

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Edith Palkowitz**  
**August 26, 2016**  
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## PREFACE

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## **EDITH PALKOWITZ**

### **August 26, 2016**

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Edith Palkowitz**, on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in **San Diego, California**. Thank you again, so much, for agreeing to be interviewed today. We really appreciate it.

Answer: My pleasure.

Q: So, like we talked about before, we'll start at the very beginning, with some biographical information, your post – or, your pre-war life, and then move onto the war years, and post-war.

A: Okay.

Q: So, we'll start at the very beginning. Could you please – could you please tell us your date of birth?

A: Repeat that, please.

Q: Could you please tell us your date of birth?

A: Oh, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 – '29.

Q: 1929?

A: 1929.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Budapest, Hungary**.

Q: And has your name always been **Edith**, or did you have a different name?

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A: I have a middle name, **Veronica**, but I don't use it.

Q: And what was your maiden name?

A: **Steiner**(ph).

Q: **Steiner**(ph). Were your parents born in **Budapest** as well?

A: Yes.

Q: So, had your family lived there for a few generations?

A: I don't know few generation, but I n – we were born there.

Q: Could you tell us your parents' names?

A: Yes. I – my father's name is **Miklos**(ph), and my mother's name is **Elizabeth**.

Q: Do your – do you know when they were born?

A: No.

Q: What –

A: I know they got married when they were 19, and that was in 1927. So, with a little calculator, we could figure it out.

Q: So, that sounds like 1908.

A: Okay.

Q: And they were both born the same year?

A: Yeah, same age.

Q: Okay. And, had your father been a soldier in World War I?

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A: No, no.

Q: Oh, I guess he would have been too young.

A: Right.

Q: What were your parents like?

A: My father was a gorgeous, handsome man. All – all fathers are with the – for the little girls. And always smiling and singing, and just – I felt very lucky with him. My mother, I don't remember much. I remember she was home with me, but I really don't know what we did together. I – and I don't know why. I just don't remember. I'm sure we did a lot of things together, but I don't remember.

Q: Did your grandparents live in **Budapest** also?

A: Yes. My grandmother, name is **Rose Mayer**(ph), and my grandfath-grandfather, **Ignatz**(ph). Doesn't matter how you spell it.

Q: Did you get to see them often?

A: Yes, we live very close, and we were very close.

Q: What about aunts and uncles?

A: Lot of aunts and uncles and cousins, because my grandmother came from a family with eight siblings. And they all had the children, and they were my cousins, and my aunts. And on the holiday, we were like 28, 30 people.

Q: Oh wow.

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A: Yes. It's nice.

Q: Did you have any siblings?

A: No.

Q: So you're an only child.

A: I had the stepsister.

Q: And was she older, or –

A: Younger. Her name was **Susie**.

Q: Were you – were you close with her? Did you grow up together?

A: No. I was in **America** already, and she stayed back in **Hungary**.

Q: Did you speak any other languages at home, or –

A: I spoke fluently German, because I had a German governess, and Hungarian, and a little, little Yiddish. The real Yiddish I learned in **Brooklyn**, when I came here.

Q: And, so did you only speak German with the governess, or was it –

A: Only German.

Q: Oh, only German with her.

A: Because she felt that Hungarian I will learn in school, and gi – with German language, especially that time, was an asset to know.

Q: Was your family middle class, you know, upper middle class?

A: It was almost upper middle class, most of them.

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Q: Had your family been affected by the depression, at all?

A: Which depression?

Q: The Great Depression.

A: In '29?

Q: In **Europe**, yeah.

A: I don't know. I-I was so young, I was a baby. I don't know. But I do know that my mother had the sister, **Ella**, and they were very, very well off. They had their own business, and they went every year a few times, to **Switzerland**, skiing.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: Yes. So they – they were well off, above – above middle class.

Q: Was your family very religious?

A: No.

Q: But you knew you were Jewish?

A: I knew I was Jewish because they went to – just my grandmother, no one else, went to temple on the holy holidays.

Q: So, she was the only one that went, but –

A: Yes, the only one.

Q: Do you know if your family had always – had – had, I guess, your parents, always felt that way? They weren't very religious?

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A: I – I have to tell you the whole story, because my story doesn't make sense, with my answers. So, I have to tell you how I don't know things, and why I don't know things.

Q: Okay.

A: All right?

Q: Okay.

A: So, the first thing I remember, I was four years old, and I found myself in a place, the snow was higher than I was. A lot of people crying, crying, tearing of the clothes, and a big commotion. And nobody pays attention to me. When we left, I said to somebody, where are we? What is this place? And they said, this is a cemetery, and we just buried your mother. I was four years old. I was told she died from a brain tumor, on the operating table. So my f – we get home, when I stay with my grandmother, and my father moved in, and we were the three of us, because Grandpa died just before. And was a very difficult life, because my mother was so young, and my grandmother couldn't take the pain, and the sorrow, to lose a young daughter like that. So, we covered by rel – Jewish religion, we cover the mirrors when someone dies, and we did cover it, and after 30 days you're supposed to take it off, but she never took it off. As my – as long as I remember, the mirrors were covered. So, being that I had no one to take care of me, my Aunt **Ella** hired a



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governess, whose name was **Mimi**. So **Mimi** took care of me since I was four years old, til right after the war. And we did everything together, schoolwork, fun work. She taught me lots of etiquette; she felt it was very important. She taught me how to boil eggs warm water, in case. **[indecipherable]** in case of what? Everything is good to know. Everything is good to know. I was ironing, I was washing, cause she did tell me all these things. And I was very content, she was very, very good to me. And couldn't be happier, except the house where I lived with Grandma, it was a very sad house. And I – the children didn't want to play with me, because I was always sad. And – and this is how the years went by. And I went to school, and when in 1944, **Mimi** wanted to leave. And we didn't understand why **Mimi** wants to leave. And she said that in her home, there is a catastrophe, and she has to leave. Doesn't matter how much she loves me, she has to leave. So that was an indication that some political change is going through. But of course the news was handled through the government, and fa – also the radio. There wasn't any television or anything, like today. So, in a quiet, buzzing way, we heard that the German army took over **Czechoslovakia, Romania**, other parts of **Hungary, Poland, France**, all the eastern European countries. And we heard this stuff, and it was very surprising, because we don't know this stuff, we don't know these things. Could I have a drink of water, please? **[interruption]**

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Q: So you said you were – over the radio, and newspaper, you were hearing little bits and pieces about what was happening outside –

A: Right.

Q: – the Germans, you know, their activity. And so you – and then you were about to tell us about your governess, **Mimi**, leaving.

A: **Mimi** left, went back to **Switzerland**, and so it was my grandmother, and my aunt didn't live with us, but my father remarried, three years before.

Q: So, in 1941.

A: Right. They married a very nice person, and they had the child together. Her name was **Susan, Susan**. They wanted me to live with them, and I wanted to live with them, because I was tired of the old atmosphere, and the sadness, and the covered mirrors, and all that. But my grandmother wouldn't allow it. She says, you're my only contact to my daughter, and I'm not letting you go.

Q: So because you were your mother's only child, she wanted to keep you there.

A: And she stated it with so much common sense, that nobody was arguing about it. So I stayed with my grandmother, and contacted my stepsister once in a while. Very – you know, it – and then in three years they were together only – only three years, and then became 1944. And so that day, that big day came, when tanks, and military machines, and guns, and unbelievable attack on every house. They just shoot. They

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were shooting without aiming. They just were shooting. And then a young man, a German fellow, soldier, came in yelling and yelling and pushing. Broke down the front door, and he said, **schnell, schnell**, that means hurry, hurry. And I had what I had on, not special clothes or anything. I just grab my pocketbook, and – and for – for i-identification, and – and – and a little jacket, that's all.

Q: And up until this point, had your life in **Budapest** been pretty normal?

A: Yes.

Q: Nothing had changed, there weren't any restrictions?

A: No, no. Some thing – restrictions were in the schools. They didn't have religious classes, so they combined the Christian classes with the Jewish classes. However, they didn't make us to kne – knee down – kneel down, or any other things. So we sat in the back, and we just sat there. And our building had three flights. One – two staircases. One was for the residents, and one was for the delivery and maintenance. And he keeps on pushing me, the soldier, and I'm going to where I always go, to the resident s-staircase. And he starts to hit me with the – with the rifle back, and you lousy ge – Jew, you don't deserve to be on the – on that staircase. You go where the delivery is, where – where the maintenance men are. And he was very upset. And I turned around, went over there, and he started to hit me. I lost three or four teeth – moving teeth, was loose. And he kicked me down from the third floor, spiral –

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spiral staircase, to the bottom. So I had lot of bleeding. I cut my head. And he – the order was to meet downstairs. When someone was injured, you stay here, one – were you able to walk, you stay here. So my aunt was very worried that I – I have too much blood on me. So where – why – where they gonna put me? So she licked off the blood, and she swallowed it. I really don't know if you could comprehend what that means, to lick off my niece's blood, and swallow it. And she cleaned me out, so I was return on the cl – on the okay people. The not well people were shot right away, right front of me. Neighbors, students, friends, teachers, they were shot right there, front of me.

Q: All people you knew.

A: Who were – lived in the house, and people I know. Storekeepers I sold – I went to. And I just looked, I looked. And then **Ella** says, what you looking? Stay with me now. I said, why? Because. And then on the loudspeaker came, everybody goes to a stadium, and there's someone gonna lead you, and stay in the line, and go to the stadium. Stadium was six miles away. You could just physically imagine me, whose mouth was cut, or head was cut, walking with my grandmother, six miles away. It sounds not so specifically bad, but in actuality, to put yourself physically in this situation is – is – is unreal that – that someone ask you to do this, but don't forget, we were the healthy ones.

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Q: And it's mar – March, right?

A: March. March.

Q: So there is – is there still snow out, and it's –

A: It's March, cold, snow, and wet. And we went [**indecipherable**] in the morning, 10 o'clock, and finally, finally we got to the stadium.

Q: And had – had other – did – ha – did you have to march through the city of

**Budapest** –

A: Yes.

Q: – to get there? So what – did you notice the reactions of people in town, as they saw all these people being marched?

A: It was a wide lane, you know, it's not just two or three. So, I really couldn't see on th – where – what they do there, where – I heard, there – good for them, that's what they deserve, that's what they deserve, good for them.

Q: This is what people are yelling at?

A: Yelling at. And it was just – after shooting all these people, it was just such a bad, bad feeling I had. I really didn't care what did they say to me at this point. So, getting to the stadium was a miracle, a miracle by itself. Was about one or two o'clock, I don't know how long. And there were benches, and we sat in the 10<sup>th</sup> row, 12 row, I don't know, and they said the first row, second row, **threed** row –

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third row, fourth row, go down to the bus, and they take you to your destination. No one would ask where is our destination, where are we going. No one. I was hungry already, and I was tired, but nothing. After, we found out that those buses took you to – to **Auschwitz**, and to all the camp, but we didn't know it then. So my **Ella** says to me, you know, it's already four o'clock, can't go on forever. Let's go all the way up, because the lower lanes moving. Let's go all the way up. So we went all the way up, and – and she was right. And then there was a young Hungarian soldier, a young boy, who used to be her newspaper boy. And she was very good to him all the time. And she called over the boy. Now, how did she trust that boy, I have no clue.

You're doing things which – which you don't know the risk you're taking. You don't need the risk you're taking. She called him over, she says, would you walk us out of the stadium? We will come back tomorrow. And the boy did. So, he took us out, an – to the – outside the we – stadium. And you know, it's about evening, it gets dark early, and now what? But God gave us good Christian people. That Christian people, Mrs. **Mona**(ph), was my aunt's client. She had the store like bed and bath, bedding and the t-towels, and this kind of a stores.

Q: Oh, like ho – **Home Goods**.

A: **Home Goods**. And she did very elegant work, wa – which included monogramming. And she had the very fancy clients, they had the crowns, and two –

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two legs on the crown told you who you are, three legs on the crown told you who you are. So this Mrs. **Mona**(ph), we – a year before this all started, came into the store, and she said – very religious woman, very religious Christian woman. She says, I love you both, but **Edith**, I want to give you a cross, and it's blessed by the Holy Mother, and **Ella**, I want to give you a cross. You know, not thi – I'm not disrespectful, but I didn't know what holy water is, holy cross, I don't know, I didn't know, I was 13 years old then, when she gave it to me.

Q: She gave you each a crucifix?

A: Yes, no.

Q: Oh, just a cross necklace?

A: Yes.

Q: Little like medallion, or –

A: And the – yeah, yes, yes, yes. And that – no, a cr – a cross.

Q: A cross.

A: Yeah. I still have it. So I forgot about it, took a pocketbook before I left to that stadium. And so we went to Mrs. **Mona**(ph), and she cleaned us up. I've a – and then, in big signs, if you help any Jew, without any trial, you'll be shot. No excuses, no discussions. So we didn't want to stay with her, because we were afraid of – for

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her life. And then the news came out that they're selling tickets to a safe house, which is managed by the Vatican, and a Vatican flag flies over it.

**Q: In Budapest?**

**A: In Budapest.** You know, that's all we knew. I mean, how you – how you figured it out, is it true, is it not, what did it mean. So my **Ella**, she could afford it, she had money with her, so she bought for the three of us, two tick – three tickets, and we went there. It's a two bedroom apartment, about 40 people. Every night I felt urine in my mouth, because there was only two bathroom for 40 people. But looking outside the window, we were still happier to be there, than outside. And then came the big surprise, that the ticket was only good for 14 days. And now, what do we then do now? So as we went downstairs, at the door, the Germans were waiting for us, and put us in the ghetto. And then in the ghetto, we were put in the worst apartment, and every day we were marching outside. I had the hole in my shoes, put in newspaper, and by one o'clock [**indecipherable**] got wet, and melted from the snow. And very, very degrading person I became. Degrading person who everybody loved, and **Mimi** loved, and had everything in the world, and now I'm walking on the street, and some idiot throwing a – a pox on me, and cursing and whatnot. Who are these people? I don't know. I mean, it's a different neighborhood, a different zip code, I'd never been there before. And then, I felt that I don't want to



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do this any more. So I said to her – oh, Grandma went to Mrs. **Mona**(ph), and she – she was hiding there. She had the basement, and she wouldn't let her go. My grandmother.

Q: So your grandmother was still at Miss **Mona's**?

A: Yes.

Q: But you and your aunt go to the safe house?

A: Yes.

Q: You're separated at this point.

A: Right. And then **Ella** and I was in the ghetto. And I said to **Ella**, I said, look, let's get out of the – the – the lane. I mean, they're not going to kill us. Oh **Edith**, please honey, of course, they're gonna kill us. She called me **Chirpy**, that was my nickname, **Chirpy**.

Q: **Chirpy**?

A: Yes. And it's a very warm name, you know, it's a very loving name. And she says, **Chirpy**, this is crazy what you're thinking. **Ella**, I'm not going to stay here, and be here six, seven, eight months. I mean, I – I – I – I went on to nothing. And we didn't eat, and we didn't trust anyone to – to talk to, because if people told about other people, hoping to get extra food.

Q: So you – you didn't know who to trust.

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A: No ca – no one to trust. So I walked like on the side of the line, already get back in the line, get back in the line. So, in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> month, one day I walk with **Ella**, and I'm talking to her. I said, listen **Ella**, I'll go out there, you don't have to. But this is terrible, this is really not something that I – we don't know how long it's gonna be. In the meantime we had the – heard about the Polish reso – revolution, that they killed the underground people, and – and – and it was terrible.

Q: Oh, the – the **Warsaw** uprising.

A: Right.

Q: So you were hearing bits and pieces from [**indecipherable**]

A: Right, right. She says – and then I said, why don't you answer me, why don't you answer me? And she is nowhere. Somebody pulled her out of the lane, and I can't find her. So, I was all by myself, and I think that was my worst day, when I lost everything; all the confident, all the hope, all the – all the attention, everything. I lost everything. So I went back to – upstairs to live, and in a couple of days, I walked out of the line. And the soldier comes to me, what the hell are you doing? With the big rifle. I didn't say anything. He said, let me see your papers.

Q: Was this a German, or a Hungarian soldier?

A: A German.

Q: A German soldier.

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A: German. And I spoke fluently German, remember? But I couldn't say a word, the words didn't come out. What shall I say? He holds the rifle, and he says, give me your identification paper. And I actually, effectively started to shake, and I dropped my bag, and the cross fell out, what Mrs. **Martin** gave me. And he said, just go. And I feel this is a miracle. I feel that it's a miracle that the cross fell out. It was about six, seven o'clock already. So I wanted to go to Mrs. **Mona(ph)**, I didn't know exactly where she lived, and – and – and I didn't had money. So I remember taking buses, and trains, and whatnot. And I told the bus driver I'm a student, and I lost all my money. He says, that's all right. He didn't know I was Jewish. And then there was a fruit store, and I said to the owner, do you have any fruit which you can't sell, which is damaged, because I'm very hungry. So he went in the back, and he brought me out some fruit, and it was wonderful, because I was very hungry. So finally I found Mrs. **Mona(ph)** house.

Q: The same Miss **Mona(ph)** who you had stayed with before.

A: Right. And she opened the door, and she says, can I help you? She didn't recognize me. I mean, after 11 months in the ghetto, she didn't recognize me. I says, Mrs. **Mona(ph)**, this is **Chirpy**. Oh **Chirpy**, please come in. Let me take care of you. And – and – and, she did. Again, the same situation where I wouldn't allow myself to stay there, and risk her life, and her family life. I mean, such a decent

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person, how could I do that to her? So, a friend of a friend of a friend recommended me to be a mother's helper. So I left Mrs. **Mona(ph)** after three days, and then – this was end of already finish – almost finished, everything. I went to this lady, she had four children, and she was thrilled to have me. Which mother is not happy to have a mother's helper, you know? And she lived on a 10 flight house. And she said, oh, I'm so happy with you. Everything was fine. However, as it was the tail end of it already, the last months, in April 1945, that's when the liberation was. And the Germans, and the Russians and the Hungarians fought a staircase, the f – the – the elevation, the f – third floor, fourth floor, fifth floor, all different soldiers. I didn't know which is which because they all wore the boots, and they all had rifles. I didn't know which soldier was **[indecipherable]** but they didn't bother us, they were just fighting. For one floor they fought like two days.

Q: And so this was –

A: To take over the floor.

Q: So it's during the – the Siege of **Budapest** –

A: Right.

Q: – that this is happening.

A: Right, right.

Q: So it's right in your building.

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A: Right.

Q: Wow.

A: Yes. And we went on to the downstairs, to the basement, and that was equipped with the kitchen appliances, refrigerator and food. And they call it bunker, bunker. And we sometimes slept there, too. But there wasn't much of a time, there was – in the meantime, was no food at all. So the – they took horses, which one was shot before – there was no man, every man was in the army – women took the horse, sliced it up and made the stew out of it, or a soup out of it. And when I heard it, I went like this, you know? And th-the woman says, a rough woman, she says, if you hungry enough, you gonna eat it. And I was hungry enough to eat it.

Q: These were horses that had been shot that –

A: Right.

Q: – somebody found, and –

A: Was si-sitting on the street, lying on the street.

Q: Right in front of the building?

A: Right in front of the building. And I asked Mrs. **Mona**(ph) when I got there, where's **Ella**? And she said, she's trying to hide, by friends. She had a lot of friends, because she had the store, you know? She knew a lot of people. Well, I was there two months, at the – at this person, and then the Russians came in and shot all the

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Germans, and told them to go to ru – you coming with us to **Russia**. But there were no Germans any more, they were the Russians now. And the Hungarians were arrested, too. So the Russians said, we help you Jews. Somehow, nobody believed them. They didn't do anything for us. We were freezing. They had – didn't give us any food. So, they said, now you are free to go wherever you want to. But the problem was, we didn't have the strength to go anywhere. We had no place to go. Every house looks like a – a toy house, full of holes, full of holes, just like the people were damaged, shot, to the **[indecipherable]**. And then, about three days later, the English soldiers came to liberate. And then, we felt free. Every soldier took two, three people, and only took care of those two or three people. And blanket, and food, and tea, and – and – and for the head. April is a rough month, it's very windy, and cold, and the – that's when we were free, that's when we were liberated, in April 1945. Can we pause now?

Q: Sure, let's take a – a quick break. **[break]**

A: After the English people came in, and the soldiers, we were really free to go, and – and before we're able to leave, they had to straighten us up a little bit, out. I mean, the strength, the – the blankets, the food, and the kind words, and where you want us to take you. The house, I will tell you about that that after this, because it has its own story.

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Q: Please.

A: So, we come in back to a apartment, not to the same apartment, with Grandma, and **Ella**.

Q: So they both came out of hiding?

A: Yes.

Q: And you were able to reunite with them?

A: Right, all two of them. **Ella's** husband was taken to hard labor camp.

Q: So he – he was called up for forced labor.

A: Yes, for forced labor, yeah.

Q: Do you remember what year?

A: About – let me see that, 1945, 1944. 1944. A year before. So, we started to be – was – was nothing open, there wasn't a store open. Peddlers sold fruit and vegetables and oil, and eggs, whatever is absolutely necessary, but wasn't enough. So **Ella** and I went out to the railroad, and said, let's go to the – because her – she embroidered all her stuff. So that – embroidery comes from small town, far away, small, little bit back, left town, you know. A little education, and whatever. So, she felt that if we go to those ladies who work for her, they have some supply. So we go out one day, is no room on the train. We go out the second day, is no room on the train. And that kept on going, and then see, there's somebody sitting on the top of

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the train. So what do you do? You go on the top of the train. How do you go on top of the train? You take a rope, and you tie yourself on top of the train. About two hours of ride. And you don't move, you don't breathe, you don't anything, just hold onto the rope.

Q: So in order to get to the small town where your aunt had business contacts –

A: Right.

Q: – you had to go up to the top of the cars.

A: Because there's no room in the train. Everybody had the same idea. So we went there, to these people, and they were very gracious, and – I mean, they were working with Ella 20, 25, 30 years, it's not a – a s – a short relationship. Ant they packed us up flour, eggs, oil, I don't know what else, in big bag. Not bags, in sacks. So you think that was hard to go out to – on the train going there, but to bring this stuff with us – so we put everything on top of the train, tied it down, and bring it with us. And it – it worked, it worked. You know, like I was with the horse food, I would never think I eat it, never, ever. And I ate it, and you know what, I enjoyed it. When you were hungry enough, you eat it. Anyway, so we were trying to recuperate our lives, schools were closed, and people came back, and – from the concentration camps, and it was a situation which coming back from hell, because it was hell. They were like 60 pounds, 70 pounds, and he kept us in. I only came back



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because I – I know my mother is here, or my father is here, or my brother is here. No one was alive. No one was alive. There is a Jewish synagogue there, the biggest and largest synagogue in eastern **Europe**. It's spelled, the **Dohan**, do – **d-o-h-a-n** Temple. I have a picture. And they – and they threw the dead bodies there, so people came, and with their hands, they dug up the rocks and everything, in the hope that they feel some of their relatives. So the Jewish people build a tree there, and I'd like you to take a picture of it late-later. And every leaf represents a person. Hundreds and thousands of leaves. It was terrible, and the magnitude of people came back, they didn't – nobody handled us. I mean, the – the English people help us with food, whatever, but what can they do? And the months went by, the years went by, and about three years later, I decided to leave **Hungary**.

Q: Before we go there, so when you have these survivors of the camps coming back, is the first time that you, and other people who had been in **Budapest** the entire time, this is the first time you are really learning –

A: Yes.

Q: – about the camps, about **Auschwitz**.

A: Well, I heard about it, you know, very discreetly.

Q: Like – so that you – you have heard rumors.

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A: Yeah, there was some buzzing about it. Because remember on the stadium – at the stadium, we found out later that those buses took the Jews to the camp.

Q: Oh, and so you, way back then –

A: Way back then.

Q: – you knew – you knew about **Auschwitz**.

A: Yes. We didn't know **Auschwitz**, but we knew that there's not a good place.

Q: Yeah.

A: There were then gassing people. We knew that they taking a shower, and gas comes out.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And going back now to the liberation, after three years – and everything was twice as hard for me to take because my – my childhood. Who le – lost – losing a mo-mother at the age of four, and I just couldn't understand why me, why me? And I ask Grandma, how come Mother left – Mommy left, and she says – and I said to her, didn't she like me, did I do something bad? And she says, oh no, she loved you, but she had to go. Not that she wanted to go, but she had to go. Of course, later – later years I understood what she said, but it was very hard to comprehend at the time. And going back now, after three years of liberation, I wanted to leave. But you can't leave **Hungary**, you can't – there is no consulate there. And somebody –

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my – my uncle had a friend in **London** a – not in **London**, in **Essex**, which is three hours from **London**, in a hospital, a doctor. And gave me a student visa, a nurse student visa. So I packed up whatever I had, and went to **London**. Somebody was supposed to wait for me, nobody showed. It was so foggy that I said, excuse me, and the next day I saw it was a mailbox. It was so foggy. So I tried to call a number, I didn't end up going, so I didn't had the number. Finally, somebody came to pick me up, and took me to **Essex**, and I met that Hungarian doctor who send me the six months student visa. So next day I went to the hospital, and – and we going to the lowest floor. Good thing I didn't read English, because it says, the morgue.

Q: Yes, I was going to ask, before you went to **England**, did you speak any English?

A: I did, I did, a little bit. Make myself understood.

Q: Okay, and how – how'd you – did you learn this after the war had ended?

A: No, in **Budapest** I learned it, I had the je – English teacher.

Q: Oh, so –

A: Also, yes.

Q: Yeah, this –

A: But not much to talk about, really.

Q: Enough to get by.

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A: Enough to get –

Q: Okay.

A: – I mean, I didn't know how to read [**indecipherable**]. I didn't know. And we went all the way down, and we going to the morgue, and I – a couple of the nurse, like I am. And – and the doctor says, okay girly, this – this is where you're going to start working, and your work is gonna be to prepare the dead for burial. I felt the way you look. And you know, I was an average child, little more educated than an average – I spoke perfect German, and **Mimi**(ph) taught me everything. But even I couldn't understand that. I couldn't understand that. But I stayed there for four months. I collected enough money to go to **London**, and get the same job, a mother's helper job.

Q: Kind of like a domestic help?

A: Domestic help, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I applied for a visa. They asked me where do you want to go? I says, I don't care, because I didn't care. And they said, go to **USA**, you – your – you're gonna like it. And so okay, go to the **USA**. And put it a little bit in a nutshell, because it's a very long story, and a painful story, one day I get a – a letter that your visa arrived, and go down to the ocean, and you go with a boat, and you come to

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**America.** I went down there. All of a sudden I have a toothache, an abscessed tooth. I read dentist, because that's a universal word. I went to the dentist, and what a time to have an abscessed tooth, how can you figure that? How – what are the chances? But you had no money, of course, and he says, I take care of you. And he took care of me without money. So I go to the immigration, face to face to the person who handled my case, and he said, you're all right. And then said, wait a minute, one number is wrong. I says, what do you mean, wumber – number is wrong. He says, they didn't okay you, they okayed someone else.

Q: Oh, your – your visa? They approved someone else.

A: A mistake. A mistake. So, while I was in **England**, I made some connection to – because you – **England** didn't have any Jewish offices or consulate, or anything, so I – these two people, not there – people told me that in **Paris**, they do have. So I got the address, I got the phone number, and I called up, and there's always many lingua – you know, I spoke Hungarian, there – they have people there. I told them my story, and they said, okay, we take you over now. So we gonna pay for your trip, and you coming over to **Paris**, and we gonna put in a student visa for you, and you gonna stay – we took over a big hotel, and everything is free for you. Just you have to earn spending money. How do I earn – I didn't speak French or anything. I

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said wonderful, I mean, this was such a wonderful proposition. And I went, so I was in **Paris** now.

Q: And what year was that?

A: In 1947.

Q: And – I'm sorry wa-was it a Jewish organization that –

A: Yes, the Jewish Federation.

Q: Jewish Federation, okay.

A: That time it was called the **HIAS**.

Q: **HIAS**, okay.

A: And they put me in an apartment, in a – in a room with three girls, and it was fine. I mean, what I had before, everything was fine. And they fed me, and – and I went to work in a fur shop, because I knew how to sew. And in the first shop, I sewed in the lining to mink coats. Now, I don't know if you're familiar with, how could you, but the leather, to sew, it – all my fingers were bleeding, because to sew through leather, it's almost impossible. But you do, you do, you do. And so I worked part-time, and we gave in that, to a school, my visa application. And I was in **Paris** for two years, and I was told that I have the visa.

Q: After two years, you got the visa to the **United States**.

A: Yes.

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Q: Okay, so this – this brings us to year 1949?

A: Yeah – no, '48.

Q: Forty-eight.

A: I came here '48.

Q: Okay. So –

A: In 1948, I got the visa. Now, I'm – I'm – I'm very seasick, and I'm a very bad traveler. I have this phobia, I can't look down, I can't travel. It's – it's – it's bad. So they put us in a – in a broken down ship. Took three weeks to get there, and I was right away in the – in the hospital. Nobody came in. There was a Russian lady brought me food, out of her – good of her heart. Cause she couldn't talk, she felt sorry for me. So she came with food. I asked the doctor, what shall I do? There's no doctor there [indecipherable] cruise. Three weeks. Three weeks in the hospital room. So then the ship engine stopped. No – even my Russian lady wasn't there. No one was there. And I hear some yelling, anybody's here, anybody's here? So I understood it, and I yell, I'm here, I'm here. So this American soldier says, what you doing here? Everybody left – leaved the ship already. I says, well, I am in the hospital for three weeks already, an-and – and everybody left, they left me, they forgot about me. And I said, where are we? Are we in the ocean, where are we? No. And he picked me up – I was actually less than I am now, weighted less – picked

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me up and took me upstairs. He says, look, that's the Lady of Liberty. Holding me like this. Very happy, you know. Very few times I cried of happiness in my life, but that was the time when I cried of happiness. So we went to **Ellis Island**. And the reason we went to **Ellis Island**, because that's a – a spy ship I came with, some Russian spy ship. And they took it apart completely. I was three months in **Ellis Island**, so was everybody else. And they ask question. But you know, **Ellis Island** looked like the **Ritz Carlton**, you know, to me, because nobody bothered me, everybody was nice to me, and the only thing I didn't like when they closed the sliding doors, you know, the prison doors. But everything else was fine.

Q: So what – what was it like staying – you just –

A: They had questions, and they said, were you aware of that – that it's a sky – spy ship? I said, I wasn't ever aware of anything, I was in the hospital the whole time. Could you – could you verify this? I said, how can I verify it? If you have that the ger – Russian lady, says 90 percent they were Russians. So, do you know the lady's name? You know how she looks? I says, I know how she looks, but I don't know her name. Anyway, so they let us go after three we – months. It's a long time, three months, but it was okay. Very tiresome for me to talk about this, but I really want to do it. Then I came to the **Bronx**, in **New York**, to a – a – a far relation, a cousin removed couple of times. So she took me in her wings – under her wings. And she



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had one bedroom, and the living room was a pull out couch, and that's where I slept. And she says, you know how to sew, you have to go to a factory, where you make money. So I went to a dress shop, I made fairly enough, I paid my rent there, was five dollars. And she cooked for me. And the boss of the store didn't pay, he went bankrupt. It was not a union place. You know, it's amazing where I took the strength, where I took the hope, after all this slapping in the – on the face, you know? I mean, how much – how much can you take? I was 19 years old. How much can you take? So I went to another shop, which was very successful. I was there for 10 years. On a Hungarian New Year celebration, I met the young man. His name was **Sam Palkowitz**, and he was a refugee too, but he was in this country already couple years. He went to school to get his accountant **CPA** license. And at night he worked in a delicatessen, and so he finance his – himself with the money he made in the delicatessen. And after two years, we got married. He always said I married him because he was legal here, that he had the green card. It's not true. Is not true. But I told [indecipherable] oh my God, you know? It wasn't oh my God, but I didn't have better offers. And so we were married, everything was fine, we had two children, and then **Sam** got the **CPA** degree. He went to work for a **CPA** fir-firm, and I got my high school **equilency** diploma, and I went to work for a bank. And I was there for 13, 14 years, and became the – the manager of the bank. I stepped up

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very nicely. And we were fine. My son **Arthur** is an attorney, a part-time judge, and my daughter has her own real estate business. They all very successful, because I pushed them to no end. And I always said – and I’m saying on a public speaking, that knowledge is power. That’s what it says on **42<sup>nd</sup>** Street, in the library, and it’s true. That’s the only thing no one can take it away from you. Everything else goes. And they listened to me. And then the kids grew up, they went to college, and whatever. And I think getting from my birth, to getting to **America**, that’s my story. Lot of obstacles, lot of painful episodes, but that was the cards dealt to me. So, we could go on to **America** now, but I said most of it, anyway. I don’t want to go into **America**, because I just said it, but I want to speak about my father.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask what was happening with him, and your ste –

A: There was an announcement, that who is between 25 and 45 years of age, go to somewhere, a stadium, or whatever, go and be there. Who doesn’t come will be shot. So, we didn’t know what, my father was 37, 38, and he went there, and they took him to **Kiev**. On the – on the 30 degree cold – minus 30 degree, they made all of them, not only my father, work. Their work was to build a bridge, and the next day they – they blew up the bridge – the bridge. They used them as mined – you know what’s a mine? People dig on the ground and if you step on it, it blows up. The field mines. And they used them as a mine finder.

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Q: To go find them, to make –

A: Where the mines are, for the other soldiers to come. And they – they did that for months, and my father stepped on one of the mines, and took off one half of his leg. So he was taken to the hospital. And then, that happened again, at the tail end. And then the Germans pushed back the – the Russians pushed back the Germans, and the Germans had to leave, and before they left, they poured gasoline on the hospital, and burned it down. And this is not the hearsay, because the Red Cross had notified us.

Q: So they burned down the hospital with everyone in it?

A: Yes. Now, my – my Aunt **Ella**'s husband, **Emory**(ph), had the father and a mother. The mother was a piano teacher, and the father had a store, it's like **Ace Hardware**, but it was very specialized, very good business. And a very tall, handsome Hungarian soldier came, with many decorations on his jacket, came to the house, to that house where I showed you, and he said, **Emory**(ph) has to go to **[indecipherable]** my uncle has to go, but the father could be saved, if you write over the deed to me, the house deed. It was as quiet as now here. What do you do? So my uncle said, listen, alive is more than a house, and he wrote over the deed to the soldier. About a half a mile away, before the ink dried, they shot my grandpa and threw him out of the car. I went back, to try to get back, cause it's worth over

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two million dol-dollars now, and it's a legitimate transfer of deed ownership. He sold that 10 times already, you know? Because he wouldn't connected with it – the soldier. But I have no right to have that house.

Q: So the house you – this was the house you had been living in –

A: Right.

Q: – with your grandmother and aunt.

A: – right, yeah.

Q: So as soon as they say, you know, sign over, he'll be safe, they turn around and –

A: Yes. And this is just about the highlights. I could sit here and talk to you for days, because I only put everything in a nutshell. But since that – when I was four years old, and came out to **America**, it was nothing good, only bad. But not just a little bad, a drama. A thing where people don't get through easy. I went in **America** to – for 20 years, for clinical psychiatry studies. I had so much hatred in me. I had so – never wanted to forgive, never. But by psychiatrists I'm told, if you forgive, you release yourself, you are the winner. You don't hold the – the bitterness against people. They – if you really – if you forgive them, you are the winner, not the other people. And I felt that these people are educated, and smart, and – and – and for 20 years, I went to these meetings. Did I forgive? I don't know. Did I forget? No. But I'm going on with my life. I'm not a religious Jew, I'm not. Never been. I do

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believe in miracles, because the cross was a miracle. But, I cannot express what I feel, because what I would say is not legitimate. But I thank whoever took care of me, and made that cross fell out from my purse. And whoever watched over me, and God did that, and I'm very grateful for it. And if you have some question, please answer me. Ans – ask me.

Q: So, what was happening with your stepmother and half-sister during the war?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your father is sent to forced labor, but what about –

A: What – before? For three years they were married.

Q: Yes.

A: And my father worked, and my stepmother, right away, she was very business-like. She worked. She had made a little business for herself. The – the boots, what the government didn't use, which was – had a cut at the leg for some reason, she bought up those boots, and she opened a little – not even a store, like a peddler, you know? And she sold that, and she made so much money. She liked me. She preferred I don't live there, because I was still a package from the previous marriage. But if – I can't say that she was mean to me or anything. The sister was a different story. The sister said that the father – my father loved me much more than loved her. And my stepmother used to say, no, it's not true. So, she had the – she

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has problems. She went back to **Hungary** to live, and my stepmother lived here in **America**, married three times. If I want to be ugly, I would say, buried three husband. But I have nothing to complain about her, nothing. So, past 20 years, I went back to visit them. And she said, Daddy is looking down, and he's very happy that you come and visit us. And so, whatever truth in it is, I did.

Q: And did your – your aunt and your grandmother were hiding separately –

A: Yes.

Q: – during the [indecipherable]

A: They survived the war.

Q: Did they ever talk about what it was like in hiding?

A: No. Wasn't much to talk. That Mrs. **Mona(ph)** was a saint. You know, she took care of Grandma, and th-the people who **Ella** went to, they – they – they – they – they – they think she was an angel, you know? I mean, she did so many favor. That time, people didn't make donations, you know? Or have people like the newspaper boy. When he needed some books or something, came to **Ella** and says, could you help me out? I give you back the money. So she gave him the money, and always helped him. And – and I guess that's why he did what he did. I don't know. That's what he did. And a good deed comes back. Good deed comes back to you. And you must believe that. Maybe not that same day, or week, or month, or year, but in a

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lifetime, what you do good, it will come back to you. And I'm very fortunate, I have wonderful children. Wonderful children. Ambitious, and good, and – my son is 60 years old, was last week, and every mother says that, I think what I have the best children in the world. I'm probably a little prejudiced, but that's okay. That's okay. And so are my grandchildren. I'm very close to them. My husband died 15 years ago. He had the aneurysm, and in two weeks, he died. He didn't suffer with cancer or anything, which I was very grateful for.

Q: And he was a survivor as well?

A: Yes, he was. He was from **Czechoslovakia**. He was on a – on a – on a bus, transport bus there. I mean, I didn't know him then. And he jumped off the bus, and he broke his knee. And the bus stopped, and they, with their rifle, they hit his knee, the one that was broken, til he passed out. And they left him there. He said, this is your punishment, to try to escape. His father was a very rich man. His father comes from north **Hungary**, northern **Hungary**, **Ungvár**, it's – he had the winery, huge winery. Was very rich, and very powerful man. And he went to **Auschwitz**, and they couldn't kill him. They did – he was such a strong, big man, whatever job they gave him, he did it. And the last day, they shot him. He didn't come with me for the therapy, he couldn't. He says, I can't pour out my heart to a stranger. He never came with me. And that wasn't the best for the marriage, because he had that

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bitterness, that memory, losing his mother, and get a stepmother. But, that's was – in **Europe** they did that, you know [**indecipherable**] in birth, she died. Birth for him, in his birth, she died. And then the father remarried, and he was okay with the stepmother.

Q: And so he – he was on a transport to go to a camp, and that's when he – he jumped off?

A: He was taken for transport, to go to another camp – **Sam**, my husband –

Q: Yes.

A: – and he wanted to escape. In the narrow street with a lot of trees, he wanted to – he jumped out, he did. And somehow the driver saw it in the mirror, whatever he – I don't know.

Q: And they – then they, after beating him, left him.

A: Yes.

Q: And then he was able –

A: They thought that he was dead, and somebody found him. Some people, I don't know. I don't even know what country was it, **Hungary** or – or **Poland**, I don't know what country was it. And they brought him back to health. So, we could not survive without those Christian people, the ones helped us, not regarding the



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consequences, what comes helping a Jew. And those are the people we are very grateful to.

Q: So you – you mentioned that you visited – you visited **Hungary** several times.

A: Yes.

Q: – since moving to **America**. Was it strange being back?

A: I didn't look at the houses, I didn't look at anything. I stayed in a hotel.

Sometimes I went with friends, with American friends. And – but I don't like to go to a hotel by myself. It's not for a special reason. And then we – with my friend being [indecipherable] trip to **Italy**, or whatever, some other places, and then we visited **Irene**, my stepmother, and my stepsister. And we st-stayed with them two, three, four days, five days, according to a plan.

Q: I guess, was it – was it –

A: Was hard.

Q: Yeah.

A: Was hard. And then late – later, I visit – visited or so frequently, because it got more painful. And as you get older, it's harder to deal with it. But I did visit, I really did. But then my stepsister died, my stepmother died. She was 92, my stepmother. And that was the end of that story.

Q: So you – you speak to school groups now?

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A: Pardon?

Q: Y-You speak to all kinds of groups now, about your experiences. What made you decide to do that?

A: Which part of it?

Q: I guess, what – what made you decide to start speaking to groups, and telling them about your experiences?

A: Oh. I was invited first, in a jail. And then I was invited – it's a name, a leave – life – or a leave – a life. It's a group which is built by the government, and teenagers, 12, 13, 14, 15 – and I go there every year – are pregnant. So this organization take them to high school, and teach them high school, and they arranging a nursery for the children. And they were very down. I didn't say half of my story. Less than half. But I encourage them that there is no choice not to do anything, because if you don't do anything, you're going backwards. And who wants to go backwards? Your child doesn't deserve for you to give up. So I gave a pep talk, versus my talk. And it worked, it worked, the – some of them started to cry. They invited me every year, and – and that was the beginning. And then schools asked me to make speeches. And depends on the audience, depends on the people how much do I say of the bitter life I had. Depends on that. I do not say everything. I say some. For instance, in **Budapest**, the soldiers took the women up

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to the ho – office, to do office work, but that wasn't office work. When they were finding the second floor, third floor, five – fifth floor, it was two, three men raped the women. Some didn't come back at all, and the ones came back, I wish I couldn't come back. Bleeding, beaten up, black and blue. And that's how they co – came back. So this is – this is – this is a country occupation. It happens in every country. But I wore the – I mean, I was so young, I wore a kerchief around my head, a black kerchief, so I look ugly – not that I'm so beautiful, but I look ugly, and – and older, and didn't look anywhere like a – a retarded person I looked. I wanted to be – I didn't want to take – I mean, with due respect, I didn't want to be taken.

Q: And this was all soldiers that were doing it?

A: Yes, Hungarians, and German.

Q: What about the Soviet soldiers, when they came? Did this continue?

A: We didn't see sov – Soviet in the beginning. On the tail end, we did. We did.

Q: Were there also rapes?

A: I don't know, really. But we were very close to the German and the Hungarian soldiers. And that was – that was something which happened – I mean, watching the countries, what happens in the country, and transporting human being, and selling human beings, it happens all the time. But to me, that was the first one. That was the first experience, when they – they – they – they transporting – they using human

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beings. And to me that was a terrible thing. A terrible thing, which is **unexcusable**. Here you make money on it. There wasn't even money on it. It was coming to them. And we were very lucky, because the war started four years ago. We were the last country to be occupied. So we had only 11 months of the occupation, where four – and then the other countries had three, four years.

Q: And something else I wanted to ask you about the war years, and the years leading up, did you ever see – what was the party – the **Arrow Cross** doing in **Hungary**? The far – the Hungarian Fascist party, I think it's **Nyilas**?

A: **Nyilas**, yes, **Nyilas**.

Q: What were they – what were they doing? Do you remember any specific incidents, or

–

A: Yes, I remember. First of all, they wore – they wore a feather in their hats. Why is it important to me, because I – I – I was transferred to a – a big factory, at one time, for a month or so, with **Ella**. And we were hiding in the gutter, and we saw the feather, and then we just played dead. But that's my favorite incident. But they were a little bit more educated than the average soldier. They were like teaching the average soldier how to kill the Jews. And they were firm believers of the Germans **[indecipherable]**. Firm believer, **Nyilas**. You – you're free to mention that. It's a word you don't want to be any connection with.

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Q: So they – they were more feared –

A: Yes, yes. As I said, they were more educated than the average people. Educated by the government, and then the Germans took over their education. And that wasn't an education like the five subjects. It was one subject; how to kill the Jews. That's what he wanted, a pure country. There is only white people, and Christian people, and he – that's what he wanted. **Hitler**.

Q: Did you hear any – any rumors about the **Danube** shootings, by the **Arrow Cross**?

A: Yes. I don't – I didn't see it, but I was told that they tied their hands together in the back, they tied their feet together, they – they – they pushed them into the water, and then they shot them. And there are shoes on the **[indecipherable]** of – children's shoes, grown-up shoes, all shoes, because there were lot of, lot of children there. How did they got away with it? In – in school, I used to sit at the desk of the teacher – not sit on the desk, near the desk, and I saw the globe. And I was playing with it, and then it occurred to me, nobody hears us, nobody sees us, what's going on. Not one person in the world would help us. Why? And the world is big. And why we didn't get any help? But of course, I never got the answer.

Q: And the shoes, you're talking about the memorial?

A: Yes. Yeah.

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Q: Did you hear anything else, specific about the **Arrow Cross**?

A: The what?

Q: Did you hear anything else specific about the **Arrow Cross**?

A: No. No.

Q: It was just they were don – you were almost afraid to say the word **Nyilas**, or –

A: I don't hear you well.

Q: I guess you were – it was more of a general – you – you don't even say the word **Nyilas**. That's how much it was –

A: No, no. No way, no way, no way. Unless you say, I love the **Nyilas**. That's all you were allowed to say. I mean, wouldn't think about it. Wouldn't think about it. I mean, it was fire, you know? It was fire. Every house was injured, every person was injured, an-and that's why I left. I didn't want to live there. And you hear, and heard now, that I had a very difficult journey. Yet, I was told, go back, go back, aren't you homesick? No way. No way. The only thing I had there is my mother's grave, nothing else. I think we should end this com – this interview. Unless you have other questions.

Q: I had one more, if that's okay.

A: Okay, sure. Speak up.

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Q: You mentioned that you and your aunt were in a brick fac – held in a brick factory –

A: Yeah.

Q: – for a short time. Was this – was this after the stadium, and after the safe house?

A: Yes. After the safe house, after the stadium. Was before the marching, before the ghetto.

Q: Before the ghetto.

A: Was between the same hou – safe house and the ghetto. We were there a few weeks.

Q: And what – what were the conditions like in the brick factory?

A: I don't remember, but I don't even know what we did there. I don't remember. I mean, 70 years ago, you know. But I do remember that we have to find our own – own transportation, and we were looking to stop a car or a bus or something. And then I saw th-the feather, and then we played dead. Everybody knew about it, very few people didn't. You couldn't ignore it.

Q: So [indecipherable] my – my last question is, is there anything we haven't talked about already, that you would like to add to the interview?

A: Nothing more what would help to understand my life. Little things, which doesn't mean anything. For instance, I went to that fruit stand, and while the guy

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was back getting me fruit, I stole an egg, to take it to Grandma, and I put it in my blouse. I went to Grandma, and she ran, **Chirpy, Chirpy**, and she hugged me, and she broke the egg. But this is not a story, not part of a story which has any – any factor in it, you know? And little things like that.

Q: So – and y – you think we covered everything that you would like to –

A: Yes, I do.

Q: – to add.

A: I really do. Thank you so much for y – for your patience, and your questions and the way you conducted yourself up – you know, up to now, to meet, and I do appreciate it.

Q: Oh, I – I thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: So this – this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Edith Palkowitz**, on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2106.

A: Those are my parents; my mother and my father, from when – when they got married, in 1926. They both of – both of them were taken away from me during the war, and at the very early age, I became an orphan.

Q: Did you want us to get your phone, or are you okay?

A: No, no.



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Q: Okay, let me get one more shot of this.

A: This picture is from my beloved grandmother, who raised me after my mother died, and I'm holding there my little doll. As you can see my face, I was very sad because my mother was taken away from me.

Q: And how old do you think you were?

A: I think I was seven, eight years old. I was four when my mother died ... I was eight or nine years old here, wearing the Hungarian national dress outfit. That was a celebration, some sort of, and it's a great honor to be in it. I know I was saying a poem, and it was a great honor for me. Everyone was very proud. This picture was taken way after the war, behind the **Dohan** Temple, which is the largest temple in the eastern **Europe**. Every leaf is dedicated to someone who died there. When people came back, before this was put up, they dug with your – their hands to find relatives, siblings, children, but very few was – even pieces of the bodies. So they put up this beautiful tree. The leaves are silver, and every leaf has a monogram.