungarian army]], and he was captured there after the war. And my mother raised all the eight children by herself. She struggled, she went away early morning, and she left me, I remember, a year old, and a gypsy [[once her mother left her alone and she was a baby crying there and a gypsy from the village walked by and fed her. The mother told the story to her.]] who fed me. So life was very difficult for her. We never had white bread, I don't remember. Just vegetables and food . . . and potatoes, that was free.

Q: Now, you – so then you went to school in Trebišov?

A: Yeah.

Q: To a public school? To a Jewish school?

A: I went to public school. I finished the first year the seventh grade. That's the first time they had seven grades. Before, they had only six grades. And I went also a must, everybody who is there has to go to Jewish school, study, everybody. [[Jewish children went to public school, and after school for Jewish children, there were Jewish classes]] And they are graded to be the public school [[and those grades they received were also put on their report card]]. I went till I was 13. To the Jewish school, Hebrew, but they didn't – Jewish, they just studied history. Jewish history. We didn't study Hebrew, just, to read and write, but we never know what it says. We didn't understand

⁵ the Jewish Sabbath (Yiddish)

⁶ to honor the Sabbath (Hebrew)

⁷ Interviewee appears to be referring to the surname "Greenfield," which is the English equivalent of the Yiddish "Grünfeld."

the Hebrew language. But we had to know history in Czechish interpretation. Czech ish was my school.

Q: I'm sorry. I'm a little confused. You went to a Czech school and a Jewish school?

01:07:07

A: Yeah.

Q: And was the Jewish school for girls, or girls and boys?

A: Together. Jewish school was together, and so it was also the public school for everyone in one room.

Q: Did the Jewish people in your town mix with the non-Jewish people?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You felt like one family. Everybody knew you by the first name. Everybody said "hi" to you. There was no – it was __ very friendly atmosphere among the Christians and Jews. Very, I could say that the signs were all over. "Jew, go to Israel [[\"Palestine\" which became Israel in 1948]]," all over the signs were. But there was no violence. Nobody hurt each other. We never heard of anybody killing each other at all. They were very, very friendly.

Q: Were you personally aware of any anti-Semitism other than those signs?

A: No, really not in my youth. No. Everybody kissed me, in fact, my friends, my roommates [[classmates]]. And everybody I had a good relationship with them until the Nazis came. And then I heard that one of my school mates, my brother was hiding already [[her brother, Rumi, survived the war, somehow hiding, and after the war was over, he went back to his home in Trebišov]], so he find him in the woods and hit him, took his shoes off, and gave him over to the policeman [[he went back to his home in Trebišov and they killed him in his town]]. That was my school mate's husband I used to kiss all the time [[she had been friends with the schoolmate, and it was the schoolmate's husband who was responsible; she never mentioned the names of either]].*

Q: What year was that?

A: That was – when it happened? Well, when I came back I was told, [[after the war. It happened before she returned to Trebišov after the war.]] I wasn't home yet, no.

* she used to kiss the girlfriend (the wife)

Q: Were there Zionist organizations, different political organizations . . .

A: Yeah. Yes. When I was young, when I said my father died early when I was only 13 years old. He was 52. And so my mother's brother, he was a *schochet*⁸ and a cantor in Prievidza [[Prievidza was in Czechoslovakia , now in the Slovak Republic]], a "Status Quo"⁹, and a modern city. So he took me to his place and I enrolled right away to be a Shomer¹⁰. Shomer, it's a Zionist organization for Israel, for Israel, and they have those Kibbutz, free, no marriage and stuff like that. But it's pro-Israel, and then when I came home, 16 [[19 years old she should have said]], I enrolled in the Jabotinsky¹¹ group, you know. Fight for Israel, even with munitions, but fight for Israel. I met in fact, Jabotinsky, I met him in Košice, in a bigger city. They had a convention, and my brother, also. We went together [[(to see Jabotinsky) " - a group went together from Trebišov]]. I have a picture with him. [[a picture with their Jabotinsky group outfits in Trebisov, not with Jabotinsky in the photo, although they saw him]]

Q: What was your impression of him?

A: Of Jabotinsky? He was a rusky – a husky, tall man and he was very strong with his conviction and I liked him. Because what he said was so powerful all the time, that Israel has no place – not to be – Israel has a place, now to be independent. They should fight for it, and that was all what I wanted to have in that time.

Q: Now, how much were you aware of Hitler and Nazism before the war started in Slovakia?

A: Before the war started in Slovakia, for me it was in 1939 when the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia where my sister [[Lenke]] lived in Brno.¹² That was Czech next to Prague, a big city. And so they left everything that night in 1939 and came to my mother to Slovakia, so we knew it's trouble. And then we got right – yeah? And we then got right away a letter after that from my sister in Galanta [[when Hungary occupied part of Czechoslovakia, early in the war, Galanta was occupied.]], who was then occupied, like Hungary. And she had to leave everything in half an hour with eight children, and they took them to some camp. And nobody heard from them since then .

⁸ kosher butcher (Yiddish)

⁹ Status Quo Ante, independent religious communities that attempted to retain a traditionalist stance after the schism between Orthodox and Neologist Hungarian Jews in 1868-69. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Status Quo Ante."

¹⁰ Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir (Hebrew), Zionist-socialist youth movement, designed to prepare Jewish youth for kibbutz life in Israel. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Research Foundation, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, corrected ed.), s.v. "Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir."

¹¹ Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), Zionist activist, founder of Betar movement. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Jabotinsky, Vladimir."

¹² March 15, 1939, the Moravian city of Brno falls under Nazi occupation as part of the "Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Moravia."

Q: Let's stop for a moment because there's a truck noise. [Pause] Before the Czech territory was occupied, were you aware of what was going on in Germany?

A: Yeah. Because we heard Hitler on radios. We called him – he barked like a dog; he didn't talk because he has a rudeness in him. That even my – everybody thought he's barking, he's not talking. Yeah, we heard about him. That's the way we knew what's going on, but we never thought of Auschwitz. No, I didn't know in that time that it was Auschwitz there. Just persecution, kicked them out. My sister [[Helen]] who was there for 30 years, she didn't have citizenship, so she had to leave in half an hour. Nobody needed citizenship, so we knew it's troubles. We knew. But not in that, in that – how you say it? In that end, you know.

Q: You probably didn't think that what was happening in Germany was necessarily going to happen to you.

A: Oh, no. We didn't – no, we couldn't believe it, no. We couldn't believe it. They were such, such unbelievable things. In my backyard I saw girls going in that frail¹³ train and they waved to me because they knew they had to pass my house. They didn't see me because I was hiding there, but they still knew I am someplace. In that small place everybody knew each other, and I had a little store, millinery store. So everybody knew me in that village, in that city. But we never thought of it that Auschwitz is the answer for those deportations.

Q: Now, you said that in 1939 was when you really became aware of all of this because your sister had to leave, and she came home. At what point did things start changing in Trebišov?

A: Well, it was the professional jobs were taken away from Jews.

01:13:58

Q: When was this?

A: In 1939 it started automatically, little by little. And then they had those swastikas. And I had in this a sign in my store, "Jew." Everybody had to put in their store a sign that was from the beginning that they should boycott us. And that was always the sign that "don't talk to them". It was dangerous. And then it was curfew 8 o'clock till 5 in the morning, or 6 o'clock at night till 5 – 8 in the morning. Maybe something like it. You couldn't get out. Traveling was restricted. You couldn't go anywhere. And . . . if you had friends – you always made connection before with few Christians. My mother went for milk six miles, they gave it to her. They're not supposed to give her, she was kosher, so they give her. So that kind of contact with food, milk and butter they give her in secret. Only secretly they could do that. But it was just impossible to describe the horrors which was there all the time. But from beginning, as I said, that was the beginning of the troubles, of the tragedies. Denied jobs, kicked them out, and you couldn't possess anything.

¹³ frieght.

The money or whatever you had, the savings you had to give them-in. People were hiding, like my mother was hiding someplace. Nobody knew it, I never find it after the war. They were hiding [ed comment: hiding, not themselves but their money and valuables] in basements or under the ground or someplace, if they had some valuables.

Q: So you're saying that this happened really in the beginning as soon as Slovakia became an autonomous – a satellite of – autonomous but yet a satellite of German—

A: Hlinková Garda—¹⁴

Q: All of these problems started right away?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, were you able to keep your business?

A: No. No, I had to close it, but I worked at home in my house, as I said, secretly. I had few [[a few]] nice customers. Peasants don't wear hats yet. They just started. So we had a factory, a sugar factory. So the professional people, they were there. Only they wear hats. And then we had a soldiers' – how you call it? A barracks for soldiers, soldier station. So they had officers, those were my customers, the elite. So few [[a few]] – I made good friends, they came to me, but it was in secret. You couldn't do it. Both ways, she would be persecuted . . . She is a Czech, so they didn't think too much. She wasn't so scared, because she had the power.

Q: Was this a frightening period?

A: Oh, my gosh, yes. We were very frightened. You never knew what happens to you. You never knew when you go out what happens to you. Very frightened. Very, very horrible time.

Q: Were there acts of violence against the Jewish people?

A: Not in my time yet. No, no. Just the scary part was that they announced, who knows Jews, they should report them. That was by itself a signal, you know, be careful, if you talk to them or if they talk to you – treat you the same as the Jews – [[the Nazis are going to take you]] the concentration camp. So it was a very, very, very daring thing to do.

Q: So were Jews being taken anywhere? Were Jews being rounded up or anything in this period of time?

A: It was – I never heard anybody who would do it and anybody who would violate anything in that time. Because it was already that time when they took the boys. The boys were not there anymore. Single boys, first, who were not married. And then they took men even they were married, and so there were no men in the city, in the place anymore. And girls they had also ordered – the way I said behind my house, I saw the freight with kids, they waved to me, so that was the last transport

¹⁴ Militant wing of the Hlinková Slovenská L'udová Stana, Slovakian collaborationist regime. Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1990), s.v. "Slovakia."

for girls [[the first transport for the single girls was March 25, 1942]].

Q: Now, when you say they took the boys, they took them then, who is "they" and how did . . .

A: Oh, the Hlinková Garda who was charge, the Hlinka¹⁵ was a priest but he was in charge of the Hlinková, of the organized like Nazi soldiers. They called them Hlinková Garda. And they were in charge and they did everything like the Nazis did. They had orders from the Nazis, so they took first the single men. And then they took the even married men, only men. And the wives with children were still home when I left.

Q: When did these deportations start, do you remember?

A: Well, it was the tragic part for girls, as the boys went first to labor camp, as my brother [[Rumi]] went. And that was – from 1939 it went on, but from 1939. And for girls, it was in 1942.

01:20:21

Q: When you say they took them, did they come into the town and round people up? How did this happen?

A: They reported them. You have – no, they get – you had – they had to report to the authorities. There was an announcement made, you have to report all the boys, single come here and here. And then they are going to labor camp, but it wasn't. They were going, already, to the end, they take them anywhere; we didn't know where. There just was no Jew anymore in the city in that place where I was. No more Jewish boys left and no men. And that was my last time that I was among the last to survive there still hiding. When my friends, as I said, they waved to me, you know, that they are in that transport. They had to report, and I didn't report. I didn't go to report. Every single girl had to come to report, and so they took them away. But I didn't, so I went hiding first, and then I escaped, you know, at Pesach¹⁶.

Q: That – before we get to . . .

A: I'm not there yet.

Q: Was there a period at which point you all had to go into some sort of a ghetto?

A: Not in my place. Not in my place. No, there was just curfew.

¹⁵ The interviewee is referring to Jozef Tiso, the Roman Catholic priest who headed the Slovakian government from 1939 to 1945. *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, s.v. "Tiso."

¹⁶ Passover (Hebrew)

Q: And where – were you with part of your family still, or living alone, or living with your mother?

A: I still lived in my mother's house with my mother and my rabbi brother-in-law [ed comments: rabbi and brother-in-law is the same person] and his wife. They came from – and my sister, who had a nine-years-old boy and my brother. We all still lived together. I was hiding under the porch, but they were looking, searching for me, the policemen. The Hlinková Garda came to search for me, and I heard them above my head, the steps, how they walk and three times in the row. So my brother-in-law and my mother all gathered us together and they said, "You come up from your hiding place. There is no way you can escape here if you hide. They will find you. It's three times in the row, and you cannot survive. You cannot stay here." So they all decided for me that I should go away that same night to Budapest. And my brother-in-law who was a rabbi, he put his hands on me [[the rabbi, her brother-in-law put his hands over her head to bless her]], it was in Pesach and he *benched* [Ed. Comment: *bench* – to bless (Hebrew)] me, you know, "*Malkele, du kenst alles machen.*"¹⁷ [[*'You can violate all the strict Jewish laws'* would be the interpretation here for *'Malkele, du kenst alles machen, -- Malkele, you can do everything'* - to save your life.]] For life, you can violate all the regulations, Jewish religion or no religion. So that was that night in Pesach.

Q: In 1942?

A: 1942. When I went with that boy, 13 years old, who didn't go the day before with his family, with his friends. They arranged the day before to go away with that boy who came back.

Q: I want to stop you because I want to make sure I understand. The rest of your family who was at home with you?

A: Yeah.

Q: They didn't go, but they thought you should go?

A: That's right.

Q: Why is that?

A: You know, I am puzzled now. I really am so puzzled. And he came home; they told me I should go, but nobody went. Everybody stayed. My brother stayed; my sister with the child. Nobody – I don't know. I can't explain. I'm puzzled now why they didn't do it.

Q: What did your brother tell you about the labor camp?

A: He said it was just horrible. They let them dig stones in mountains just for a reason that they should be sacrificed. They should be – they should be trouble, they should sacrifice. They should suffer. He lost [Ed comment: he lost = he lost weight] in one week something impossible. You saw him – I went – we went to some place to a vacation place to, to board – a spa. My mother had troubles with the feet. And he came to visit us in that time. He said it's just

¹⁷ "Malka, you can do anything." (Yiddish)

horrible. He had 15 people – I have a picture with him from that forced labor. He said it's impossible what they do with them, no food, they hit them if they're not, you know, in line. If they don't do their job right. And I can see him even now, how he complained. How cruel it was, he said. It's not even human what they're doing with him. With the rest, 15 boys were there. Mostly boys.

Q: So for some reason, your family decided you would leave even though they did not?

A: That's right.

Q: And did they – was there any sort of organization that helped you, or you were just going to run away?

A: There wasn't time to think. We didn't care, you had nothing to lose. Nothing to lose anymore.

Q: So you were going to leave just totally independently?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, you mentioned that you left with some boy. Who was this boy?

A: That boy, his name was Izo¹⁸ [[Izso]]. They had a big, a big, grocery wholesale place. And I used to know them because they were friends, and the day before his two sisters and a boy went with other group, 15 people. I supposed to go – I supposed to be in that group, but they left without me. I was mad and not mad because I could understand that how difficult, how dangerous it was for them to wait for me. But the next day that boy, as I said, he came with me because he came back. Little fellow, you know, 13 years old, a kid – like tiny little boy, and he was scared to go without parents. So but our parents, still decided he should go with me. So he listened and he came with me. So we crossed the borders, and . . .

Q: How did you get there?

A: Walking overnight. It was night. It was night and so much, mud in the field. And we came to a village, closest village, and the dogs start to bark. And that was give-away because in the village everybody knows each other; it seems like dogs don't bark. So we went in the – in there where the horses are – the stable. And we waited until sun came out, and we went to the woods. And from there, we went to Újhely¹⁹ to a smallest, a next smallest city. And . . .

Q: Now, this Újhely is in Hungary?

A: Yeah. I am already in Hungary. We are already in Hungary. Újhely was maybe 10,000 people. Nice Jewish community. And I needed money because Czechish money wouldn't be good. So I went to the first store I saw a Jewish name on the store title. And I went in, and so, the woman says, "Your mother is Mali Grünfeld." She recognized me. I was so amazed. She gave me money and I left. From there to Budapest, but from Újhely – Újhely. There I had an aunt, I had

¹⁸ surname.

¹⁹ Sátoraljaújhely, Hungary.

aunt and I went to visit her. I remembered her, she gave me her maid's Jewish-Hungarian [[might have been "Romanian-Jewish" and these, too, would have been papers that would have been safe to carry in Hungary]] papers. So with those papers and my cousin who was one lawyer – he didn't give me – one lawyer and the other was a factory, a big factory, what kind? Oh! - chairs and everything. He gave me money enough to go to Budapest. So we came to Budapest.

Q: Did – the boy was still with you at this time?

A: Yeah. [[Yeah. Up until this time. Then he went by himself to Budapest to meet his sisters.]]

Q: Did he have papers also?

01:30:04

A: He didn't. He didn't. He just got papers in Budapest because his two sisters were already there.

Q: I want to ask you, when you decided to make this trip out of Trebišov into Hungary, what did you take with you? What were you thinking?

A: Oh, whatever I could put on. And I had few jewelry, I put it in my skirt, sewed it together. And we went – to that woman, that woman – a policeman's sister [[in Trebišov]] supposed to guard us through the border. She took my money, she took my jewelry out of my skirt and we didn't have anything. Just what we had on us. Two suits, two dresses, and that's all. And the less we had, the easier it would be to walk in that mud.

Q: Was there any kind of underground activity in Trebišov that was helping people get to Hungary that you know about?

A: No. No. Unfortunately, no. Nobody believed that it would happen, something like that. Nobody believed because they were already organized. Jabotinsky, they had a group, and they had Mizrachi²⁰ also for Israel. [[When asked about organized activity she answers no – relating it to large groups like Jabotinsky. However there seemed to be this woman and then perhaps there were others helping the Jews leave Trebišov or Czechoslovakia.]] And nobody did anything against them. Everybody went like unbelievable. In my time, no one was there any longer. No singles, no men, no girls. It was just horrible.

Q: And your plan when you left home was to do what?

²⁰ Religious Zionist movement founded in 1902. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Mizrachi."

A: I was young. I wasn't scared of work, because I had to work all my life in childhood. My father died 13 [[when she was 13 or 14 years old]]. I went to my aunt, and I worked like a slave from 5:30 till 9:00, so I wasn't scared from work. So to me, everything was good. And with food, I was never spoiled because my mother had nothing. So I was always depending on myself. One slice of bread will be mine, but I can make it. I had a confidence. Crazy, stupid. But I can make it. I will work hard, and I was very honest. And so – I don't know. I think it was more than luck. And how I survived, I don't know.

Q: Okay, but just getting back. You had a plan that was just to go to Hungary?

A: Right. Saved my life. No other question about the trip.

Q: And someone helped you over the border.

A: Not really. No, we went alone. That little boy and me, we went alone through the border. But that woman where I had paid for them, she directed us. She told us which way to go, that's all. Once we came in that little village in Hungary, we were all by ourselves.

Q: Okay. So you left this town Újhely for Budapest?

A: Right.

Q: And how did you travel?

A: Train. Train, I remember. By train.

Q: Had you been to Budapest before?

A: Oh, no. We didn't have money to travel.

Q: So when you arrived, what was your impression?

A: My only impression was, "God, how I will make it here?" I know no one. On the street. Big city, and you – I don't know. I really cannot even tell you how is it possible to do it now that I think of it. But I was lucky that a boy I met who was my neighbor in Trebišov, and I met him in Budapest. And everybody said, "Don't talk to him. He's an informer." But to me, he gave me a place where I should stay, paid for the room. Gave me a little money, and that was it. And from there on, that Jewish organization in Budapest – I remember where it was, but I can't remember the name, what organization. They organized jobs for refugees like me in secret. So I went there, and luckily I got a job in a dress – in a men's clothing. But I needed, as I said, I needed the job, and I was lucky. I didn't have problems to get it.

Q: You said you remembered where this Jewish organization was located.

A: Gee, I remember where it was. I can't remember the name.

Q: Do you remember the street or anything?

A: I know it was kind of – Sziv utca [[Sziv Street; ``utca`` is ``Street`` in Hungarian]] or close by. Sziv utca or next to a train station – to a train. I think it's Sziv utca. It was far a little away from where I lived.

Q: And how did you come in contact with the boy you knew from Trebišov?

A: Oh, he – random. On the street. I just met him. I met everyone – I never knew – they warned me not to talk to him, and he faces me right away when I walked on the street.

Q: Who warned you not to talk to him?

A: When I was in Trebišov, they already knew he's there in Budapest, and everybody, "Keep away from him. Keep away from him." To me, it was a good luck.

Q: So if I'm to understand you, when you arrived . . .

A: No one.

Q: It was a big city, you didn't know anyone, and you ran into this boy on the street?

A: Right.

Q: And he got you settled . . .

A: Right.

Q: . . . with him? [[The boy from Trebišov helped to get her settled with a place to stay in the city. She wasn't staying with him.]]

A: Right.

Q: So you worked in this clothing store?

A: Oh, I worked a million places right away. That was a clothing store. The other was a sugar factory. The third was a maid. I had to change very often because it was dangerous. Somebody recognized me, I'm Jewish, I had to run away and leave the money. I worked there and somebody would suspect you, that was enough to leave the job for me.

01:37:08

Q: I'm a little confused because as I understand it when you first went to Budapest, you went with Jewish-Hungarian papers, yes?

A: Yeah.

Q: So it was okay to be Jewish?

A: Yeah. Hungarian.

Q: Oh, you were worried they would suspect you of being . . .

A: Czechish. [[You could be Jewish in Hungary at the time she fled there, however, you could not be a refugee. Numbers of people were fleeing into Hungary.]] So you couldn't have contact. You avoided every contact possible. You didn't know anybody. If your mother would pass by, you wouldn't say hello to her. Because you would be scared that it's a chain. I know her, whom she knows and it would be on and on. So we didn't have friends really. But one group we met in the park, they were also Czechish like I was [[they were Czechoslovakian Jews who had new Hungarian (she had Romanian) ID papers like herself]], but already Hungarian Jews. And we met occasionally, once a week or twice a week. One boy was missing. [[This is in 1944, Wily Salgo, brother of Tibor Slezak]] We were scared what happened to that boy. So the Nazis [[the Nazis had captured Wily]], his brother was with him [[his brother, Tibor, was with Wily after Wily escaped and came to Tibor]], and his brother said he – two weeks later he escaped the Nazis, but now he will need papers because he is without papers lost. Identification cards. Clear?

01:38:24

Q: Well . . .

A: You not there yet?

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay, darling. Yeah.

Q: If you want to finish this.

A: No, no. OK. Say whatever you want.

Q: Well, how did you – there were a lot of other refugees there from Czechoslovakia, other places?

A: Oh, yeah. Of course there were, yes. But you just look at them, and you run away from them. You wouldn't stop them.

Q: So how did you make contact with this group that you met in the park? How did you know each other?

A: That's a good question. You know, I was thinking about that many times, and I couldn't really – I went to a kosher restaurant, there I made my friends. I made many friends. I mean, like me, you know. But that group, I can't remember how I met them, but we kept seeing each other

almost for a year in that park. We know each other by names, but maybe we didn't even want to know there. I can't remember where we met them. In that park it was close by to me, and I went there to sit down, to escape everything. And it seems like that was the place, but I wouldn't swear on it now after so many years. Just I know we met each week or twice a week, you know, to know that they are there; they are alive. [[How they met – they may have met first in the kosher restaurants when it was safe to be Jewish, just not safe to be refugees and they found out each other's stories. Malvina had changed her name to Lea Ingel and later to Gizi Kovacs. The Slezak brothers changed their last names to Salgo.]]

Q: Did that park have a name?

A: People?

Q: Did that park have a name?

A: Yeah. I wrote it down, I forgot. I went there last two years ago, so I go to visit. Hmm, I have it written down, I forgot now.

Q: Now, before we get to the story because it's a very important story ...

A: Körúti Park²¹, Circle Park. Körúti Park, Hungarian.

Q: You were at this time living in Budapest as a Hungarian Jew? [[Right. She spoke fluent Hungarian. Lea Ingel may have been from Romania.]]

A: Right.

Q: What was life like for Hungarian Jews at this point in Budapest?

A: Well, from the beginning, you want to say, or when the Nazis came in?

Q: When you were there.

A: Well, I was there from the beginning. It was a normal life, *cheider* open and kids with *peyes*²² run everywhere and many synagogues – I used to go in the synagogues. And one day, I never forget, the Dohany Utca Synagogue [[The Dohany utca Synagogue is the famous large synagogue in Budapest with 2 large Moorish towers on top]], which is now a museum. Dr. Hevesi²³ was a lecturer. And Yom Kippur, I went there, and they asked me, they came with a ticket and they said, "Give me money." On Yom Kippur, they want a contribution. And I said, "I need money." They thought I'm joking because I had to be dressed very clean to be able to get a job. If you're dirty and your nails are dirty in Budapest, out of work. You don't have a job. So the regulations they have there, so what did I want to say? [moves her lips: I forgot.]

²¹ In a later discussion with the interviewee, she indicated that this meeting place was actually Városliget, the city park of Budapest.

²² earlocks worn by Hasidic Jews (Hebrew)

²³ Simon Hevesi (1868-1943), chief rabbi of Budapest.

01:42:02

Q: Well, I was just asking you what life was like for a Jewish person in Budapest in this time.

A: Oh, religious. People went to synagogue like here in Washington, wouldn't be any difference. There were organizations, Agudah²⁴ was very popular, and synagogues were three, four. One Rabbi Adler was there and his sister. The only person who let me in her house was that rabbi's sister who was married to a cantor, and she let – it was dangerous to let me in, and she was the only one who let me in. So they raise kids – Woman was working, to my surprise, more than in Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia, Orthodox rabbis' daughters don't work – or children. And here a woman was working and education is stressed. They know so much, even girls study more than I did, we did in Czechoslovakia. And they all worked, everybody, girls, it was a big change there. Religious kids started to work and have professions. Before they didn't have that. And life went on; There were everywhere there were kosher restaurants, and I used to be in kosher restaurants. I was kosher in that time. It was no different than here, a normal life.

Q: No restrictions on Jews?

A: From the beginning when I was there? No, but automatically the same law started like in Czechoslovakia. Exactly the same, they copied. Because the Nyilas²⁵ they were the Nazis, the Nazis, did the same thing that the Hlinková Garda did in Slovakia. Labor camps – forced labor and then took them away one by one.

Q: Are you talking about after the occupation or before the German occupation?

A: Before, before. Before, everything before. [[Everything was OK before (well, not OK...) She is speaking about April 1942 when she arrived until March 1944 when the German Nazis arrived and Nyilas, Hungarian Nazis took over the government.]]

Q: Well, when you first arrived in Budapest in 1942, everything seemed to be okay for the Jewish people there? You said everything was sort of normal.

A: Yeah.

Q: At what point did that start changing in Budapest?

A: It changed because after a while they had the same stars to put on – yellow stars. Then they had the same taking away the boys to labor camp. There was a Dohany utca, Dohany where they

²⁴ Political and social movement popular among Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Agudat Israel."

²⁵ Nyilaskeresztes Párt Hungarista Mozgalom (also referred to as "Arrow Cross" or "Greenshirts"), Hungarian fascist party lead by Ferenc Szálasi. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Arrow Cross Party."

used to – and they organized ghettos.

Q: When was this? I'm just trying to understand how fast this happened.

A: Oh, oh, oh. Well, in 1942 was great, till 1943 – end of 1943 – it started really serious business with taking them away and put stars, losing jobs, closing the stores, curfew on the streets. You couldn't be on the street. And almost paralyzed Jewish life. No Jewish life left over. Little by little, they took the men away just as much as the – in Czechoslovakia – they took the boys away so you didn't have Then they took the girls away. So Budapest was practically without Jews. All the stores closed, to the end. And from beginning, it was automatically it was like step by step the same design followed the Nazis' order. [[the changes happened in March 1944]]

Q: So until things got bad, you were working from place to place and living somewhat of a normal life?

01:46:19

A: Oh, I couldn't say that's normal. You didn't know what you eating. I don't know where you sleeping. You don't know where you working. I don't know if that's normal. If I think of it now, I can't believe it how I could survive. I wouldn't call it normal by any means. Relatively, oh, yes. If I was thinking how those people in the concentration camp, I thought I'm – I saw people on the street hitting them. Policemen hit the old people walking, they couldn't walk – hit them. So I would think, "oh, gosh, I am vacationing, if I see this." And ghetto – I pass by a ghetto I had one loaf of bread. I was saving it for the whole week. There's a woman in the entrance. I said, "Take that bread." I will never forget her face was yellow-green, and she was crying. She said, "I cannot take that bread away from you." I said, "Just take and run because I will be caught, and nobody will be happy." So it was such a impossible, but why that woman didn't run away, I don't know. The door was open. The ghetto door was open. People didn't believe it, couldn't believe it, that it could happen. Even they were in ghetto, they still couldn't believe it, that tragedy what waits for them – it's unbelievable. Gosh, bombs – day by day, I saw mountains of people like potatoes, like potatoes. One hit my house, where I was with a Christian family already, since I'm Christian [[carried Christian ID papers]]. And they had a little soup, a bowl of soup. They gave me one spoon, and six other people ate the same – from the same plate. One spoon [[spoonful]] of water, but that was all – we couldn't have. We couldn't go out on the – one woman, we were in bunker for three months in sand, sleeping. You couldn't go out, it was bombing constantly. Budapest was burning day and night. I was happy about when it was burning, to be honest. If I die, Samson.

Q: When was this? At what period of time?

A: That was already in 1944. The most critical time, and no one could be Jewish any longer. There were no Jews.

Q: Now, you mentioned just now something about becoming Christian. [[She had acquired non-Jewish, Christian-Hungarian ID papers, a new name, Gizi Kovacs.

She never became a Christian.]]

A: Yeah.

Q: But you didn't tell me how all of that happened. Maybe you can . . .

A: Oh, how I became Christian? Well, there was no more – my identification Jewish-Hungarian wasn't good anymore because there were no more Jews. So I had to change my name for Christian Jew, Hungarian Jew. [[Hungarian Christian]]

Q: When – how long did you live as a Hungarian Jew? I didn't – I just want to get an idea of —

A: Hungarian Jew? Till 1943, middle 1943.

Q: And at the point where you were a Hungarian Jew, you felt always at risk?

A: Of course. Oh, many times they brought on me the policeman one day in the restaurant, “Where do I get the ration papers?” -- it was illegal. And then one day, I go in the park because they said *razzia*, it will be in that street. I should go in the park, there will be safe. So I went to the park. And one man, a Nazi newspaperman, was in charge of the building where I stayed and he is there in the park and he stops me. And we talked together, and then he says where I am from. And I said I didn't even know because my Hungarian name, I still had Hungarian name, Jewish name. And he said he's going to my city. I said my mother was yesterday here and he wanted to say something to him, that he should go to visit my mother because he knew the city. I said don't go because my mother was yesterday here. Then he takes my pocketbook away with force. In that pocketbook was my life. If you don't have any papers with you, you're dead. And I knew he's a Nazi newspaperman. I knew he's in charge of that building, and I run after him. I said, He said, “Why are you so nervous?” he's asking me. I remember like now. And I said, “I am insulted that you took with force my papers. You didn't ask for them.” He tells me, “I thought you are a very naive girl. Now, I know that you are *raffiniert*²⁶...” Like shrewd, *raffiniert*. It's a *Raffiniert* is like a shrewd “girl, a Hebrew girl. Just tell me when you came from Czechoslovakia to this country.” He didn't report me. I left. Two weeks later somebody went there Well such magic things, such a un Then I am walking on the street and a policeman is coming. And a man behind me came over, and he said I – he knows me. I never saw him before, I didn't even know he exist there. You know such coincidence. And in the restaurant, policeman was – he cut shut the store door and he brought the Nyilas, the Nazi ? on me, the Nyilas? And he said I should identify myself. You know identification cards. I said, “I left them home.” You know, just to let – well, anyway so such episodes which . Many, many, many more. At night I was waken up in midnight. I should show them the papers, and that cantor's wife's sister was with me. Said, “Don't be next time without paper identification,” he left me there. Now you know, these stories, it's um... they locked me in the restaurant and my – a kosher restaurant in Dob utca nine [9 Dob Street], and he said, “A Nazi's coming in to check everybody. You run.” I left everything, run on the street in day time. It was – you didn't know what you're doing from minute to minute. I was a maid because I didn't want to eat. Going to eat places. [[she was a live-in maid so that she would not have to eat in public and take chances]] Then I was washing the dishes in the restaurants,

²⁶ cunning, crafty (German)

so I should have food, I shouldn't be hungry. Washing dishes in a restaurant by myself, unbelievable.

Q: How did you know who to trust?

A: Didn't trust anyone. You just didn't trust anybody because Jewish people you couldn't. You were scared of them and yourself, and Christians, you couldn't. And the end – well, I – the end, to the end where only Christians could be like, how I got the Christian papers. So, my brother-in-law was a cantor [[Béla Weinstein, in Galanta]], and his congregant was one of the woman who had [[the woman was a cousin to Jozef Adler and she had said to Malvina on past visits to Galanta that if she, Malvina, were in Budapest, she should look up her cousin. Josef Adler is the person who gave her the Christian papers.]] – that Adler who gave in Budapest – who gave me the Christian papers. Kovacs Gizi is my name now. He had always contact and money. He was Jewish, but he had such wonderful job as a Christian. He didn't look like Jewish. So he gave me the papers, Christian papers. Follow?

Q: Well, I want you to explain this a little bit more how you were able to get Christian papers.

A: All right.

Q: And about when this was. I think you said this was middle 1943?

A: Yeah. Middle 1943. Well, you could have the whole house full of diamonds. If you wouldn't have the identification papers, your life was not worth it a penny. So there is my friend, Joseph Adler, and he was – he had a aunt [[and cousin]] in that place where my brother-in-law was a cantor, so he helped me. And until today, we are friends, and I went to his grandchild's wedding two months ago, 800 people. It was fantastic. [3 children married]. So he gave me the Christian papers, Christian Hungarian papers. And he gave me money, and he helped also other, a rabbi was next in that same floor. Without any question, he went in which was dangerous and gave him money and the identification papers.

Q: How did he get these papers?

A: He had a contact with the, with one Christian man, and that Christian man was somebody very important. And he gave him all the identifications what he needed, and so he helped many out, with money, because he always had money, and he helped me out with the papers.

Q: I'm going to stop right here because they need to change the videotape.

A: Oh, all right.

Q: And we'll take a little pause. How are you doing?

A: I don't know—

End of Tape 1.

Tape 2

02:01:00

A: And you want to know I came from the Golem family, who made the Golem, the Rabbi Loew, from Prague? I came from that family. My mother always said, "Don't forget your name."

Q: You said . . .

A: Okay, if you want it. If you don't, . . .

Q: Oh, no.

A: It's up to you.

Q: It's good information, but it doesn't fit right here.

A: No, I just, I just – if you wanted it. That's the reason I said. . .

Q: When we finished up before, you were talking about getting these Christian papers. Were you able to help anyone else get Christian papers?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: How did you do that?

A: Oh, yes. Well, it was like . . . one boy I used to meet at the kosher – Dob utca Nine was a kosher restaurant in Budapest, okay? And I was kosher and I went every day, and there was a boy and I met him there. And he said he is having – he has identification papers if somebody wants it, but for money. I had no money. I was lucky I have from day to day – if you worked a week, you could buy yourself on black market one slice – one loaf of bread. But normally, you had to work for a week. Well I said to that boy, "I have one ring." I had a ring from home, from my hometown, a small ring. "I give you that ring in deposit. The woman cannot come today over to bring me money, but she has to get the papers today because tomorrow, you never know what happens to her. So leave me the papers. You come tomorrow if you want to, to my place, and I give you cash. I see her tonight. I promised her to bring her the papers." He said, "I cannot give you. I need the money." I said, "I cannot – you cannot," – he was in my room. I said, "You cannot go away with that paper now. You have to give me that paper." "I can't." I said, "I don't care. Here is my ring. Take my ring." So he listened. He was good, and I went to give that paper to her. And then she gave me her bracelet, which I carried, I thought if she will come back, I won't (need it) – I don't need it, I will have everything after the war. Give her back. So she gave me her ring and her bracelet and, of course, she didn't come back. And one woman the same way, I give her the papers, that boy left the papers without money. Give her another ring. The same ring I gave for two people, I took back that ring. And she came back, but she couldn't survive; her body didn't work. You know, they didn't eat and they ate and then they got sick, and it was so she didn't. But those two people – those two people I remember

exactly how it was.

Q: And you were able to get these through this Mr. Adler?

A: Oh, Mr. Adler [[you couldn't be Jewish she obtained papers from Jozef Adler in Budapest.]]. Mr. Adler – nobody was Jewish anymore, okay? 194– end of 1943 and '44 beginning, no Jews.²⁷ And so Adler, we met in the restaurant occasionally, and he said, "Here are your papers, and here is your money. And I have a place where I live, you can come to live there." [[he must have known a woman in his apartment building who could take her in (see next story) – not with him in his place. She must have stayed there a short while.]] But we didn't know each other. You know, we did not suppose to talk to each other, we didn't know each other, that they shouldn't suspect us. And so then I was lucky, he occasionally gave me money. And then to the end it wasn't good anymore either. So he left his – I didn't live there anymore. I had to find a new place.

02:05:02

How did I find a new place? I was working in Rothschilds [[a Rothschild woman of the Rothschild family was a customer in this store]] – in that elite salon, aristocrats. And I am going home, and my colleague, my girl, who was working with me dresses, I said to her, "You know my housewife" – how she said? "My landlady – landlord has a guest. Her sister came from someplace, and I cannot stay there tonight. If you could take me, I will sleep on the floor. Anyplace you want just to have – 5 o'clock is curfew. You cannot be on the street." So she let me, and that was my good luck and I stayed with her. But it was already bombing, constantly bombing it was on and on and on. I don't know if you want that part now. And I stayed – three Jewish – her brother-in-law and her two sisters, we were in the same building together. [[I think it was the last place there in Budapest. However those people were not Jewish. Later in this Transcript, she says, "I stayed with that Christian family. Two sisters, one brother and one sweetheart for one of the sisters. "]] There was unselfishness, I would never believe it. She's asking me, "Malvina, Gizi, when is Yom Kippur?" She knew I am Jewish – didn't report me, and she – unbelievable how unselfish those people were while I was with them. You know, slice of bread or water, it was like life saver, and they didn't care. They gave me just as much as they had. We should come to the bunker how everybody had to be curfew and bombs were hitting the city constantly. And in a certain hour or a certain time, they were announcing each day, when we have to go in the bunker. Bunker, you know what is a bunker? So we went in the bunker one time in the length of three months. Didn't go out, didn't go in. And one girl says, "I can't stand it," a young woman. I just see her in front of my mind. "I have to get water." "Don't go, don't go, sweetheart." Bombs hit her and she

²⁷ The conditions for Jews in Budapest quickly deteriorated after the German take over of the city on March 19, 1944. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Budapest."

never came back. Just for water, but she wanted to go there. But it was just such a critical time, people are – and that bunker life three months, unbelievable. Three months in one place, one seven-story building. And one day I am standing in front of the building – occasionally, I – she lived, we lived on the first floor – occasionally, we went up to the first floor. Not permitted, everybody had to be downstairs, but since it was first floor, so we went up. And I am standing in front of the window, and the bomb hit the whole building and that little window with my friend. Scattered bombs, you know? and all windows are broken. And we are here like a miracle. Nothing happened to both of us. And we couldn't eat; we had no place to go. The stores were closed and bombed out. You could steal – they didn't call it stealing. We had a word for it. Confiscating or something. Confiscating, but not stealing. And they had ice cream cones, so I took ice cream cones and put water in it. So it was lucky, and my friend's uncle came. He was, he couldn't talk. He cried. He cried with tears. He's "starving." A big, husky man is crying. So I gave him as much I could, and one day I went for a bread. They said that place will have bread, and I met a friend who pretended he's blind. He said, "What the heck you doing on the street? It's curfew." No one was on the street. I was the only one. "You cannot do it. I give you money, if you need money. You don't go out on the street any longer." And that kind of – on the street, you couldn't see anyone. As I said, except the mountains dead people scattered in one section. And one restaurant was open one hour a day, and there were many dead people around you and you didn't mind. You just went through and went in and ate if you got a cup of soup, and went back again. Impossible, impossible conditions. Hygiene – there was none. Couldn't drink water, so how could you wash yourself with water?

Q: Did you think you'd get through all of that?

02-10:23

A: Beg you pardon?

Q: At the time, do you remember what you were thinking? Did you think that you'd get through all of this?

A: I always have a kind of stupid hope. I didn't believe it it's possible to do it, but I always said to that landlady, "You will see, we will have to – we have to live through that war, and I will tell you, you have to live. And we have to live through that war." But that was so silly. That was very silly to hope.

Q: After you were living with the Christian papers, did you have to do anything differently? Did you have to pretend you were Christian? Did you have to change your lifestyle at all?

A: Well, I didn't have to change too much because I didn't have any lifestyle. Makes simple as that. I had no lifestyle. From minute to minute, I don't know where I am. I'm working today, somebody suspects you, I run away. No money, no job. Today I'm sleeping here. I don't know where I am tomorrow. I don't even know where I am tonight. No plans, no arrangements. Once I had a rental room, that's true, with two old ladies. They knew that I'm Jewish, and the manager

of that building knew I am Jewish. I had to leave. And in that same building was that newspaperman.

Q: But you didn't have to go to church or—

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: Now, you came from a very religious home.

A: Yeah.

Q: So during all this period, were you able to in any way continue your religious observances or practices?

A: Well, the kosher restaurants were still open until it was open, but then it was closed. So then I ate anything I could. But while I was a maid in that same period of time, I didn't eat, but they ate pork and stuff like that. I just picked bread and stuff which is kosher for me, but it wasn't kosher.

Q: So even with all of these hardships, you tried to respect your tradition . . .

A: Yeah. I wouldn't do it anymore. If I think of it now, it was so silly. And, you know, that nicest part was in it, I didn't have to do it. I didn't have to observe according to the rabbis. I could do anything I wanted to. It's a style, or, I don't know, way of life, I guess.

Q: What about holidays?

A: I went to synagogue one day, and in that same time a friend where I was working, she had a big cross all the time. And one day I came to her – nobody was around us – I said, "Are you Jewish?" And she says, "No, I am not Jewish." And here I went to synagogue, and she is there. So in synagogue, I used to go in also in that Dohany Utca, in what is now a museum [[The Dohany utca Synagogue is open and a museum is next to it]]. I used to hear wonderful lectures that Dr. Hevesi. He was a wonderful lecturer. It was so quiet when he was talking, and I was so impressed with him. And that was like a hiding place, no place to go. It wasn't safe either. It was public, it was – never, public places, they didn't advise us to be. We supposed to be hiding all the time someplace where nobody would see us. So I went to the synagogue and to the shows, to the theaters I used to love to go. I thought I'm safe inside. I don't have to face too much public outside.

Q: This was all while you were still a Hungarian Jew, or this was after you got your Christian papers?

A: It was continue, but you see the synagogue wasn't anymore on. So it was a ghetto, and that's the end to the synagogue.

Q: Did you ever go into the ghetto?

A: To the end when I gave that woman that slice of bread. No, I didn't want to go in. It was too

risky. Even that little bit what I went in with the gates, open gates, it was not advisable. I couldn't help them.

Q: But you knew what was happening inside?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, oh, we knew. We knew, yes. That's it's ghetto, everybody knew that that's a ghetto; and it's no picnic.

Q: Did you feel at all conflicted about that? That you were running around as a Catholic and yet your people were in this horrible condition?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did that feel like?

A: It was like a stone. You can't think. You feel like a statue, that it's not you. How can you survive and watching them? And you can't do anything about it. Where can you turn? The whole world is quiet. Nobody cares, and we were angry. We were very much angry, not only on the whole world, that they let something like that happen. But we were also angry, if I may say, in that time when Jewish people were still all right that they were so indifferent. They were so indifferent. They didn't raise, we didn't hear any screaming, we didn't have any help from anyplace, and we felt very, very bad about it, angry. We were angry. Simply very, very angry that you can sit in nice warm place, and I'm starving and freezing to death, and no shoes. One hole was snow and the other one went out the snow. So it was anger and such hopelessness. Can't do anything for them. And when I saw those people, I said, "Thank God. What do I have to complain? I'm vacationing." That's the way I felt. I'm on vacation. With all the troubles compared to them, unbelievable.

Q: At this point did you have any more contact with your family?

A: Oh, right away, no. I wrote right away when I came in April. The 22nd [[22 April - Pesach]] when I left Pesach my home. And I wrote right away home that I'm all right and I would like to hear from you. You know, just a card, and I give my address to that cantor's wife, Frankel, Lillian Frankel. She was the only one who let me in her house. Only one woman, no one let me in. And the card came back very shortly, didn't take too long. That, The 5th of May the card came back. Card came back the 5th of May [[stamped ``May 5'' - not received]], I remember like now. "Unknown," "Address Unknown" [ed comments: the card said "address unknown"] They moved, but the address is unknown. And that was the time when they took them to concentration camps. You know, I didn't want to find out where they were. Until today, I can't think – I couldn't put myself together to find out. I don't know if you can understand me. I couldn't put myself together. I didn't want to know where they are. From Dachau, I was 30 miles [[after the war she was living in Munich, ``30 miles'' from Dachau]]. I didn't want to go in. I didn't even ask where they are. Can you believe it? So unbelievable. Mother 62 years old only, and I was the youngest.

Q: Okay. I want to get back to that. But maybe you can tell me now about how you got involved with this group that was acquiring ID cards or work permits. You said earlier that there was a park . . .

A: Yeah. Körúti, Körúti²⁸ Park. Was Circle Park.

Q: And about when was this? I forget.

A: Beg you pardon?

Q: About when was this time-wise?

A: Well, it must have been end of '43.²⁹ End of '43 because that was when it when it was most critical. Most critical time. There were no Jews. Boys are out in concentration camps. Men are in concentration camps. Women are all away or in concentration camps. Ghettos are liquidated. There are no more ghettos, no more labor forced, no more don't see Jew. Budapest without the Jew. So I went to that Körúti Park³⁰. I lived in that – close by, Negyed Utca³¹ in the train station – close to the train station. And one boy – so we met then there maybe Ďuri [[Ďuri or Gyuri Perl and Jan Perl were brothers in the group.]], and then his wife and one other was a lawyer and his wife. And then my two friends [[brothers, Tibor and Willy]] and one other boy was there, so two women.

Q: Was this sort of a spontaneous meeting?

A: Yeah. It was like we meet here and happily we acknowledge each other. That was the message. But don't talk to each other unless you have to, and don't sit in one section. You know, scattered all over. We don't know each other.

Q: Were you all from Czechoslovakia?

A: Yeah. They had the same papers already [[First, they also had new names, Hungarian Jewish (not Slezak, their given names), and then Hungarian Christian names]], Christian-Jewish – Christian-Hungarian papers like me. They couldn't be otherwise there.

Q: So tell me the story of how you got involved with this plan.

A: Oh, well—

Q: And if you remember the names of these people that would be helpful.

A: Well, Perl [[Perl - last name]] Ďuri. Perl, P-e-r-l, Ďuri D-u-r-i. And “D” on the top is like “U” Hungarian. And then the other was his brother, Jan, with his girlfriend. I can't remember. And the other was – I can't remember. I just remember Perl Duri, with his friend [[girlfriend]]—because I went to visit him after the war – with his mother survived. In Trencianski-Martin³².

²⁸ Városliget

²⁹ Conditions for the Jewish population of Budapest quickly deteriorate when the Nazi-backed Arrow Cross party seized power on October 15, 1944. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Budapest.”

³⁰ Városliget

³¹ Street name unverifiable.

³² Turčiansky Svätý Martin, CZ

Trencianski-Martin, in Slovak in Tatry, he lived. I remember exactly. And then Salgo Tibor and Salgo [[pronounced ``Shalgo'' - In Hungarian language, ``s'' is pronounced ``sh'']] Wily, those were two brothers. And then the other married couple, one more was missing, was there. [[maybe she knew Marika Vas (by her fake name during the war), wife of Zoltan Vas]] I can't remember the names, but I have four names [[those listed above]]. And one - one day one of the brothers were missing, the Salgo, not married [Wily] -- The other [Tibor] was also single, -- Wily, and he is not in [[the park]].

02:22:25

So we worried, since one is missing so that's a bad news for everyone. So [Tibor] his brother worried, and he said after two weeks that he find his brother. He came out, he was captured by the Nazis, hanged 10 days on the ceiling with hands up in the back tied together. Cigarettes in the back testing how much he can take, and electrical wires in his mouth and, of course, tortured him as much they could. So, luckily, the bomb hit the building after 10 days to be tortured and hanging on the ceiling. He escaped, but he was blue, green and yellow, you know, from all this torture. He had to hide in the bunker, and when he came out, so he needed papers. With[out] the papers he is lost. So, after he looked a little better, his brother decided that he will ask his General friend - Christian. He [Tibor] was working in the pharmacy, and then he met that General, Hungarian-Christian. And he gave him a paper that he requests from the National Printing Office, identification cards for laborers to work in a factory - in a munition factory. And I will be there, they shouldn't give anybody the papers, just for me. And he's sending me, assistant, to the National Printing Office which was located - I see it now, like a - Váci Utca, like in a Fifth Avenue. And his brother {Wily} - I didn't know where that place is - took me. Three blocks away he was waiting, if I come out alive. So I went in, in that National Printing Office and there was a young man - luckily, I got them 500 identification cards. I didn't look at them. I just grab them. I don't know; I went out. I didn't breathe, I guess. Very - and then that boy was waiting for me who was hanged, you know. So I gave him the papers and he run away, and he gave it to others they had contact. What kind contact? That brother who was working in the pharmacy they made the arrangements to meet all the men there, and he will give them from the pharmacy - because it's open to the public, it's a safe place - and he said so many and so many people only, so many, so many hours. Divided the time they shouldn't be all at one time there. He said he saw everybody [[Wily was watching who was coming in and out of the pharmacy - maybe to let people know when it was safe to come in to get these papers]], he told me that he saw everybody who's coming in. But he was there incognito, they shouldn't see him; he was hiding behind in the back somehow. And I went there three times [[to the Printing Office]]. I don't want to tell you how scared it was each time to go in. And the fourth time - I got three times, okay, 500 and 500 - and the fourth time, they wouldn't give me. But I noticed that they want to call the policeman on me, the Nazis, so I run out. How I did it, I don't know. So that was my lucky star in that time that I could make it. And they are, I met them [Tibor Slezak and Wily Salgo] in 1981 [[International Holocaust Survivors Convention in Israel]] - '81 when it was the international convention in Israel. My husband and Miriam was with me.

Q: Miriam your daughter?

A: My daughter. And those two men came, I saved their lives. You know, Wily, those two brothers only. They came in and Wily, the younger one who was hanged, said, "I thought that I would never have children," because they tortured him so much everywhere. And now he has a family and grandchildren, he's happy and he was a pioneer. From the 400 people on the boat, the first to go to Israel. And they were seven survived, and he was the one among the seven who survived. And his brother is a doctor now, he's retired. And he [Wily] has a family, beautiful children, and they came to visit me also to Washington to Silver Spring. But when I met him I lost the convention. I thought "I am dreaming" and he didn't stop repeating, "Malvinka, Malvinka," talking Hungarian because I speak and he speaks Hungarian, "You are my heroine, you saved my life. You saved my life. You are a hero, you were great." You know, that kind of thing. I thought "I am dreaming," it was great. And his brother also came.

Q: Let me ask you a few questions about these papers that you went to get. What were these papers? They were work permits?

A: Yeah. Work permits.

Q: Did they have names on them?

A: No, no, no. They didn't have names, they was printed. Printed with that General's paper, print of a General's paper, and on that paper was required that I should bring, I should bring the – from the National Printing office the papers for free. National Printing Office gave me papers, just blank names. But it was the National Printing Office seal, Hungarian National Print... And that was Nazis everything went through that printing office. They had a seal from the printing office, but blank. Everybody could fill out you are a tailor, 13 years old boy or 15 – the way you wanted. [[Wily told her in a phone conversation from Israel in 1989 that people brought in photos and they (in the pharmacy) put names and the papers together]]

Q: So your friends filled out the name cards?

A: Beg you pardon?

Q: Your friend, the people you were working with, after they got these blank work permits, then they would put in names, or false names or whatever?

A: Yeah. They gave them in that pharmacy when they came in, everybody got that paper. And they filled it out according to their age or profession, whatever they choose to be.

02:29:13

Q: Did you actually see the papers?

A: I was lucky to get rid of them because I didn't need them. I was already Christian and if I keep one and somebody – a police or something, I'm dead. Where did you got it? He was caught – he was caught? when he gave the papers, that Willie. He had a handful of papers in the hands and policeman put him in jail because they find the papers in his hands. He escaped again, but it was very, very life threatening. Not only dangerous, but it was a bullet right away.

Q: Who is the man you got the papers from in the printing office?

A: God, I can't remember. A young man and I didn't even ask, I didn't care [[she knew the papers had gone out to 1500 people]], and I, I was just so happy to get out with the papers. Didn't know, was a young man in 30s, very businesslike dressed.

Q: And then each time you did this, you gave them to Wily or the brother as soon as possible?

A: The younger brother. The other had troubles to walk. Then after that after the war, he got sick.

Q: So you gave it to the one who had been tortured?

A: Yeah.

Q: He would wait for you at some appointed place?

A: Three blocks, yeah. Because any time I went in, all the time it was life.

Q: Do you think that anybody got paid for these papers?

A: Oh, yes. Now, that was a good story. You know, I'm glad you asked me because I didn't know it until maybe a month or two months ago. I called my friend up [Wily], and I said, "You know, I want to recheck that how it happened." I wasn't interested before. I didn't care, I gave it to the – and you do what – you know. He said that he gave it to his sister-in-law [[it was a cousin's wife]]. She made money on it, and she didn't give a penny to that boy. That boy gave her the paper – that boy who was tortured, I gave him the papers, all right? And then the boy gave the sister-in-law the papers, and she made money on it. And she didn't give him anything, and she didn't give me anything. So they became enemies.

Q: The sister-in-law was the wife of the guy in the pharmacy?

A: No, no. The other – their sister-in-law. They had another sister-in-law. Not a sister-in-law – how you said it? Like a nephew –? Like a sister child, a nie..., a nephew, a niece.

Q: Niece?

A: Yeah. No. A brother-in-law's wife.

Q: A brother-in-law's sister?

A: Yeah. A brother-in-law's wife.

Q: Your brother-in-law's – is a sister.

A: But, Not, Not. . .

Q: These got distributed through the pharmacy . . .

A: Yeah.

Q: . . . and the other brother? And who made money?

A: The sister-in-law from another brother . . .

Q: Another brother?

A: From another – had nothing to do with those people, with the two sister-in-laws.

Q: But she was . . .

A: Cousin! Excuse me. Now, I got it. I know I confused you. Cousin's wife. His cousin's wife got the papers, and his cousin's wife didn't give anything for the Wily, that man who gave her the papers, and she made money on it.

Q: But these papers got distributed through the pharmacy, correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: And so this cousin's wife was involved in this . . .

A: Must have been. Must have been.

Q: I see. Well, did you – at this time – you have a regular, sort of a normal job also?

A: It's nothing normal.

Q: Okay, but, you know, were you working somewhere?

A: Yeah. I worked. I was luckily always working someplace, yeah. I worked all the time all my time what I was there. Million jobs, but I always – I was always lucky to get some work. But you had to work a week to get one loaf of bread.

Q: The last time you went in n [[they had been talking about her other jobs, and the interviewer wants to go back to the Printing Office (''last time you...'') and the answer relates to being ''suspicious of you'' to the time they closed the door on her in the restaurant and brought in the Nazi police.]] when you thought that they were suspicious of you and they were going to call the police or the Nazis, how did you get away?

A: Miracle. I said I had my identification, I left them at home. If they would let me out. So, "I let you go now, but next time don't go without identification papers." Such, such, such unbelievable

thing.

Q: So after this episode and you kind of went back to just wherever you could find to work or a place to live?

A: Yeah. They usually in Budapest have a sign, "A bed to rent." "To sleep overnight, One bed to rent." [[maybe Hungarian "a" and "one" are the same also. She would have been looking for "a bed" or "one bed" signs. That meant many beds.]] Mostly, I went there. It was light overnight men and women together, families together. It was no problem I was so used to it.

Q: At this point in time, were you aware of any of the aid organizations, the Jewish rescue organizations or underground organizations in Budapest?

A: It's no help, no help anymore. It stopped, all of them. There was nothing there in my time what I would remember. There was no contact. We didn't go anyplace to listen to anything. We were scared of the light, so I didn't know anything. In that time and Bricha³³ [[in Hebrew means to flee or escape - it was a secret Jewish organization to help Jews immigrate in that time to Palestine]] was before, you didn't hear anything after. After the Jewish life stopped, we had no knowledge of anything.

Q: Do you think that the people you were working with to get all of these work permits, do you think they were operating independently or that they had had some help and instruction from another organization?

A: I think they must have had some other organization. [[Perhaps she meant other "contacts."]] Wily must have had something. [[Wily must have known other people. She was not aware of or had contacts with all the people he may have known at the time, through Jewish circles, through work.]] Wily must have had because he was very broad minded, he was very active before and he did - but, I wouldn't know it.

Q: So you don't know who that would have been?

A: I wouldn't know, no. I couldn't tell you. I could only find out if I call him again - 'cause he's alive, he could tell me - in Israel.

Q: Well, it might be good information to just put in your file if you ever find out, if you know. So the Nazis came into Budapest?

A: Yeah.

Q: And things changed? They just got worse? Things . . .

A: It's not worse; it's the horror. The most horrible, horrible, horrible time. There's no Jew, not a single Jew is there. Can you imagine such a lively organization, such a lively Jewish

³³ escape efforts (Hebrew) Bricha - an organization

community? Synagogues are empty. Stores are closed. You don't see any single person, and curfew was on till the end of the war. You couldn't go out, it's just you couldn't meet – breathe outside. You had to be in bunker, prepare to be in day and night. And at night it was a must if you are over 5 o'clock. One time I couldn't make it, so a house was bombed out. So I went under the house all by myself. There was a man shaking, he has sickness. I said, "how come you are here all by myself [[she meant "yourself"]]. They put him there, sister-in-laws put him there so that he shouldn't be – so he should save – they should save him. The whole building was empty, so I stayed with him the whole night. The sick man shook all night through. Also fear and everything. I will never forget that night. Curfew, if you not home in time, you lost. [[Curfew, if you're not home in time, you're lost]]

Q: So toward the end you weren't even working anymore?

A: No. I didn't work to the end, no. I stayed with that Christian family. Two sisters, one brother and one sweetheart for one of the sisters. She was a ... They were nice to me.

Q: They thought you were Christian?

A: No. They said, "When is Yom Kippur? Tell me, Gizi, When in Yom Kippur?" Gizi's my name now, okay? Hungarian. Hungarian-Christian. "Gizi, tell me when is Yom Kippur." I said, "I don't know. No." "I don't know when is ..." So they knew I am Jewish, but they didn't report me.

Q: And you stayed with them until the end of the war?

A: Till the end and bombs were constant on.

Q: Well, how did all of this come to an end?

A: What happened to the end? Germany lost, but Germany still was killing in the last minute. In December everybody announced Germany *kapituliert*³⁴, finished. Germany won't win – lost the war, and they still went at night and killed and killed and killed. The bombs and the grenades, I heard every time at midnight. And one [[group of]] seven people, my friends, men, they took them to the Donau³⁵, to the river, faced the Donau – faced the river, shot them.³⁶ Seven people. And one pretended he's alive [[He was alive, he survived the shooting, and he pretended he was dead.]], so he told me my friend was killed there. He was from my neighborhood – seven and one survived because he pretended he is dead. It was impossible. The killing was unexcusable, and the government did support, gave permission to kill – didn't stop. The government, Hungarian government – Horthy, Horthy. He said, he didn't interfere. He gave the orders to kill more. A madness, unbelievable.

³⁴ surrendered (in German)

³⁵ Danube river (in German)

³⁶ During December 1944 and January 1945, between 10,000 and 20,000 Jews were shot by members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross, and their bodies were dumped into the river Danube. Israel Gutman, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1990), s.v. "Budapest."

02:39:55

Q: Do you remember the liberation?

A: Oh, my . . .

Q: And when was it?

A: Ah, it was in May. According to me it was in May. They say in January, in December. December was over, but in May that was the end of the war. Legal.

Q: Right, but in Budapest it was earlier, wasn't it, in Budapest?

A: In December.

Q: Or January maybe?

A: January, yeah. December – end of December³⁷.

Q: What happened then at that time when the . . .

A: Well, everybody plundered.

Q: Well, how did you – where were you? What was happening when the Soviets came in? Tell me about that.

A: I was in that room with my friends, and suddenly five soldiers come over. And they want to attack the woman, the single woman there. She was very beautiful, and she screams after me, "Gizi, Gizi, I didn't report you. Help me, help me. Help me, help me." Five soldiers.

Q: Soviets? Soviets?

A: Soviet, they liberated – Soviet Russian liberated Budapest. So they all wanted to attack her, so she screamed after me and I came over. And I said, "Hey, you my brothers. How can you do it? What would you do if somebody – something like that happens to your wife or your sister and mother?" So they let her go. [[Hey, you're my brothers. - she spoke to them in Slovak, a Slavic language so then the Russians would know what she is saying to them right away.]] She said, "You owe me that because I didn't report you, and I knew you are, Nazi – you know, you are Jewish." And life, you couldn't have food. You didn't have anything. Even after the war, the stores plundered– everybody steal whatever they could. There was no established law. After maybe four or five months later, they said, "Hey, you cannot do it any longer." From December to summer, I think. You know, you could take and nobody would bother you. But after a while, the law came in that you cannot steal or take anything

³⁷ The Soviet Army liberated the Pest portion of the city in January of 1945, and went on to liberate the Buda portion the following month. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, s.v. "Budapest."

anymore, so what we did – there was no food, no stores, no place to go shopping, after the war. The only great thing was you had freedom. You could breathe, and I thought that's best in the world what you can get after – that we are alive. So I went to see that man [Tibor] who was that friend who was alive. My Christian lady [landlady] took me to him, and I was happy that he's still alive. We didn't know anything. And he took over a office, a doctor's office because he had two years of medicine already. And he said it's horrible, no drugs, and he had to take the bombs – the shrapnels out of people. Cold, freezing hospitals. No heat and no drugs. He said it's a horrible, horrible condition. So while he was going to hospital, curing the people, and if he saw somebody's very sick even before, he took his identifications away and gave it to somebody else. And I was waiting for food. Kitchens on the streets for everyone. From in the morning til night you can wait for a cup of soup. I waited, and I got him soup and luckily and he could be in the hospital. But after a while, we decided we are going to Szeged, plenty food, another city – a doctors' university. So he went to enroll to the doctor, finish, and I was there staying till I wouldn't be hungry anymore. Once they got me, the policeman, I had wanted to sell. But they didn't put me in jail. You know, they just took away my blackmail? – or black market. There it was already food plenty. Plenty food in Szeged. Then I wanted to see who's at home in Trebišov. I knew it's a magic, if somebody will come back.

02:44:27

I didn't want to dream. I still – I took a train overnight, three weeks on the top of the train and I traveled. And Red Cross occasionally stopped the train and gave us soup or something, so in three weeks I came home traveling on the top of the roof. Soldiers went home. The soldiers didn't want to go back to Russia. They got an order if you're not coming three times. If you not coming on the third order, you will be sent to Siberia. So then they went back on the same train what I went on the top of the train. And I came home and, of course, there is – we owned a house and a restaurant, and my mother still owed money on that building. So I stayed till I could make – pay off the house. So I was dreaming, I wouldn't believe it that somebody's coming back, they should have at least a place. So I went in my house, they hit me, why I didn't stay with the – why I didn't die with the Nazis, because the Christian woman took over. She was one time a maid in my mother's place, so she lived now in my building, in my house. It was a nice house. And she hit me, and I wanted to know sentimental things what I could out from there, so I took a policeman and we went back. She hit me again in front of him. Such a – soaked over Communism – I mean, Nazism. Everybody was a Nazi. One boy who hit my brother, gave him to the policeman, he says while I was there – stopped me on the street, he said: "I wanted to save your brother." Gosh, I was so mad at him. I was so mad. I went to the office, I said, "How come you still have that man free?" So he says, "We have a new Bible. If somebody hits you on one side, you should give him the other side." I said, "It's good that you didn't build a monument for the killers here." But then I left, I didn't – I stayed till I . . .

Q: Any other people in your family or other Jews come back?

A: From my family, no one. From my family, no one came. And I find maybe 10 people, 10, but they don't live there anymore. They are in Israel – they went to Israel, maybe 10. I went to the

synagogue. Books scattered, we had a big library, book – Torah books. Mother, I don't know she – maybe the rabbi – father, I don't know. I didn't question it because I always – saw that book in that same place. And my mother used to read them in translation, in Jewish translation, the Hebrew. They had always had that Jewish – so they put the books in that synagogue, and my brother-in-law [[Rabbi Nusen Elias Grünfeld]] wrote 500 pages of Torah. [[Rabbi David Greenfield, another relative, said that it was the commentaries on the Torah written by her great-grandfather, Shaul Yechezkel Grünfeld]] They were there in that synagogue. And then my cousin [[not David Greenfield]] took them out – who is New York now. I wanted to publish it, but my hands are not kosher so he doesn't want to give it to me. He's very religious – Borough Park. And life – people went back to their professions and they worked, but they didn't have to because the HIAS and the JOINT distribution gave everybody a room if you wanted to and enough money to live on after the war.

Q: How long did you stay in Trebišov?

A: Just till I sold my – I cleared my house [[she never went in the house, her family's house; she worked to pay off the house; she thought she would get it back ... she never got her house back (''cleared'' the payments)], my mother's house. Four or five months. I didn't want to stay there. In Prague they wanted to give me a factory because I was very good in my field, and my name was good.

Q: So you went to Prague then?

A: Then from there, when I left Trebišov, I went to Prague, and Brno once more to see my sister's place and I went to Galanta where my other sister was, and was bombed out both. My – Brno was bombed out, the building. No one came back, and Galanta I had nothing there left. One boy wasn't home [[Helen's son, Shmuel (Shmile), was not home when the family was taken away to the camp. He went (somehow) to Budapest also. They met several times in Budapest. He must have told her that he was not home when the family was taken away.]], so he came to see me in Budapest in 1942. And their parents were taking him away in '39, and then Miriam now asked for a paper from the agencies, from the Red Cross. So they sent her that he was – he died of starvation in 1944 in Auschwitz [[the paper she saw said he was taken to Auschwitz; he must have been taken with other Jews from Budapest to Auschwitz; the paper also says that he was transferred to Mauthausen where he died]]. The only boy. Also – and after the war, Trebišov, they didn't have Jewish life. Those people are like how – group like a ghetto [[a small group of Jews who had been from Trebisov returned to Trebisov and were staying together; when she arrived, she joined them]], stay together there in a bombed building and one got married. She's in Israel now, was a pharmacist, and no one is there now. Nobody stays there, and I got back a little money what my mother left the woman, Christian, where my store was. She gave me back a little money. [[her mother had left money before the Jews in Trebisov were taken away with the Christian landlady of the hat shop, and this woman returned the money to Malvina when she came back]]

Q: So you went to Prague?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you do there?

A: Oh, I just wanted to get out to United States, so I went to Germany from Prague.

Q: So you didn't stay in Prague then?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no. I didn't stay. I just was inquiring which Visa is faster. If I can get out faster from Czechoslovakia, so I registered also in Prague. But it was against the law, I was in the DP after the war. DP, Displaced Persons camp in Germany. After the war in Budapest, We went, I went first to Szeged where I could eat. After that I came home to see if anybody is alive. No one was alive. I went to Germany because I heard they have established Displaced Person camps, and whoever wants to come to register to United States. So I knew I have my sister here, I wanted to come to United States. I registered in both ways, which was illegal. My sister sent me once money. They put me in jail because I wrote to her, "thank-you for the money," and then the censor, they said, "How come it's foreign currency? You cannot keep money." I said – I had to lie, I'm sorry. I didn't, of course, I said that one dress would be \$10. The one pair of shoes \$10. So I thought in relating \$40 value what she would send me would be \$40. So they brought a translator in, and finally they let me out. But that was one day in jail.

Q: When you say you registered in two countries, what were the countries?

A: Czechoslovakia, Prague. Prague.

Q: And the other?

A: And the other was the – Ulm, Ulm, Leipheim, Leipheim, where I was registered in the DP camp from '45 – from '45, I registered, and till '47, till I came to this country. [[Czechoslovakia and Germany; she registered in both countries to see which quota would bring her name to the top faster so she could emigrate soonest]] But meanwhile I went illegally, you know, to the Czechoslovakian, see again if I can come out faster.

02:52:45

Q: Now in Leipheim, how large is the DP camp office? Can you tell me a little bit about it?

A: They were barracks before, and they made them for DP – the DP camps. It was maybe 1,000 – 800 people there and one, two, three, five; maybe five big, huge barracks. And UNRRA³⁸ supported food, and we got little, little rations. You know, how much – I could finish it in two minutes. But it was still a great help. And you could earn money if you wanted to work or teach. You want to be a dressmaker, you organize a group and you get paid from the UNRRA. I didn't want to work, I said I worked so much in my life. I didn't want to work for money. My sister was

³⁸ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

very good. She send me packages of cigarettes, and one piece – one box, you could live a week. And I moved to München³⁹, and I traveled a lot, I traveled all over Germany.

Q: How long did you actually stay in the camp in Leipheim?

A: Registered. [[It's not clear how much time she spent at the DP camp over the year and a half.]] It went from 1945 till 1947.

Q: You actually lived at this camp for two years?

A: Yeah.

Q: You lived at the camp, but you traveled around?

A: Right, yeah.

Q: And you had complete freedom?

A: Yeah. You can do anything you want to there.

Q: Who were most of the other people who were at Leipheim? Where were they from?

A: They were all displaced persons. My cousin was with me in the same room. She brought soap in this country. Soap from people, made from people. Nazis made soap from people. Nazis' lamp shades and soap, and she carried that piece of soap with her. She showed me that piece of soap made from people.

Q: Where did she get it?

A: Where did she get it? You know, I can't tell you, but I know her address. I can find out, but I didn't care to know it. Everything was painful to find out. I don't know, it's just so painful even to know. But I know she carried it to United States.

Q: So you met up with her at Leipheim coincidentally?

A: Right. I knew she's alive, and I went to – after the war, I walked 30 kilometers to their home to find out who is alive. So I found her, she was lucky. Three sisters together, two brothers, they are still alive. [[in their hometown, she said she was going to register at Leipheim; maybe at that time, they all agreed to go to Leipheim.]]

Q: So how did you find out she was in Leipheim?

A: We – she – we – how did I find out? We lived together in the same room [[they shared a room in Leipheim, 2 girls and 2 boys; they put up a sheet to separate the quarters]], and her brother was with me in the same room and one other strange [[a "stranger" – they had not known him from before.]] boy. We were *fir*⁴⁰ people,

³⁹ Munich, Germany

⁴⁰ four (in Yiddish)

and before Leipheim when I went to see him, that was in Czechoslovakia. So then we made it up that we going to Germany, she wants to immigrate. She doesn't want to stay home.

Q: In Leipheim, there were a lot of people there from concentration camps?

A: Mostly, mostly everyone.

Q: Did you talk to them? Did you learn what they experienced?

A: One was more horrible than the other. One was more horrible than the other. There was not a story, all were heroes in my eyes. I wasn't better than they were. I was luckier, but they were suffering more. Everybody had a name [ed comment: name=number (tattoo)], and who had a name on their body, it was a horror, unbelievable. Shiver when you see it.

Q: Were you surprised by what they told you?

02:57:09

A: Yeah. I was surprised, yes. I didn't expect that bad. Walking naked in the woods, walking naked – just to punish them, not to give food, not to have water to drink, not to eat. One – my, my – I can't even – my, my niece, my cousin, she stole a little potato. How can you blame a little 17 year old beautiful girl, she steals? But she stole maybe somebody else's life. That little potato was somebody else's life. The others, the cousin, I heard that cousin's cousin, somebody in the family; she washed herself with the water. She could save a people's life with that water. Conditions unbelievable. I never thought so. And tortured them on the street – and nude – and hit them and take them, and pull them. Anything they wanted to do, like a piece of furniture, not human.

Q: We need to change the tape.

End of Tape 2.

Tape 3

03:01:04

A: I forget they – Miklos⁴¹ who was 10 years in jail.

Q: You want to tell that story? Okay, I'll ask you about that.

A: Okay.

Q: Just sort of – we were talking about in Leipheim when you met up with all of these people who had come out of Auschwitz and other camps. When you were in Budapest, did you know much about the concentration camps?

A: Not too much. Not too much. We just know they are gone, no one is here. That's all we knew. There is not a single Jewish person alive in Budapest, except like I was, you know, Christian papers. [[that must have been the impression she was left with at the time in Budapest.]]

Q: In the ghetto, there where some, I think.

A: To the end, I don't remember. If it was, I don't remember.

Q: But you hadn't heard stories about the death camps?

A: Ghetto? No, no, I didn't hear anything. Only after the war when the concentration camp came back. You know, when everybody – my cousin who had that soap, piece of soap in her hands, it is so earth shaking to me. They said lamps and soaps she carries with her. And she had numbers, and her brother was 60 pounds when he came out from conc..., the camp – the Dachau – not Dachau. From that horrible camp there ... Which was the worst?

Q: Auschwitz?

A: Auschwitz and then one more. [[her cousins were in Auschwitz; perhaps she heard about Birkenau from her family and survivors in Trebišov]] Well, anyway, he had his share. Stories – it's no food, walking in the rain, walking in the outside nude just to, just to suffer. Just to make them suffer.

Q: What was it like living in this DP camp?

A: Well, you see, I was very lucky. When I – in the DP camp as DP camp, you had opportunities, if you were looking for. You could have courses, Hebrew and dressmakers, and any profession

⁴¹ In a later conversation interviewee clarifies that it was Mátyás Rakosi she meant to refer to here.

you wanted to pick. You could get educated. If you want to leave the DP in the free world, you could get prepared in that place if you didn't have any profession. Like my little cousin [[Freudu]] who lived with me, she was gorgeous and 17. So I told her to go to study Hebrew; she did. I told her to go to, I was like a mother to her, go to make – learn dressmaking. She made, she went. So when she came to United States after years, lucky, she studied in that dressmaker design school, and she became a very good dressmaker. So she, you could make yourself anything you wanted to in that camp, if you wanted to. But I didn't feel like I wanted – life was very, very limited and simple. But you had friends. It was such a tight together Community. You know, like you're like my brother, you're my sister. You didn't feel like strange person there, it was one whole big family. If you see a man, you didn't look at him like a man. But you looked him, “Oh, my gosh, thank God he's here. That's my brother.” If you didn't have any – you know if you didn't feel like a man. But it was all – or a sister or anybody, you had such a unity. And life was very, very simple, and those people really didn't have too much strength to do anything more – they went to eat. You went to lunch, get the dinner that little rations, what they got. In the morning, breakfast, a little cereal, tiny milk, and that was it. You were hungry constantly even with the rations you got, you got there. But many people managed some way to make money. Some way that they couldn't, wouldn't have to be hungry. But from that rations, you had to be hungry. You didn't have to starve to death, but it wasn't enough. And then the clothing, you could get free. So you didn't have any worries where you get a dress, and rooms were free, of course. One room we were four people in. My cousin and me and her brother and a little strange boy. It was nothing unusual to have a strange man in that room, all Nazis or with numbers or – I mean survivors. It was nothing unusual. It was such accepted thing that girl – not scared – man, no man wasn't such thing in that time. She was Orthodox, my cousin. She is still, and it wasn't a difference. Not supposed to be in the same room according to the – you know, regulations, Jewish. But was no difference, and courses, they emphasized Hebrew courses very much so.

Q: So after a while, you weren't in the barracks. You had your own little apartment there?

03:06:33

A: In München, out of the camp. I didn't like that camp life.

Q: Oh, how long did you stay actually living in the camp?

A: Registered. I had to wait to come to the United States, so I had to be registered there. I couldn't—

Q: But you didn't live there for very long?

A: No, I traveled a lot. You see, so by traveling, I took a room in München. It wasn't legal maybe, but I did it. My sister send me packages and once – oh I before I said It, it was almost in the . . .

Q: Well, I think you've talked about it. It must have been quite wonderful to be able to be open. To

be able to be a Jew.

A: Free. Fantastic. But it was such hopelessness there. There was no place, was no solution for it. Only one solution offered that place, to immigrate. That was the hope, the best place in the world. But three-quarters of those people there, no one wanted to stay there; they wanted to go out from the country. That was good. But it was very depressing waiting three years... on one (place)... Tomorrow, they promise you tomorrow the quota, and you come tomorrow and a year later. Six months later, three months later, and was always one year, two years, three years. For me it was 'til 1947. It wasn't right. I didn't have in the camp registered DP camp. [[Once, I didn't have with me the Leipheim ID papers in the camp, the registered DP camp, where she was registered.]] My friends went to a city close by, a bigger city. Günzburg or Ulm. And I went to say good-bye to them. I didn't have my identification card – identification on me from the DP camp already, American s' DP camp. They picked me up in that, in that truck, three soldiers. Here, you go in that truck. Put me to jail. Can you imagine how strict it was before? American soldiers did it to me; put me with the prostitutes in Ulm in the jail. Next day, I said, "How could you do it to me? Not enough I have to be with prostitutes after the war?" I should – was a court, they caught me, you know, made a case out of it. And \$50 fine, I said, "Well, where would I get \$50?" \$50 is like \$50,000 to a person who doesn't have five cents. I said, "I can't give you \$50. I don't have money." And so one man from the group said, "I bail you out." In the, in the, in the jail, they gave you a glass of grass with water, that was the soup. On the floor, you could sleep. Now, the Americans, all right.

Q: I think you had wanted to mention something about the Communist government that came in after the war into Hungary.

A: Well, the Communists liberated, so they took over Budapest, of course, the country. And there were soldiers, Americans – Russian soldiers, and to me they were great. I was hungry. There was nothing to eat, no place to shop. And I went – I knew that they have a big truck with bread. I said, "I am hungry. Give me *chleba*⁴²." I speak Slavic, you know, I speak Slovakian. I said, "Give me, *Davai chleba*. Give me bread." They didn't ask me who I am. I said, "I am freezing in my room. I need wood." He went to the wood with – where is wood, you know, forest. Cut the wood off – cut the tree off, and carried it with other soldiers to my house. Cut it to pieces, I was warm. That's Comm— American – the Russian soldiers. But they were always drunk. They sung on the street, doctor or a peasant, equally the same. They were drunk and drunk and drunk. And then they, "You have a watch? *Davai chasi*." *Chasi* is a watch. They said, "Give me the watch. *Davai chasi*." They put it here on elbow from top till down, like kids; they never had a watch in Russia. So suddenly, "*davai chasi*," that means give me your watch. They didn't wait, they just grabbed and took it out of your hands and put them on. And then they threw them away like kids; that was funny to me, very funny – how they had them. But they didn't want to go back. They said, "Why should I go back to my country? I don't have a family there left. They are all bombed out. I'm not going back." But there came the order three times, they have to go back otherwise they are in the Siberia. And one man who was 10 years in prison, Miklos what was his name? Forgot his name, Miklos⁴³. Maybe it will come back to me. He was from the democratic regime in Hungary, put to jail because he was a Communist for 10

⁴² bread (in Russian)

⁴³ Mátyás Rakosi

years. And then he became in charge, so what did he do? He killed people, and everybody could see hanging on the street, in the big street in Budapest – Andrassy út. Hanging people, you pass by, you didn't think anything of it. You took everything such in stride, I don't know. You didn't think anything after the war that man is hanging. Because you saw so many on the mountains piled up, so you just pass and didn't think anything out of it. And then maybe you expected that he was 10 years suffering in jail, that he wouldn't be so sympathetic to the people. It was – after the war was still misery. No food, even for everyone. Not only for the Jewish people now – equally. Couldn't get anything in the stores. They were all empty. No food, what I mean just to survive. Sometimes the water was pumped out. You had to travel miles to get a little water, probably.

Q: So you decided to try to come to the United States?

03:14:24

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, my God. I could hardly wait to come over. And when I came on the boat . . .

Q: In 1947?

A: Seven. From Bremen, Germany. I thought I am dreaming, God, I was so happy. That breakfast, I never thought that one minute before is such a horrible life, and here I am such a luxury. It was like a dream, like a dream come true. You couldn't describe that feeling, you couldn't. Just the food by itself. You didn't concentrate on anything else. Just to be free and to have food. You can walk; you can talk whatever you want to. That was just the most amazing thing to me. No starving anymore. That was a luxury life. Everybody got sick, but I didn't so I was – on the boat. The boat was a army boat, *Ernie Pyle* and water came in the boat. So we had to change the directions. It took us three weeks to come in United States. Wouldn't last that long if it not water in the boat. You know, accident. It was a dream.

Q: Did you travel with anyone you knew?

A: I traveled with many friends. [[she answers yes, she never said she met up beforehand to travel with people, so she answered she met friends, people on the ship]] I can't remember, but we all went apart. After the war, we had a little bit of contact from beginning. One is in Frankfurt. I had, yesterday, I just saw her picture. I forgot her name. I don't have any contact with them any longer, but some came to – in Frankfurt, I met them, and then United States, I didn't know where they went.

Q: So tell me about your first impressions when you arrived in New York – you arrived in New York?

A: Yeah. A dream. A dream of dreams. Ah! My sister came, my brother was and a few friends, her friends came to wait for me. And a bouquet of flowers, my brother. Couldn't breathe, I

cried. I just cried. Couldn't believe it. Very emotional. The, the – that Statue of Liberty. Yeah, that was something to see. I can't describe, even now it brings tears in my eyes. It was just gorgeous, it was like heaven on earth. Kiss everyone – I couldn't stand anybody complained in the United States. Even now I'm feeling there is no way to complain to me it is heaven even now. It's unbelievable. One minute away – I'm thinking one minute away. Was great. And I had a great sister [[Sylvia]] and a great brother [[Irwin]] supported me in every way. Give [[Irwin gave]] me money right away, give me five – \$,3000, which was a fortune for a person who has nothing. And he said, "You be independent. I want you to be independent." But three weeks later, I went to work. I went to work as a millinery, and I got a stitch infection. My body wasn't – just one stitch, with a needle. I had to stay off because my hands were infected. But luckily, I got along with people very well. I made very, very nice friends in New York. I am still friends with them. One died, and one just came to see me, who was in Europe, was working for Rabbi Bernstein⁴⁴. She was his secretary, so I just met her last week. So I was lucky to have met someone. It's still a dream.

Q: Did New York present any kind of culture shock? What here surprised you?

A: In New York? It was everything, what you wanted to have. I went to lectures each time to Segal Synagogue [[Stephen Wise Synagogue, popular place to meet people]]. They had dances there every week. I went there. One man was there in that time, he said he's a medical doctor. He said he want to marry me the next day. Not living anymore. I dream, it was everything from the first minute I came to this country, it was a dream in every way. Yes, culture I cultivated. I went to those lectures, Segal and then dances and then the Jewish shows, free tickets for refugees. And Skulnik⁴⁵ for Second [ed comment: Second Avenue- Yiddish theater] in New York, and the theaters I like all the time to go, yeah.

Q: What was difficult for you? Anything?

A: No. After the war, gosh, nothing was difficult. Nothing. I got a job right away. I didn't want a job. I, I – when I got the stitches, I got paid for it. I could be independent. If I make a dollar, I still have a dollar to put away. I could still eat, not to be hungry and to be independent. Fifty cents a frankfurters. I was so proud it's mine.

Q: It's sort of a strange question, but when you started working, you probably worked with some people who had not been in Europe during the war.

A: Right.

Q: Did you ever talk about the war? Did you – were they surprised? Did they want to know anything?

A: I tell you, I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't even talk to my children for years. I didn't want

⁴⁴ Rabbi Philip Sidney Bernstein, Jewish advisor to United States Army in Europe from 1945 to 1947, also served on Jewish Welfare Board. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Bernstein, Philip Sidney."

⁴⁵ Menasha Skulnik, American comedian, popular star of New York's Second Avenue Yiddish theaters. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Skulnik, Menasha."

to bring it up. I didn't want to talk about it. Somebody brought Holocaust up, I just said, "Sorry, I can't participate in that subject. I'm not ready for it. I don't want to talk about it." I couldn't bring myself together, even to my kids, to talk about it.

Q: So you—

A: Painful, very painful.

Q: . . . you eventually met someone, got married?

A: Yeah. But also in that one episode it was that jealousy was big, because I was good in my field. I can – I was already a milliner at home for many years, and I went to Bratislava and in Budapest one of the best salons. And I was watching what others do, I observed because I had to. I had to compete with everybody. So I was looking what how to make the most, and that was jealousy many times. One woman said, "Yesterday a woman was here. She was much worse than you are, and they hired her." But they let me go because the forelady didn't want me. And then in Budapest where I was working one time, I made a hat, designed all by myself. And that design hat went all over the country, had orders. And the woman said, "Cut off a certain part of the head. It should be better." I said, "Don't cut it off. It's perfect as it is." "No, you do it." So then the forelady comes in, and she said, "Who killed that hat?" And she told it's me. She didn't took it on herself because the forelady told me to correct it. I wanted to leave the store. That was the European. But was jealousy in jobs. As a foreigners. That what I noticed. But I work at many places, they were sympathetic with me. They want me to come Saturday to work if I want money, even it's not right but I should come. Many places I was lucky. I didn't noticed any anti-Semitism while I was working. I made friends while I was working, good friends. I didn't have that problem with them, just the jealousy was more a problem. What I noticed. They were scared of it. If I met somebody? Yes, I did.

Q: How long did it take you?

A: When I came in, I was engaged. [[engaged to a survivor whom I met in Germany]] When I came to this country in 1947. Yeah, I met somebody in Germany. I have his picture here. And I came out and he want me to come back after two years. I said, "Oh, no way. I changed and you changed. Two years, it's too much. You lived through; I lived through. I'm not going back to misery again. I don't want to go on rations." And so then he married and I married, too. Oh, my brother [[Irwin]] lived in Washington, he had a little store. And I lived in New York, so I came to visit him. And I was helping him like a European sister, cleaning his jewelry and washing his floor, washing his windows. Like at home. And a man came in, three customers, and they said if I am single, they have a man for me. And I was talking on the telephone, he's a musician, a friend from Europe, from Brno where my sister was. And he belonged to my sister's congregation. When he was 13, he already played violin, he's a violinist. And I was talking to him, I was always very happy to talk to him. So anyway, he said they have a man for me, and I said, "Okay, so let me meet him." To me – my brother had a date with a girl, I said, "I'm not going with you on your date. I need a man for myself." Just not to be with him, not to spoil his date. So then my husband I met in his cousin's place, in his brother-in-law's. My husband didn't want to come to my brother's place, but he said he was going to his brother's – brother-in-law's brother liquor store in Washington. I said, "Okay, he's not coming here. I am going there." So my husband came, then he took me to his

brother – he's a lawyer in Fairfax, he was. Now, he's old and sick. Burstein, Robert Burstein. And they thought I would be good for him, you know, for his brother. So in five days, he wanted to marry me. He was a very set man, he always knew what he wants to do – what want to do. And I felt like he's very reliable and character is great, and I don't meet a man every day like that. So it took me five months to make up my mind. In January '51, we got married. He was an economist and a rabbi, he missed one maybe a year or something. [[he attended what is now Yeshiva University in Washington Heights when it was Rabbi Yitzchak Elhanan Theological Seminary, very Orthodox rabbinical school on the Lower East Side in New York, and had not finished the final year of the rabbinical program – so he “missed a year” to be a rabbi.]] Very educated. A good person like human being, so that was my good luck.

Q: Do you have children?

A: I have two girls. One is Miriam and the other is Susan. She's married 10 years, maybe more, to a very, very nice Catholic lawyer – very nice man. And they have two [ed comment: three] adorable kids, Brian, Tony and John. I'm very happy with the kids, with them that they are happy.

Q: Let me just ask you a few general questions about all of this. When you look back, what do you think – you were a single young woman going through all of this alone. What do you think gave you the courage or the strength to do what you had to do?

A: In the war?

Q: Uh-huh [yes].

A: I tell you it was just such an automatic thing to do; that man needs papers, and my life was so miserable if I lose it, I have not too much to risk. Not too much to risk. If they catch me today – there's nothing safe. Was no – I couldn't say I'm sitting in that chair and I'm safe. That chair wasn't safe for me. Nothing was safe. So I said if I have to do something with my life, that man will be dead. He needs my help. And it was like such an automatic thing, I didn't think I am in danger. I knew what I am going to do. I didn't think I am crazy, I knew exactly if I go there, it will be danger. And, as I said, I didn't think, just that I have to do it. I didn't even think it's such a great glory to me in that time to do it.

Q: But all of your hiding and everything alone, was there something about your background, the way you grew up, your life before the war that prepared you for what you had to survive?

A: I had a very difficult life, youth. My father died when I was only 13 years old, and I didn't know my father till nine years old. He was captured in Sarajevo, now in Serbia. I read his card, "Send me money, send me food," sent to my mother, when he sent from there.

Q: World War I?

A: Yeah. World War I. I didn't know him. And when he came back after – he was captured in that Sarajevo, and when he came back, I was nine years old, developed. Suddenly, you have a father. I didn't like it. He had a snuff box, Orthodox, you know, and I didn't like that smell. And then he

was teaching me how to pray Hebrew, and one day he cut – he tied me to the table, I should study; I didn't want to study. But that was punish your kids, in the name of God, you know, that they should listen to you. I didn't like it. I was already not ready for that kind [[that kind of]] treatment, you know, I didn't like it. And then German, he taught me how to ... And he played chess, he taught me. He made chess and he played chess. He was a *gabbai*⁴⁶ in the synagogue. You know, like a president in the synagogue. And he was a respectable man because they honor the name, if you are a rabbi's daughter, he is a rabbi's – a *kvittel* [ed comment: a kvittel- rabbi's family] [[a *kvittel* would be a small piece of paper, in this case, where people would write upon it their prayer request and give it to the rabbi, to pray for them and get blessings from a rabbi.]] rabbi. [[This is what she calls a *kvittel* rabbi]] He came from that Loew, that big, golem family who made the golem. Kind of he related that he comes from that family. Loew, in Prague, Rabbi Loew. And he created that golem? and he came from that big, big family. So they got respect – and he was a teacher before he – when he got married at 19 years old. And my mother, I remember, she used to wash dead people. She said that's the biggest mitzvah, biggest mitzvah in the world what you can do in your life. Because they cannot repay you anymore. You do it for the sake of doing good. And she was a very high – very, very high ethics, she had. Moral ethics. She always stressed money is – name is more worth it than money, that on all the time. Like gold, you know, that kind of Talmud. And once she says she studied the book, and once she told me I was amazed; I was already a woman. And she says that birds communicate. I said, "Where did you get it from?" She read in the, in the Talmud book, interpretation. And she studied a lot, and she took every day a newspaper and shared it with the neighbor, had no money to buy it alone. But she had to have the paper. And hardworking existence, I don't think so she lived. Eight children. Eight children, no father [[Eight children, no husband, to help her raise all the children.]], but everybody when they grow up, they congratulated my mother, how great the kids are. She didn't do anything for them. One was a maid [[Helen]] in a rich place, – an aunt's place – the other [[Zali]] was a maid in a rich place. My uncle [[her mother's brother, Philip from Prievidza]] came to pick me up so I can study hats in his place. His daughter [[Malvin, her cousin]] was a millinery. I became a millinery. But they didn't register me for a year, sooner so I should work free. For three years, you had to pay if you study any trade. And after three years, you get paid. So they didn't register – I worked four years, instead of three years. But it was a good experience for me, they had a very disciplined, happy life, and I didn't have it at home. So then my father died, and I cried day and night when I was young. I slept on the floor. I was homesick when I went to that place, and sit on one place for 12 hours. Somebody died in the community, I had to make the hat with her overnight. I was 13. I had to be up the whole night, make that hat. It would be against the law if it's in this country, but I did it. And you had breakfast, a cup of coffee and a slice of bread. Lunch, a good lunch, but I could have three lunches, I was so hungry. And then you have 7 o'clock dinner: a slice of bread with a cup of coffee. There now, I was hungry. It wasn't – but I always prayed to God he should make me not only independent, I shouldn't need anyone. I should have my bread and water. That's all I want, I don't want more. Just I should be my bread and my cup of water. I shouldn't need any charity that was my desire all the time my life to ...

03:34:09

⁴⁶ sexton (Hebrew)

Q: This was as a young girl?

A: Very young, 13 when I was in my aunt's place. I said "that's enough for me. Should be my bread, don't give me anything." I don't want anything. And my mother was strong. She was very proud, she didn't take charity. She wouldn't take charity. When the Germans, Nazis, the Czechish Nazis came in, the Hlinková Garda, one very rich man wanted to give my brother suits. He [[the man]] didn't need them because they take them away. They take away – the Nazis took away, if you had one dress, two dresses, take away one. The whole house cleared it out. You know that procedure. And my mother didn't want it. She said, "No, darling, you don't take it. You don't need it. You have what you have, and that's enough for you." Very proud, didn't want – and very, very hard working. She was like a slave to me, like a slave. It was a very difficult life. Early morning, late at night, no husband to support anyone. It was – but she had faith in God. That faith kept her, faith in God.

Q: You think that kept you going, too?

A: I think so. I think so, yeah. I always said I have to live through that war. I have to live. I know it's impossible, though, logically. But inside of me I always, yes, I have to live through that war.

Q: Do you think that your religious beliefs helped you survive?

A: I was never that big, I was never – it was just a pattern made for me from my mother's place. But I questioned all the time something in religion. And once I belonged to three organizations, they kicked me out. Because one is Agudah, the Mizrachi, I'm a Shomer and I'm a Jabotinsky. And I was in all four of them. Then I decided Allgemeine Juedische Organisation⁴⁷, that means United Jewish Organization, and I thought people shouldn't fight. There's no reason to be more religious and non-religious. My brother was a rabbi at home. My brother, the rabbi – brother-in-law – came to see my mother, I have to say that story. The other was a *schochet*, he came to see my mother in my house. [[Altogether there was her brother Rumi (rabbi), her brother-in-law Rabbi Nusen Elias Grunfeld (rabbi), her other brother-in-law Cantor Bela Weinstein (shochet), and her brother Irwin.]] My mother was religious. My brother [[Irwin]] who came to the United States [[in 1939]] was not educated[, and he touched the open bottle of wine. Nobody would drink that wine. I couldn't accept it, it was just over my head. I couldn't, and I just questioned.

Q: Yeah, but, nevertheless, throughout the war—

A: I kept the tradition.

Q: . . . you tried to observe holidays. You tried—

A: Yeah.

⁴⁷ Allgemeine Juedische Kolonisations Organization, a short-lived general Zionist organization started in 1908 by Alfred Nossig. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Nossig, Alfred."

Q: . . . to keep kosher.

A: Yeah.

Q: You prayed. I mean, it must have given you some sense of strength.

A: Yeah, yeah. I think I got it from my mother. I think I got it from my mother, and it was always in my mind "your name and your name." You know, it's better than gold, and that kind always in the moral standards. I think that was my mother's doing. And one thing she always said I have to have it good in life, because I'm a good person. That kind of carried me; that she had faith that I want – she always said, "Don't bring me shame on my head." She said it to my brother, and those stories all over, I think she had something to do with that. Yeah, I was, I went to synagogue almost every time I could. Shabbos, even then, and that was danger. And, as I said, it's on Yom Kippur when they came to ask me money. I said, "I need money." They wouldn't believe me because my manicured hands and my clean dress I had one dress. They stole my dresses. I washed out the belt, I washed out the collar, and I went to work. But water was very rationed. You were not home at 4 o'clock, you don't have water. If you have one dress and it's not clean, you cannot go to work.

Q: Once you had these Christian papers, it never occurred to you to stay Christian?

A: No, no. I don't believe in it. I'm not such strong Jew that I should change right away. Because I am a good Jew maybe in my heart. But I couldn't change it. What would I – no.

Q: Were you ever confronted with moral choices that were difficult to make during the war?

A: Well, yes. Yeah! My friend, desperate, she said she's in love with a married man who supports her. And she thinks that that married man that married man's wife is the prostitute, not she. She's not the prostitute because she is living with a man she doesn't care for, and he's living, ergo, she is the one who is entitled. And she says that she has a man for me. It was nothing unusual, nothing. Such a – sometimes it was a blessing who could do it. I didn't have shoes. Maybe that saved me – I was embarrassed I didn't have shoes. But that was, yes, it was many times. And then the \$500 Pengö [ed comment: Pengö is Hungarian currency] somebody offered, my friend told me if I go with him. No, I couldn't follow it. I didn't follow one; I didn't follow the other. But it was nothing bad in that time. You know, it was – nobody would point out that you did something wrong because your life was at stake. That money, it could save your life.

Q: But you didn't do it?

A: I didn't even having second thoughts, I was insulted. I didn't want to talk to that girl any longer, but it was, yeah. It was facing many such little episodes. One man wanted to give me lunches, in a restaurant... "I give you lunch..."

Q: When you think back now about these years, 50 years ago, are there certain images that stick with you?

A: Oh, yes. Every day. You can't get away from it. I get very mad if they say, "Don't forget it." If

they – they have a lecture, Senior Citizen Survivor Center, "Don't forget." What are you talking about? It's the whole family. It's not a person. "Don't forget." There hasn't been a day what you wouldn't remember every one. Even my husband is dead eight years, I remember him every day. And now, the whole family, a nice family. I would have a great family. I have no one from my family. Two years ago my sister and brother died. I could have a great family. Yeah, you can't forget. It sticks to you lifelong, I feel that way. You can't. Eight children. [[her sister Helen's children]] One was a year old. I loved them to pieces.

Q: So you think back on that time when you were all together before the . . .

A: Oh, yeah. I went to visit them, I stayed there. Played with them, loved them.

Q: Or maybe when you said good-bye to your mother?

A: We had a great relationship. Beg your pardon?

Q: Maybe you remember when you left your town.

A: Oh, yes, yeah. Of course, I see every day people in front of me. My sister [[Zali]] had nine-years-old boy. [[Solku - her nephew (Zali's son); S in Hungarian is pronounced "Sh" so he was "Sholku" and his Hebrew name was, the way we would pronounce it, Shaul Yechezkel]] Adorable little fellow, great little fellow. Nine-years-old kid, and I – as I said, my mother [[Mali (Amalia)] was only 62. So everybody was young. No, you can't – I don't know.

Q: What kind of long-term impact . . .

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: What do you think that these experiences, how have they affected your life today?

A: It's hard to say, because I keep blessing my God. That he gave me such a long life and such a happy life here in this country. I married a wonderful man [[Max H. Burstein]], couldn't get a better person. A better character, you couldn't get. He was a rabbi [[she means education; although he never got smicha, ordained, he finished all but the last year of rabbinical school in the US]] and an economist, he was in the government [[worked for the CAB, Civil Aeronautics Board in the US government, economist]]. Besides this, he was gentle human being, a *mensh*⁴⁸. So I had two girls; the other is Susan, she is married three years – I mean, with three boys.

03:44:30

Q: Yes, you mentioned them.

⁴⁸ good-hearted person (Yiddish)

A: Three grandchildren, and Miriam. So I had a full, full life, and I blessed to God that he gave me that in this country. And what I think I can't forget the past, and the past goes with me always, but I hope that no one in the world has to have that experience, no one – what I had. And that I am here today, I think it's not me. I think some, like a statue, I don't think so it's me. Why would I go to that whole hell for the people I don't even know? I didn't regret it. I didn't regret it, but I just hope – and what happened, my answer to it? That it, needs from the childhood, an education against the hatred. One letter I got from Mrs. Maurer⁴⁹ when the story came out in the newspapers that people in leadership should see, can see what hatred can do. That hatred, child is innocent. To me, I don't have hatred, thank God. I don't know what was the – I don't have hatred against anyone. I can't forgive what they did. I don't know how Germany can sleep at night. But it's—

Q: There's too much noise on the—

A: You mean on the outlook?

Q: No, I mean, there are people who act a certain way or don't act a certain way or have certain fears because of what they went through at an earlier time.

A: Well, the fear is that you can't forget, and it haunts you. It haunts you. Wherever you go you are hearing the lecture I am in Hadassah⁵⁰. I am in the ORT⁵¹, I am in the B'nai B'rith members and there is Temple Israel, wherever you are the memories haunt you. So it must have an effect, because you're never relaxed. You lost that freedom of relaxation. You can't relax. You're always tensed, because the memories. The Memories. If I go on the street and I see a kid, I say "Oh my gosh, my little grandchild, he is— thank God – here, but where are the others?" Innocent nine – eight children. Good people, they didn't hurt a fly. So you're tensed. You're tensed. Many times when I got out of that thing, I thought maybe I should go to the psychiatrist. Many times I thought maybe everybody should go. I faced it little by little. I think everybody has that feeling. I don't know, I don't speak for everybody. But it haunts you day and night. That's all I can say.

Q: For several years afterwards, did you just block it out?

A: Never block it out. Never. I don't remember . . .

Q: You said you wouldn't talk about it to anyone.

A: Oh, I didn't talk, but I didn't block it out. It made me very – when I went to those meetings, it made me very shaken-up. For a time then I couldn't tolerate the one brings up the war stories, and the other brings up the other war stories. And none was better than mine, and everybody's the same shoe. Everybody is in the same shoes. There is no better story and no worse. Everybody you see here is a monument. What those people lived through, and I am included, that's not normal. It would be crazy to say that you are very, very normal, if you're always

⁴⁹ State Legislator/Treasurer, Lucille Maurer

⁵⁰ Women's Zionist Organization of America. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America."

⁵¹ International organization promoting vocational training and development among Jews. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "ORT."

tensed and always think about this, what you cannot. It's almost 50 years, and you carry it with you. I'm asking you, I'm asking you the question, normal or not normal? If somebody tells you a different story, maybe they are different. Maybe they are. I just can't say that it's . . .

Q: One last question I have, because I don't think I asked you this before. When we were talking about how you were able to get all of those work permits so that other people could have papers and be free or sort of free, why did you do it? You knew that you were at great risk. What made you do it?

A: You know, I was asked that same question a few times, why I did it. Somebody accused me I took money. I didn't take money – wasn't money involved at all, okay? And the other part, I wasn't crazy. I knew what I am doing, I knew exactly what I am doing, that it's not a ball game for me. I know I am going in the top of the atom bomb, it can explode every minute when I am stepping in or before I step in, because the building was surrounded by the Nazis. Why I did it, I have no answer for it. I really don't know why I did it. I just had something in me said you have to do it and no question. You have to do it, and I didn't feel I am doing something very big. I didn't feel like I'm such a big hero. I just did what I have to do. I was there in that minute they needed me. That boy [[Wily]] is dead without me, and life was tough. If I lose my life there, maybe I would lose it regardless. That was my idea, but I wasn't crazy. I knew what I am doing. And I didn't plan to get money for it, didn't think of it. And I'm happy I did it, very happy.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add?

A: What I would add to it?

Q: I feel that you've told me a lot, and I don't have any more questions, but if there's something else you wanted to say . . .

A: Well, one thing I wanted to add. I don't want to miss it. Churchill. Churchill was the only statement – statesman, he openly said that he's against, the Nazis. That was only country, none of the others – they were quiet. He was the only one who spoke, who was outspoken. My mother and sister [[Lenke; they must have praised him]] – I can't remember anymore. That's all I can say; he just said that. You know, I just feel it shouldn't be war. That's all what I feel like. And in Israel, I was in AIPAC⁵², I thought I'm dreaming. They put me to the head table with the, with the Ambassador of Israel and his wife and a congressman and another congressman. I thought I'm dreaming. After 2,300 people in AIPAC convention, Sheraton Hotel downtown, and I am there, me, little from that village and from that place. I thought I am in heaven. So they work for peace and I am all for it. I hope will come to Israel. So, I don't know what to say. Just bless everybody.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

⁵² American Israel Public Affairs Committee. David Singer and Ruth R. Seldin, eds., *American Jewish Year Book 1996*, vol. 96 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1996), 110.

Q: Now, you're going to do . . .

[Displaying documents]

A: This is business stationery from Trebišov. “Salamon Grünfeld Trebišov Hostinec, Restaurant.” This is “Salamon Grünfeld⁵³, Trebišov Hostinec⁵⁴,” it's my mother's restaurant business stationery. This is my business. What is that? My, my business – this is “Malvina Grünfeld Modesalon⁵⁵, Trebišov.” That's my business stationery in Trebišov.

Q: For your . . .

A: For my business for hat – I said millinery, millinery store.

Q: And one more?

A: And this is my brother-in-law, “Bela Weinstein, Schächter und Kantor” in Galanta, *schochet*⁵⁶ and cantor in Galanta. He was in a big yeshiva place in Galanta, and this is a business stationery.

Q: This a picture. Who is this? What is this picture?

A: That picture is taken in 1937, and here is my family.

Q: In Trebišov?

A: In Trebišov. And here is my sister, who's married to a rabbi [[Lenke married to Rabbi Nusen Elias Grünfeld]]. The other brother who is a rabbi [[Rumi]], and my sister who was in Galanta [[Helen]] – take them, took them away. Here's my mother, and here is – seated – and next to her is her sister-in-law [[Sharika Frieder, wife of Philip/Pinchas, Mali's brother]]. Her brother's wife, and here are two sis— is one sister, one girl who was a rabbi's daughter [[Rabbi Lebovich, a relative]] from Bratislava and the other are—

Q: On the right is the sister from—

A: Sister of a rabbi and a rabbi from Bratislava. [[sisters were daughter of Rabbi Lebovich]]

Q: On the left?

A: No, those are strangers. I don't know them, but this is the sister. There are two sisters and here is another friend of mine. And here is engaged to that – the fiancée. And here is a son-in-law of my mother's brother. Here is my mother's brother [[Philip/Pinchas Frieder]] and that's his son-in-law, and that's his grandchild. Family picture that was from a wedding. [[from a Lag Ba'Omer celebration]] This is a picture of my mother and me taken in 1930's at home

⁵³ Reflects spelling of surname as it appears in documents shown.

⁵⁴ restaurant (Czech)

⁵⁵ fashion salon (Czech)

⁵⁶ kosher butcher (Yiddish)

in Trebišov. [Indecipherable]. Oh this . . . ? This is my picture in the seventh grade in Trebišov in public school. I am on the right side seated next to my teacher – 13 years old. This is my picture taken in Prievidza where I studied to make hats, and I was a Jabotinsky [[supporter]] here. Shomer, Shomer, not Jabotinsky. Here I was Shomer [[Shomer HaTzair]]. The second on right on the second row.

Q: You were how old?

A: 17.

Q: The name of the town?

A: Prievidza -- I studied hats. This is my store in Trebišov, a millinery shop. I made the hats, in 1930s, late '30s.

Q: How old do you think you were here?

A: I could be between 20, 23. I was already in business.

Q: Okay.

A: This is my father's picture taken – I couldn't tell you – maybe in '20s in Trebišov. He died in '27.

Q: Okay. Who's that?

A: That is my little nephew, nine years old, my sister's son. And he was a great student in Trebišov – Solku.

Q: What happened to him?

A: He died in the Nazis with my sister. They took mothers with children, This is the picture what we got from my brother, Adolph Grünfeld, from a forced labor camp in Vysoky Tatry.

Q: What year do you think this was?

A: That was around '40, I would think so. 1940.

Q: And he is which one?

A: This one.

Q: On the left?

A: On the left, yeah. He's the first one on the left on the first row. This is the picture of Salgo Tibor taken after the war, and he helped to save his brother. He wrote the paper to save his brother, and he lives now in Israel.

Q: And he is the person who sent you to the printing office?

A: And he's the person who sent me to the National Printing Office to get the identification papers for the, for the . . .

Q: The munitions factory.

A: . . . for the munitions factory.

Q: Okay.

[Technical conversation.]

A: Okay, this is me after the war in front of my store in Trebišov in my millinery store, and my sign is there. This is my first picture taken in Leipheim after the war. This picture was taken in my happiest day when I came to this country in 1947 before Yom Kippur, and those people were my – were waiting for me. And here is my sister [[Sylvia]], also, with the group. And I am here, the third from the right side with the flowers. Taken in New York, taken in New York.

Q: Ready to start your new life?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: Ready to start your new life?

A: Oh, great, fantastic. God, can't believe it, Ah! how happy I was just to be here.

Q: Okay.

Conclusion of interview.