

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA**

MEMOIRIST: EVA DUKESZ FRIEDLANDER
INTERVIEWERS: JOHN KENT
RUTH EINSTEIN
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INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

John: [Today is] May 7, 2008. We are in Atlanta, Georgia. I am John Kent. Let us start with your name and your name at birth also.

Eva: My name is Eva Friedlander. My maiden name was Eva Dukesz, D-U-K-E-S-Z.

John: You were born when and where?

Eva: [I was] born in Budapest [Hungary on] May 11, 1921.¹ My mother's name was Margit. My father's first name was G-E-Z-A, Geza.

John: Did you have any brothers or sister?

Eva: No brothers, no sisters. Only child.

John: Start with what your family life was like and what your earlier memories are.

Eva: My mother was a very celebrated actress. She comes from a very rich family. My grandfather had an estate about 25 miles from Budapest. The name of the town where he had his place [was] called Pecel, P-E-C-E-L [Hungary].² My mother expressed her wish early after high school that she wanted to study singing and acting. Against my grandparents' wishes, she had her way, and she went to Vienna [Austria] to study acting.³ They sent an old maid aunt with her as a chaperone. She lived there for a while. After a while, her parents insisted that she come back to Hungary, which she did.

Then . . . I'm not exactly sure how my father and mother met . . . they did meet. My father was a civil engineer and a very good-looking man. I have his portrait in my bedroom . . . It

¹ Budapest is the capital and the largest city of Hungary. Originally it was 'Buda' and 'Pest,' which were two separate cities that were separated by the Danube River. They were united in 1873 and became 'Budapest.'

² Pecel [Hungarian: Pécel] is a town that is today part of Budapest, Hungary's metropolitan area. It is situated a little over 12 miles (20 kilometers) from Budapest's city center.

³ Vienna is the capital and largest city of Austria, and one of the nine states of Austria. It is Austria's primary city and is the cultural, political, and economic center of Austria.

was a very interesting marriage because they were both highly-educated and very sophisticated people. Their friends who came to the house were doctors and research people, so it was a very fine cultural atmosphere. We lived in an apartment because in Budapest, they didn't have suburban life that we have here in America. Unfortunately, the marriage went south because my father's business ventures didn't work out in many occasions. Many times, money initiates conflict between men and women. The marriage went bad, and finally, after I turned . . . 13 or 14, they separated. They never legally divorced; they separated. My father then lived with somebody who was a very successful businesswoman and he kind of stabilized his financial situation.

From that point on—when he left and my mother and I stayed together alone—I didn't get much help from him financially. There was no question I had to start thinking in terms of making money. My father financed for a year a secretarial course for me, which enabled me to apply for a job as an experienced secretary [doing] shorthand, typing, some bookkeeping, and the usual things. That's how I started working and that's how we sustained our livelihood with my mother. My mother was multi-lingual also, and she started taking in children and taught them German, and French, and English. We lived together and that's how we managed our life. Here and there we did get some financial help from my father, but very irregular and not enough to take care of our needs. It also meant that I couldn't continue my education, which unfortunately was a thing that cannot be [or] couldn't be repaired. But I was very eager and very interested. I self-educated myself all along from that point on . . .

John: During the thirties, when you were a teenager, how much were you aware of what was happening in the rest of Europe yet?

Eva: Quite a bit. When I was a teenager, I was already a working girl. My first job was in a very high-class legal office. There were two attorneys [who were] partners—one Jewish attorney, who was my boss, and then a non-Jewish attorney who was . . . the provider of the clientele and the lead to all the cases that they were interested in handling. It was a big office, and each attorney had their own private areas, and private secretaries, and legal clerks. That's how I started working. It was already quite obvious that the clouds are gathering and things are getting worse and worse. I worked in that office for six years. By that time, all the restrictions

started coming in.⁴ I was fully aware of everything and, naturally, suffered by the limitations in many ways.

John: Was there any of the antisemitic attitude before Hitler [came to power and became influential in Hungary]?⁵

Eva: Yes, of course.

John: That was already in Hungary before?

Eva: Very much so, yes . . . Many Hungarian-Jewish families changed their names and ‘Hungarized’ their names to feel more secure, and show their intent to assimilate, and be part of the regime, and feel more comfortable.⁶ Nevertheless, it was in the air. When I was in elementary school, I think there were only two Jewish children in my class and because the school was short in space and classrooms, the two Jewish children had to sit in the back when the rest of the children had their religious educations because in Hungary the schools provided religious education. It wasn’t the church that took care of that . . . the school, actually. I was immediately aware . . . I couldn’t help being aware of the fact that I am a second-class citizen or somebody that has to work around the issues and the laws.

John: What did you make of that as a young person? What was your understanding of why this was happening, and what it means, and all that?

Eva: I’m not sure that I remember my complete perception about all this, but the fact was that I felt on the sidelines because some of the children that were in my class in school had parties and sometimes I wasn’t invited because . . . My mother explained to me, “Well, those were all the Christian children, and they probably didn’t want to invite you,” and on, and on, and

⁴ In the period between World War I and World War II, Hungarian Jews were violently persecuted. Anti-Jewish legislation began in 1920, when Hungary had passed one of the first antisemitic laws in Europe. As Hungary fell increasingly under the influence of Germany and the Nazi regime, persecution continued in the 1930s with a series of “Jewish Laws” that restricted the number of Jews in universities, liberal professions, administration, and commerce. As early as May 1938, Hungary had adopted comprehensive anti-Jewish laws and measures. In 1941, racial laws that were modeled on Germany’s Nuremberg Laws were introduced. The new laws reversed the equal citizenship granted to Jews in Hungary in 1867. Among other provisions, the laws defined “Jews” in so-called racial terms, forbade intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, excluded Jews from full participation in various professions, and restricted their opportunities in economic life.

⁵ Pressured by domestic radical nationalists and fascists, the Hungarian government began to build an alliance with Nazi Germany soon after Hitler came to power in 1933. In November 1940, Hungary officially aligned itself with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Hungarian troops participated alongside German troops in the 1941 invasions of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, but Germany did not directly control the internal activities of Hungary until the country was occupied in 1944.

⁶ The Hungarian racial laws passed between 1938 and 1941 barred employment of Jews in the civil service and restricted their opportunities in economic life. By 1939, many Hungarian Jews had converted to Christianity to combat the loss of work and poverty.

on . . . many issues that were obvious. As soon as I started reading and became aware of what was going on, it was quite clear that we were more and more limited in possibilities, in careers, in rights, and in privileges.

John: In what way were you and your family Jewish?

Eva: In what way? I'm not sure that I understand the question.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

John: What I mean is, was it a religious family or was it more of an identity culture? What did it mean to you to be Jewish?

Eva: Typically the Hungarian Jews—at least the ones I have known—were not observant, extensively, of Jewish traditions very much. Major holidays, yes. Everybody went to synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah*,⁷ and *Yom Kippur*,⁸ and all of that. But my mother never was lighting candles Friday night.⁹ I started that when we came over here. Strangely, my children were very much intent on going in this direction, but as a child, I wasn't raised in a very strict Jewish tradition.

John: Did the oppression and the separation of 'you're Jewish and you're different,' make you more curious about it or want to be more identified with it?

Eva: 'Curious' is not the word. I think I felt limited . . . and somehow on the sidelines and actually resentful. I had an advantage as a child and as a young girl. I was born blonde. I was a pretty child and very non-Jewish-looking. My parents both mentioned it on many occasions that, "You are fortunate. You don't look Jewish." That was somehow sort of a protective element in making me feel that I am going to be more capable of handling the different issues than some people who looked very typically Jewish.

John: What were your personality and your mentality like as a young person? How would you describe yourself?

⁷ *Rosh Ha-Shanah* [Hebrew: head of the year; i.e. New Year festival] begins the cycle of High Holy Days. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, G-d sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. Prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on Yom Kippur may revoke these decisions.

⁸ *Yom Kippur* [Hebrew: Day of Atonement] is the most sacred day of the Jewish year. *Yom Kippur* is a 25-hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting *yizkor* for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to *Torah* readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the *shofar* (a ram's horn).

⁹ Women traditionally do the lighting of the candles on Friday evening before sundown to usher in the Sabbath. After lighting the candles the woman waves her hands over them, covers her eyes and recites a blessing: "*Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light Shabbat candles.*"

Eva: I was very interested in art and literature because this was the direction that my parents put me in, particularly my mother. Even though we couldn't continue my high school education since I had to drop out and work, my mother, through some friends, arranged for me to go to a lady's house, who was the wife of one of the prominent journalists in Hungary. I don't remember her last name. I called her Aunt Steffie, Stephanie. I spent many, many afternoons with her talking about literature, art . . . She had . . . her books were up to the ceiling. We sat on the floor, looking at the reproductions of the paintings, and statues, and things like that. That definitely put me in the direction of being interested in finer things in life. That was pretty much prevalent through all my life.

John: Do you have any knowledge of how the antisemitic direction influenced your mother and father or how it affected them?

Eva: I don't know whether my father's business dealings had suffered too much. I think some of the problems he had in his activity were related to poor judgment in business decisions and investments, and not necessarily Jewish issues. My mother, who was on the stage in Vienna, was probably not having any problems on that line. I think things started increasing as I was growing up and I was a teenager. Through my experiences, they were naturally hurt and offended.

John: As you say, the clouds were gathering. What was your thinking and your parents' thinking about, "What are we going to do?" Was there any forethought . . .

Eva: I don't recall that we made definite plans in that direction. I think we were trying to deal with the daily issues, and financial problems, [and] how to navigate our lives, particularly after my mother and I stayed together and managed our life basically on our own. The real major decision-making was coming around much later, after the Jews had been designated to certain areas in Budapest . . . where you were supposed to live in certain areas . . . or they moved families together in one apartment, and several families occupied one apartment which was only

suited really for one.¹⁰ That's when the real picture came through that we are headed into major, major problems.

My father conducted his own life after my parents separated, and unfortunately, he was under the influence of this woman that he lived with, who was either optimistic or stupid. She kept telling him that, "We're going to be okay. We're going to work for the Germans, and they're going to pay for us, and we're going to make it." Unfortunately, that's not what happened because when things were getting really bad in the fall or winter of 1944. They had taken him and her. She jumped [off] the train and worked her way back to Budapest. From that point on, we don't know what his fate was. To this day, I still don't know. I've been working with a lady here who is a volunteer for the International Red Cross.¹¹ I just got a letter from her, which stated his name and what happened, but no outcome . . . We don't know where he died or what happened to him.¹² My cousin—my mother's brother's youngest child—was taken and we do

¹⁰ At the end of November 1944, the remaining Jews in Budapest were ordered to move to a ghetto established in the city's old Jewish quarter on the Pest side in an area bounded by Dohany, Kertesz, Kiraly, Csanyi, Rumbach, Imre Madach streets and the Karoly ringroad. The ghetto area included two of Budapest's main synagogues, the Dohany Street Synagogue [Hungarian: *Dohány utcai zsinagóga/nagy zsinagóga*] and the Orthodox Kazinczy Street Synagogue [Hungarian: *Kazinczy utcai zsinagóga*], which housed a *mikveh*, or ritual bath. The ghetto was short lived, but like other ghettos set up in German-occupied Europe, its residents suffered from horrible conditions that included a lack of food and sanitation as well as the constant terror of violence from the Arrow Cross. When the Soviet Army liberated Budapest in February 1945, more than 100,000 Jews remained in the city.

¹¹ Eva is likely referring to the International Tracing Service. As early as 1943, the Allies anticipated the end of the war would leave millions of displaced people searching for loved ones. Acting on the initiative of the Headquarters of the Allied Forces of the British Red Cross in London, a central tracing office for prisoners, forced laborers, refugees, and missing persons was established in London. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), assumed the work of the central tracing office on February 15, 1944 and at the end of the war, established a temporary headquarters in occupied Germany in Frankfurt am Main. In January 1946, the office was moved to Bad Arolsen, Germany. In 1947, the International Refugee Organization took on the management of the tracing services and in 1948 it was named the International Tracing Service [German: *Internationaler Suchdienst*; French *Service International de Recherches*; also called the 'ITC']. Today, it is an internationally governed center for documentation, information and research on Nazi persecution, forced labor and the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and its occupied regions. The archive contains about 30 million documents from concentration camps, details of forced labor, and files on displaced persons. ITS preserves the original documents and clarifies the fate of those persecuted by the Nazis.

¹² Eva's father probably was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. From May 15 to July 9, 1944, Hungarian gendarmerie officials, under the guidance of German SS officials, deported around 440,000 Jews from Hungary. Most were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, upon arrival and after selection, SS functionaries sent approximately 320,000 of them directly to the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and deployed approximately 110,000 to forced labor in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. Thousands were also sent to the border with Austria to be deployed at digging fortification trenches.

know that he was taken to the [Josef] Mengele camp, where they experimented with the children.¹³ That's where he perished.

John: What about your mother?

Eva: My mother and I were hiding with false identity papers on the other side of Budapest. We originally lived in Pest.¹⁴ Then when I provided these IDs, we left our apartment and we took two different directions. My mother was keeping children for a large family. She lived with them with her new identity. I was working in an office. I had to make some money because I didn't have any reserves to sustain my life. I dyed my hair black, and I had glasses, and worked the situation for a while in that fashion.

John: Going back to the beginning of the war, how did things change after 1939 or 1940? What was Hungary like during those early war years?

Eva: You mean after the Germans took over?¹⁵

John: Right.

Eva: Restrictions . . .¹⁶

John: There was that span of four or five years before the Holocaust really hit Hungary.

Eva: Right. My dates are not exactly accurate in my mind because we're looking at a 57-year distance or 60-year distance. When you say, "How was it like . . ." Restricted movements. The

¹³ Eva is referring to the Auschwitz-Birkenau network of camps that were built and operated by Germany just outside the Polish town of Oswiecim (renamed 'Auschwitz' by the Germans) in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. It is estimated that the SS and police deported at a minimum 1.3 million people (approximately 1.1 million of which were Jews) to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex between 1940 and 1945. Camp authorities murdered 1.1 million of these prisoners. Josef Mengele was an SS physician who earned the nickname the 'Angel of Death' in Auschwitz-Birkenau. He was notorious for being one of the physicians who sorted newly arrived prisoners on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, picking out those he wanted for his medical experiments—especially twins. Many survivors recall being selected by Mengele, but caution should be used as a number of German physicians were present in the camp and took turns performing the selections at the arrival ramp and during routine roll calls.

¹⁴ The Danube River divides Budapest, Hungary. The west bank is called 'Buda' and the east bank is called 'Pest' although it is now one city, Budapest.

¹⁵ Hungary was an ally of Germany during the war. It remained 'independent' until March 1944, when the Germans invaded it and a puppet government was installed under the pro-German Ferenc Szalasi of the fascist Arrow Cross Party. Miklos Horthy was still officially the regent until he was formally removed and arrested in October 1944. Before March 1944, Horthy had refused to deport Hungarian Jews to their death, but did persecute them relentlessly along the lines of the Nuremberg Laws in Germany. After the German puppet government took over, nearly 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported immediately, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them were murdered. The Soviets liberated Hungary in January 1945

¹⁶ Until the German occupation in March 1944, Hungarian Jews were not required to wear yellow stars. Authorities commenced issuing anti-Jewish decrees immediately after the German occupation in March 1944. The Germans isolated the Jewish population from the outside world by restricting their movement and confiscating their telephones and radios. Jewish communities were forced to wear the yellow star on their clothing. Jewish property and businesses were seized, and from mid- to late April, the Jews of Hungary were forced into short-lived ghettos.

yellow star order came in and we had to wear that. [There were] certain hours when Jews shouldn't be on the street. These are the hours when you can shop, or go to the store, or take care of your errands. Things were narrowing more and more. Families relocated. Professionals couldn't continue their activity. The man that I worked for had to drop out of that legal office because he just couldn't stay. He was managing the matters from his house. [The restrictions went] on and on.

John: How did individuals treat you? I mean, apart from the formal rules and laws that were implemented. How did the people around you treat you?

Eva: I had a number of nice young girlfriends. Their attitudes didn't change. We stayed close. I don't know. It's hard to put in words because the discrimination was very obvious and coming through in every way—not necessarily always verbally, but in looks, and attitude, and this kind of thing.

John: Did the majority of the Christian Hungarians seem to agree with the changes or were they grumbling?

Eva: Absolutely. They were very willing to adopt all the all the trends. There was a whole new generation . . . young kids, basically. They formed a party . . . the Arrow Cross Party, which consisted of these teenagers or maybe 20 to 30 young men and women, who were very happily serving the Germans.¹⁷ They were the ones who came to the apartment buildings and homes, and helped to round up the Jews, and line them up to be shipped out of the country, or be taken to forced labor camps, and things like that. The Hungarians were extremely willing to oblige the Germans. They had outdone the Germans many times.

John: During the early 1940s, was there any option of getting out or was it too late by that point?

Eva: There were a number of Jewish families in Hungary, in Budapest, who had the money and had the insight to leave and go elsewhere. My mother and I were not in the position. Neither

¹⁷ The Arrow Cross Party [Hungarian: *Nyilaskeresztes Párt-Hungarista Mozgalom*] was the most extreme of the Hungarian Fascist movements in the 1930s. It consisted of several groups but is most commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc Szalasi in 1938. It was modeled specifically on the National Socialist party (Nazis) in Germany and was extremely antisemitic. It had begun to lose support by 1941, but its fortunes rose in March 1944 when Szalasi and the Arrow Cross party was installed by the Germans as a puppet government, although Admiral Horthy was still regent and nominally in charge. In October 1944, Horthy was deposed and arrested and the Arrow Cross assumed the total rule of the country. The Arrow Cross government enforced a regime of terror on all Hungarians, although Jews suffered most heavily. The Arrow Cross was responsible for the deportation and death of an estimated 440,000 Hungarian Jews.

was my father. Those were the people who were the smart ones . . . Many of them had money in Swiss banks or family connections in west Europe or even in the United States. They left, but the majority couldn't do it or they didn't see the need. They were . . . many of them felt till the very last minute that, "It's going to be okay, that we're going to survive." It was hard to convince them that it wasn't going to be that way.

John: What do you remember about when the formal Holocaust started in Hungary around the spring of 1944?

Eva: Yes, spring and summer. What do you mean by what do I remember? People were called into forced labor camps, one after the other.¹⁸ People were ordered to report to these camps. They had to supply their own equipment—boots, and blankets, and sweaters, and stuff. Things were happening. Many very brave people were trying to help. That's how some of these so-called 'protected houses' came about where Jews were under the protection of [the] Swedish and Swiss governments' protection.¹⁹ For a while, the Hungarian government respected it, but then gradually those things deteriorated just as badly. They were all temporary solutions and it was obvious where we were going.

John: How did you and your mother get those false identity papers?

¹⁸ In 1939, the Hungarian government, having forbidden Jews to serve in the armed forces, established a forced-labor service for young men of arms-bearing age. By 1940, the obligation to perform forced labor was extended to all able-bodied male Jews. After Hungary entered the war, the forced laborers, organized in labor battalions under the command of Hungarian military officers, were deployed on war-related construction work, often under brutal conditions. Subjected to extreme cold, without adequate shelter, food, or medical care, at least 27,000 Hungarian Jewish forced laborers died before the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944.

¹⁹ Eva is talking about the mission of Raoul Wallenberg (1912—unknown), a Swedish businessman recruited by the US War Refugee Board (WRB) in June 1944 to travel to Hungary. Given status as a diplomat by the Swedish legation, Wallenberg's task was to do what he could to assist and save Hungarian Jews. Wallenberg led one of the most extensive and successful rescue efforts during the Nazi era, saving thousands of Hungarian Jews. With authorization from the neutral Swedish government, Wallenberg began distributing "Schutzpasses," certificates of protection issued by the Swedish legation to Jews in Budapest. He established 'safe houses' where these protected Jews could live and would theoretically not be bothered by the Germans. For a while, the Germans respected this but as the atmosphere radicalized increasingly they ignored the Swedish passes and violated their safe houses, taking any Jews they wished for deportation. When the Russians liberated the city in February 1945, there were about 70,000 Jews still in the ghetto, another 25,000 under Swedish diplomatic protection and another 25,000 who had successfully hidden themselves. Wallenberg was last seen in the company of Soviet officials on January 17, 1945, as the Red Army besieged Budapest.

Eva: I had young friends who had been connected with the Underground or did their own . . . research.²⁰ They provided this for me without any money. Basically, they were getting money from people who could afford it, but because they were friends and they wanted to help me, they provided me with these things. That saved my life.

John: What name did you have? Do you remember?

Eva: Barbara Nagy, N-A-G-Y, was my name. I forget my mother's name.²¹ She was not related to me, as far as paperwork is concerned. That was an altogether different . . .

John: Describe what day-to-day life was during those months.

Eva: When we were in hiding? As I said, we left our apartment with all our basic belongings, just a few essentials [in] a little suitcase. I took this job as a secretary in a little office. Before this happened . . . Maybe I need to backtrack a little bit, because there were already restrictions.

At that time—in the early stages—I took a job as a nurse in the Jewish hospital in Budapest because one of the doctors there—who was a friend of my family, who was the chief [obstetrician-gynecologist]—arranged it that they hire me. I was like an office assistant, or lab assistant, or whatever you want to call that. That helped a little bit. Then that started getting a little touchy. I felt that that's not going to help for long and undertook a job . . . The Germans were manufacturing aluminum. They took over several big factories in the surrounding area of Budapest. They were hiring people for actual factory work. I took that job after I dropped this hospital job. I worked there. That was extremely difficult and very stressful.

I noticed that they started picking people and assigned them to other places. My fear was that the end will be that soon I [would] get [put] into a transport, or a camp, or something. I didn't show up after a few weeks in that job. That's when my mother and I decided that we were just going to separate and try to live on the other side of the city, where we were not that well-known, with new identities, and new looks, and try to weather the storm.

John: You had those yellow stars for a while?

²⁰ With the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, the Zionist youth movements in Budapest decided to go underground and to pursue every possible avenue to save Jews. The underground smuggled 7,000-15,000 Jews into Romania, until the border became a front line in August 1944. It set up a workshop for forging documents, which were also used to release Jews from labor battalions and death marches to Austria. About 100,000 protective passes, "Schutzpasses," were issued made by the underground and distributed to among Jews in Budapest. After the rise to power of the Arrow Cross in October 1944 and the renewal of the murders, the underground acquired 52 children's homes, supposedly under the auspices of the International Red Cross. About 6,000 children and instructors lived in the houses until liberation.

²¹ Eva's mother used the name Margit Kocsis in hiding.

Eva: Yes.

John: Then, after you got the papers, you . . .

Eva: Then, when all these jobs fizzled out on me and I felt that these were not going to help in the long run, that's when we decided to leave the apartment and walk away with very few necessities and establish something on the other side of the city.

As a matter of fact, one of the young attorneys—who was an escapee from one of the forced labor camps [and] who originally was working in the same legal office where I started my business activity or secretarial activity—he met me one day. He told me that he was going to try to save his life by acting as a young Hungarian officer. He got a hold of a uniform. He asked me if I wanted to team up with him. He was going to take a little apartment in the Buda section, and pretend that he was a newlywed, and he was on leave of absence because he got married. But he needed a wife. He asked me if I wanted to play his wife. After some deliberation, I said, “Okay,” so we did. We rented this little apartment and came there one day. He rented it and then I joined him the next day [pretending] that we just had our wedding. I came there with the flowers and we acted like we were newlyweds.

We stayed there together for a couple of weeks. Then the landlady got a little suspicious because he was hanging around the place too much, too long. She asked too many questions, and we felt that this is not going to work very [well]. That had to breakup, so he went his way and I went my way. He actually survived the whole period. He ended up in a forced labor camp but he escaped, so he saved his life. I managed my own life in a different direction. But that was one of the interesting episodes.

John: Do you remember what the feeling or tone was during that period? How did you feel day-to-day?

Eva: I was talking to a friend the other day about this. I don't think that I was in a constant panic because, somehow or another, when you are in a dangerous situation and you feel like you have to act . . . At least, that was my mental process. I didn't allow myself to be panicky and wring my hands [saying], “Oh, my God, what am I going to do?” I did what I felt I needed to do in bold ways and risky ways because that's what instinct told me to do. Looking back on it now, I can't understand how I did it. In my present state of mind, I possibly couldn't do it, but at that time, I did it and I got away with it. It worked. It was just brazen and taking chances, I guess.

John: How much contact did you have with your father at that point?

Eva: Very little. Here and there. I phoned him and I begged him not to stay and wait until he was being picked up and transported. [He said,] “No, no . . .” He was very optimistic and, because of this woman’s influence, I didn’t get anywhere with him. Unfortunately, that was it.

John: Continuing towards the end of 1944 now, in terms of your situation, what were you doing? This was about the winter of 1944.

Eva: The last part or the last phase of our hiding in Buda was that . . . my mother and I finally did get together because the bombardments were intense.²² Everybody knew that we are coming to the end [of the war] and the Germans were crumbling, retreating. We felt that we should be together and try to stay with each other, rather than being separated in different areas. I stayed with her maybe a little over a week, in somebody’s house whom we never met. This was a beautiful residence in the Buda side, a villa that was owned by some very wealthy people who disappeared. In the basement of this house, there were about eight or ten people—basically all strangers who came together on a similar basis like my mother and I—[and who] just sort of drifted in there. We were hunkering there. They had a couple little chairs and a bench, and there we were [waiting], knowing that, “This is it.” I mean, we’re trying to stick it out until the bitter end.

This is actually what happened because . . . after six or seven days, the Russians came. They entered the basement and they started their looting, and their taking people away, and getting whatever they could get out of the little belongings that people had in the basement. That was the final phase of this thing. Then, when it seemed like it was clear, my mother and I tried to walk back to Pest on one of the remaining bridges (because most of the bridges were destroyed), to find our apartment—which we did—but that, too, was looted. Half of our belongings and furniture was taken, but at least we were together and started to rebuild our lives a little bit.

John: Was there a specific day when the war ended there? Was there any announcement or anything that specific?

Eva: When we were staying in this cellar with these other people who were trying to hide and stick it out, there was a person with a radio. It sounded like things were calming down and it was safe to come out, but during that week, there were numerous bombardments and houses

²² On December 26, 1944, the Russian and Romanian armies surrounded the city of Budapest, Hungary. The city was strongly defended by German and Hungarian troops and a siege lasted for two months. During the siege, about 38,000 civilians died through starvation or military action. The city unconditionally surrendered on February 13, 1945.

crumbled all around us. We were running out of food, and on one occasion, myself, and my mother, and a couple of those other people that we were hiding with decided that we were going to venture out to see if we could find some food. We were roaming around and there was a store that was already broken into long ago, but they had some leftover little cans and supplies that we just took. Somebody had a little . . . sterno or something in that basement so we could heat up a couple cans of something.²³ There was a dead horse. It was very cold because it was still wintertime when all of this was going on. There was a dead horse in a neighboring street, and one of the men in this group said, “We’re going to try to cut up some meat, and take it back, and try to cook it,” which we did. That helped a little bit. Those were the final days before the liberation.

We experienced the liberation, of course, by the Russians, who unfortunately were not very merciful about the first few days where they were allowed to loot. In fact, the first group that came in that cellar that looked around, they asked for watches. They already had a bunch of watches on their arms because that’s what they were looking for [as well as] alcohol. They were taking people’s cologne and drank it, and looked for wine, and whiskey, or whatever. They were also looking for girls. This one Russian, with the bushy hair and that fur cap, grabbed my hand and started taking me out toward the steps to go up from the basement, up to the street.²⁴ My mother, who was sitting next me, knew immediately what was going to happen. She ran after me and this soldier, who was dragging me. My mother started screaming and carrying on in Hungarian. She didn’t speak any Russian. For some strange reason, after 15 [or] 20 steps, he let me go. We never found out whether he got scared that it caused too much commotion or he decided that he didn’t want any of this thing. But my mother was very brave and just followed, and yelled, and screamed, “Let my daughter go! Let my daughter go!” He let me go, so we went back. A day or two after that, things were clearing, and everybody dispersed, and everybody went their own way. But that was a very close call and a very threatening one. My mother acted so bravely.

John: Do you remember any other close calls earlier during the war when you were in danger?

²³ Sterno ("canned heat") is a fuel made from denatured and jellied alcohol. It is designed to be burned directly from its can. Its primary uses are in the food service industry for buffet heating and in the home for fondue and as a chafing fuel for heating chafing dishes. The name comes from that of the original manufacturer, S. Sternau & Co.

²⁴ Eva is referring to an *ushanka*, a Russian fur cap with earflaps that can be tied up to the crown of the cap, or fastened at the chin to protect the ears, jaw, and lower chin from the cold.

Eva: There were quite a few. There was one incident that was several months before the very end. I was walking on one of the main streets in Budapest—one of the beautiful, very wide streets . . . probably Andressy . . . I’m not sure if it was Andressy . . . one of the big, wide streets.²⁵ I was . . . [I] don’t know what I was planning to do. There was a patrol car coming. I had false identity [papers] with me. I never had any similar occasion, so I never had to test this situation. These people . . . these soldiers came and asked for identity. I handed them my little card, but I knew that they were probably going to discover that it’s a phony one.

I said to this one soldier, “I need to go to the bathroom. Please let me go. I’ll run into this house and come out in a minute.” I left the identity [card] in his hand. I ran into this house. I had no idea what I’m dealing with. I just wanted to get away. Miraculously, this house was one of those old buildings where there was a huge entry door in the front and then you entered the courtyard. Then going through the courtyard, there was another door, which led to another street. There was a name for a house like that [**Hungarian: 37:14; sounds like “arterio”**] house, which means that you could go from one street to the other through that courtyard. I didn’t know that that’s what’s going to be. It was an absolute miracle, so when I realized what was happening, I dashed through the courtyard and exited on the other door. [I] left my ID with this man, but I was safe, and got away, and made my way to where I wanted to go. There were several similar situations where people were suspicious, and they questioned me, and somehow I got away. I’m not sure that I remember all my close-call incidents, but this is one of the things that definitely . . .

John: You mentioned that your father was either optimistic or foolish.

Eva: Yes.

John: What was your attitude or expectation throughout that time?

Eva: I was determined that I’m going to make use of every means and ways to save my life and my mother’s and not wait, and hope, and trust that it is going to be okay. I was in touch with a lot of the young people who had Underground connections. They were well informed and they were the ones who spread the news [about] what is happening to people who are put in transports

²⁵ Andressy [Hungarian: *Andrássy*] Avenue is a boulevard in Budapest, Hungary, dating back to 1872. It was named after Prime Minister Gyula Andrássy. It was constructed to link the city center with the city park, the *Városliget*, and was considered a masterpiece of city planning at the time. It is lined with Neo-renaissance mansions and townhouses. It was recognized as a World Heritage Site in 2002.

and what is happening to people who are unprotected in this difficult time.²⁶ I didn't have too many illusions that I [could] just sit down and everything is going to be okay.

John: Once the war did end, how did you and your mother continue from there?

Eva: We were fortunate that we found our apartment, although it was looted and in terrible condition, but we did find it. We reoccupied it, and cleaned it, and tried to get our life back on track. As a matter of fact, in the first few days when we moved back, after we came back from Buda, the Russians were still looting. They came with a huge truck to the courtyard of this building. We lived on the second floor. They went from one floor to the other, demanding to be let in, and picked up things from people—not just us, but other residents of the building. The open truck was [waiting in the street below] and they were dumping stuff down there—coats, belongings, special fine art items, pictures . . . whatever they could find, they did.

Then my mother and I decided that we needed to somehow make some money. We didn't have any capital and we didn't have any reserves. My mother had this idea and I was very much in favor of [it] because of my secretarial experience and being multilingual—I spoke German and English fluently already—that we should open a little secretarial service. We walked around in the neighborhood, and we found a little store location that was empty for quite some time. We talked to the landlord and he was willing to rent it to me. I had one old typewriter at home and we got a hold of a secondhand desk. We fabricated a little sign and I started offering my services as a secretarial office.

In those days, everybody was very keen on copying identity documents and bank statements and many issues that people had after this difficult time. Slowly, we became known and people came. We had a girl that I hired, who was working for me part-time. She brought her own typewriter. We became a place where people could get copies, and get business letters written, and translations done. I had a guy who was a Russian translator and he helped out. We

²⁶ Although Hungary had initially been resistant to mass deportations of its Jewish population, after the German occupation in March 1944, Hungarian authorities complied. In coordination with the German Security Police, police, gendarmerie, and local administrators began to systematically roundup and concentrate the Hungarian Jews in ghettos before forcing them onto the deportation trains. With the deportations from Hungary, the role of Auschwitz-Birkenau as an instrument of the German plan to murder the Jews of Europe achieved its highest effectiveness. Between late April and early July 1944, approximately 440,000 Hungarian Jews were deported in more than 145 trains, around 426,000 of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Under the guidance of German SS officials, the Hungarian police carried out the roundups and forced the Jews onto the deportation trains. The SS sent approximately 320,000 of them directly to the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and deployed approximately 110,000 to forced labor in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. As many as 8,000 Hungarian Jews were murdered on a daily basis during this period. The crematoria were unable to keep up and open-air pits were used.

started making a little money. [It was] very meager money because every evening we counted what we took in and it was a question of can we afford buying a little meal at the little diner, or do we have to just fry potatoes or whatever. But we survived and we kind of got back on track.

At that time, we didn't know for sure that my father was not alive. Research was done and everything, so there was still a little hope in my mind that maybe he would turn up. But soon after that, I think the government introduced a rule or law that somebody who didn't show up for a certain amount of time was automatically declared dead. That was the procedure that we had to take, because obviously he didn't show up anymore.

John: How much of a government was there at that point? Who was in charge of things?

Eva: There were many changes. The government that was formed was actually part of the young people who [had been] persecuted themselves and some that . . . very few who were sympathizing with the fate of the Jews. They formed a government.²⁷ I don't exactly remember the names or what happened, but they were trying to put together the country with a great deal of difficulty. There were many changes in different leading positions. Many of the people who were part of this newly formed government were very strong Leftists.²⁸ They had the ruling hand because they felt that they had the power behind them, as far as the combined liberation group, which consisted of the British, the American, and the Soviet powers. But the Soviet were far more pushy and more insisting on their ways and [getting] their people to be in position.

I didn't pay much attention to all these things because I was trying to survive. I had a young friend who had a motorcycle. He was willing to take me out into the country for us to buy some food and produce, which we couldn't find . . . The supplies were very inadequate and there were no regular sources for buying things. Every other week, he and I went down and we got a bunch of eggs, and bread, and fruits, and brought it back. That helped a lot. I even helped some friends with it.

John: When did you drop your fake identity, or did you?

Eva: The minute that liberation happened, there was no need for that. I resumed my own identity.

²⁷ In January and February 1945, Soviet forces liberated Budapest. By April, Soviet troops had driven the last German units and their Arrow Cross collaborators out of the rest of Hungary. A communist government was then installed. In 1949, the country was renamed the People's Republic of Hungary and it became a socialist state, under the influence of the Soviet Union. It remained under Soviet control until 1991.

²⁸ Eva is referring to the Left Bloc [Hungarian: *Baloldali Blokk*], a political alliance in Hungary, functioning between 1946 and 1948. The Bloc included the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), the Social Democratic Party (SZDP), the National Peasant Party (NPP) and the Trade Union Council (SZT).

John: How did the people treat Jewish people after the war? Did anything change in terms of how people treated each other?

Eva: I think that there was a little bit more of a compassionate attitude. Everybody was so busy to get their lives together—not just Jewish people and people who managed to escape the concentration camps and the forced labor camps. Everybody's life was upside down. I think the antisemitic trend was not as prevalent because survival was the number one issue. People wanted to establish businesses or some income, and restore positions, and banking . . . It's a world that is very difficult to understand for people in America because everything is organized, and everything [in Hungary after the war] was totally disorganized.

John: When you and your mother went back to your apartment, was there any difficulty in claiming it again?

Eva: No. I mean, the residents in the building were delighted to see us, and they came over and offered help, or cleaning up, and were very friendly. That part was okay. There was nothing difficult about it. It was rightfully ours. Then when things started simmering down, we took in somebody. This was a little two-bedroom apartment [with] a kitchen and a bathroom. In order to supplement the income that I produced with the secretarial service, we decided that we'd rent one room. Essentially my mother and I lived in one room, which was our bedroom and everything. Then we rented it to this person who rented the other room. He had the privilege to use the kitchen if he wanted and we shared one bathroom. That helped a little bit because a little extra money came in.

John: Did you have any other relatives around at that point?

Eva: I was an only child, so there was not much . . .

John: No other aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins . . .

Eva: My father's sister was alive. I had some contact with her. We were very close—not just as cousins but as friends, but she too was busy restoring her life. Here and there we saw each other. I didn't have too many other relatives. Then my other cousin, who was this woman's sister, had a son who was a very sick person. She didn't much communicate with the rest of the family. It's mostly some neighbors who were friendly and some of my old childhood friends that surfaced again.

I was waiting for my fiancé, who was a young attorney, who was in a forced labor camp in the Ukraine. He managed to survive several years of forced labor camp. We had news through

the Red Cross that he was going to be released sometime. That was very significant to me and a sustaining element.

John: You had not mentioned a fiancé before. How did that relationship start and when?

Eva: The acquaintance started back in that attorney's office where I first worked. That's how I met him. It was a very lovely romance and very hopeful, but then he was called into the forced labor camp. At first, he was in the country, within the borders, but then they moved him away. Here and there, we exchanged letters. It was an official engagement because I met his family and I had his ring. We were hoping that we would survive, which we both did, but unfortunately it didn't work out because after he got back, the long distance and the separation were not in favor of the relationship. It didn't work out. He married somebody else and I did too.

John: What was his name?

Eva: Dr. Daniel Gonda, G-O-N-D-A. He became a very successful attorney after the war. He represented clients who had automobile claims. He was in close work relationships with the Austrian authorities. He had a very successful professional life. After we broke up, he married somebody. The marriage didn't work out. He had a daughter. I saw him on occasions when I went back to Hungary after George and I moved over to the States, but he had his own life and died, I think, about ten years ago or so. He had stomach cancer. We stayed friends. It was something that was very nice and very remarkable.

John: Continuing from how you and your mother were slowly rebuilding your lives, and you had that new business [in] late 1945 or early 1946 . . .

Eva: 1945 or 1946, yes. [In] 1947, actually, it was going on. I met my husband in 1947.²⁹ He was then . . . After he and his family were reunited and everybody was safe in his family, since he studied and graduated in Bologna, Italy, he decided that he wants to go back to Italy. He didn't like what was happening in Hungary, in political ways or any other way. He loved Italy and had many friends there. He spoke fluent Italian. He went back there and came back. He went there in 1946. He came back in 1947, which is when he and I met. I met him through his father. His father was one of my clients in my little secretarial business and he was very pleased with

²⁹ George Friedlander (1915-2004) was born in Budapest and left Hungary for Italy when he was 19 to study at the University of Bologna. By 1941, he had earned a doctorate in biochemistry, microbiology and medical physiology. That same year, while visiting family in Hungary, he was sent to a forced-labor camp. After escaping the camp, he hid in a basement in Hungary with other refugees for six months and joined the Hungarian resistance. Later in the war, he was recaptured and sent to a death camp in Ukraine. He escaped again and spent the remainder of the war in Poland.

the service that we gave him. He told me on some occasions that his son is coming back, and that he's going to tell him to make sure to come and see me, and use our help in whatever he needed, which is what actually happened. That's how he met me and that's how the romance started.

John: What was he like?

Eva: What was he like? He was a very good-looking, delightful individual . . . lots of fun, lots of unexpected pranks, and sense of humor, and a little bit of a playboy, but at the same time a very serious man, and very intelligent, extremely resourceful. As we got acquainted and this relationship developed, I found out about all of the experiences that he went through, all of the interesting and remarkable things that he did going back. He was a very colorful individual. Lots of his friends here in Atlanta always said that he was a genius, which I think he was. [He was] a very special somebody.

John: Had he done one of these interviews for the Shoah Visual History Foundation?³⁰

Eva: He didn't want to do that for some reason. I don't know why. He was asked at the same time that I was. I don't know why he felt that he wanted to save his story for something else. He didn't actually accept the invitation to do this, but he was present . . . I have the tape here and you're welcome to view it if you wish. At the end of the Steven Spielberg interview, he was sitting next to me and my son, who became a doctor, too. The last few minutes of that interview shows him. If you want to borrow it, I'll give it to you.

John: You met around 1947?

Eva: He came back with this diplomatic assignment from Italy, which he achieved through connections and some networking. I still don't know how he did it. The Italian government gave him an assignment in 1947 to help repatriate Italian prisoners-of-war and citizens that were stuck and stranded in Hungary to go back to Italy. He came back with this assignment with credentials from the Red Cross and the Italian government. That's how he came to my little secretarial office. That's how we got acquainted.

We started . . . He convinced me that I should be his assistant. He was a good-looking guy and a very likeable somebody. I could see that my mother was capable of running the

³⁰ In 1994, Steven Spielberg founded the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, a nonprofit organization established to record testimonies in video format of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust. Between 1994 and 1999, the Foundation conducted nearly 52,000 interviews in 56 countries and in 32 languages. Interviewees included Jewish survivors, Jehovah's Witness survivors, homosexual survivors, liberators and liberation witnesses, political prisoners, rescuers and aid providers, Roma and Sinti survivors, survivors of Eugenics policies, and war crimes trials participants. In 2005, the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation transferred the collection to the University of Southern California.

business on the basis that I help her part-time and try to help establish George's activity. I agreed on that. We found an office for him, which we set up so that he could start interviewing people and start working on the assignment that he was given. In about two or three weeks time, after this operation started and he put announcements in the paper to get people to sign up so that he could help them get the work and the documentation ready, the Secret Police came to his office and with some false pretense arrested him, [claiming] that he was conducting activity that was not in agreement with the usual diplomatic procedures, which was a fabrication. That wasn't true at all.

They took him to this place—which was an infamous place on Andrassy—that was the Secret Police office.³¹ They detained him, and for several weeks we didn't know where he was because they didn't take me, and they didn't allow anybody to follow, naturally. He couldn't send any messages. Finally, after two weeks, he found a little broken pencil in his pocket and he scribbled a little note on a piece of toilet paper, and somehow convinced one of the guards or somebody to take the message to his father, which this man did. My father-in-law gave him a generous tip. Then we started putting some action in to get him out of this situation because they were interrogating him, they wouldn't let anybody visit him, they wouldn't let an attorney go there, or anything—for absolutely no reason. Then after several weeks of efforts and then letters from the American Allied Control Commission, they released him.

At that point, he decided that he had had enough with Hungary, and he goes back to Italy, so he did go back to Italy. By then, we were in an understanding that we were going to continue our life together. I broke up my engagement to my fiancé, and prepared my plans to join him, which I did. In 1948, I went to Italy and never returned after that.

John: Did you ever find out what that whole police interrogation thing was really about then? Why that . . .

Eva: Slowly, things came to the surface. As I mentioned before, the new government and the new officials that took the leading positions in many important ministerial levels were actually ex-schoolmates of my husband from high school years. Some of these people had this peculiar idea that because he came from Italy with this government assignment, that he was really not the

³¹ The 'Secret Police' is formally the State Protection Authority (AVH: initials in Hungarian), which was the secret police force of Hungary from 1945 to 1956. It was modeled on the Soviet Union's secret police the NKVD/KGB, and was very feared. Their headquarters was on 60, Andrassy Street. Usually people who went in there didn't come out, thus it is known as the "House of Terror." It is now a museum (opened in 2002) about fascist and communist dictatorial regimes in the 20th century.

friend of the Leftist group of these people, of this generation, which he wasn't, obviously. It was basically a vindictive and nasty fabrication. Because they had the possibility and the power to do this, they did it. There was nothing one can do. The conclusion that my husband, and his family, and myself came to was that, instead of trying to rectify this thing and go into a whole wasted effort to overcome this horrendous experience, he'll just leave, and forget it, and stay away from Hungary—which he did. Of course, after that things changed.

I followed him and we started a new life in Italy. We lived there for . . . three-and-a-half years. I worked for the [American] Joint Distribution Committee, that had a very extensive organization.³²

<interview pauses, then resumes>

John: Just one more question then about life before you moved to Italy.

Eva: Yes.

John: After the German presence was removed at the end of the war, what happened to all of the Arrow Cross people and all of the nationalists?

Eva: What happened to the Arrow Cross people? They all became great advocates of the Soviet regime. They all became Communists. That's what happened.

John: What happened to that strong anti-Jewish attitude, even after the Germans were removed? Where did all of that go?

Eva: To the best of my recollection, that was not a big issue in those days when everybody was trying to rebuild a life. People went back into business. Jews reopened or opened shops, and resumed activities, and resumed positions. Antisemitism was not a big issue then. I'm understanding that it is awakening now and it's a growing trend—certainly not as ferocious and bad as it was in those days, but obviously it is there.

John: Do you remember what the policy of the Soviet presence was about the whole Jewish issue or was there any . . .

Eva: I think, officially, they were not condoning any of this, naturally. I don't know whether there was any kind of government regulation to redeem the Jews or give any extra help or whatever. They were busy establishing positions and taking over all of the important levels that

³² The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (commonly called "the Joint") is a worldwide Jewish relief organization headquartered in New York. It was established in 1914. After World War II, the Joint provided desperately needed supplies and necessities to survivors inside and outside of DP camps in Eastern Europe, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

they wanted to. It was something that was at the bottom, lingering, but not terribly obvious or in any way threatening whatsoever.

John: When you and your husband moved to Italy, what did your mother do?

Eva: My mother continued, for a while, the little business, which slowly phased out and lost justification because other similar things came about and life started getting back to normal. She was getting a pension from the government. She was also getting help from me because I regularly sent her money from Italy because both George and I had positions. George became the assistant to the Nobel Prize-winning professor, [Ernst B.] Chain, who was conducting research for the Italian government on penicillin production.³³ George was selected to be one of his associates. [Chain] brought a team in from England, including his own wife, who was also a research scientist.³⁴ That was a very nice and very rewarding time because George did what he was trained to do and we had lots of young friends who were all around us.

I had my position with the AJDC, the American Joint Distribution Committee. I was part of a team that was resettling people who were in refugee camps in Italy, in Naples, and different areas. I was particularly assigned to work with a couple of South American governments to supply visas to people because everybody wanted to come to the United States, but everybody couldn't be accepted and handled.³⁵ We were promoting the idea that people

³³ Ernst Boris Chain (1906-1979) was born to a Jewish family in Berlin, Germany. He won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 1945 together with Sir Alexander Fleming and Sir Howard Florey, for the discovery of penicillin. Chain fled to England in 1933 when Hitler came to power. In 1948, he married an English biochemist, Lady Anne Ethel Belof, with whom he had three children. The couple later went to Rome, Italy before returning to England in 1964. He died in Ireland.

³⁴ Lady Anne Ethel Belof (1921-1991) was a notable biochemist, born to a Russian-Jewish family in London, England. Her siblings included the historian Max Beloff, Baron Beloff, the psychologist John Beloff, the journalist Nora Beloff, and the politician Renee Soskin. In 1948, Anne married Nobel Prize winner Ernst Boris Chain, with whom she had three children.

³⁵ The 1924 Immigration Act set annual quotas based on a prospective immigrant's country of birth. At the end of World War II, these quotas were still in place. President Harry S. Truman favored efforts to ease US immigration restrictions for Jewish displaced persons but existing laws had no provisions for displaced persons until Truman issued a directive on December 22, 1945, ordering the State Department to fill existing quotas and give first preference to displaced persons. Still, of the 40,000 visas issued under the program, only about 28,000 went to Jews and between 1946 and 1948, only 16,000 Jewish refugees entered the United States. By 1948, Congress passed legislation to admit more DPs to the United States. The 1948 Displaced Persons Act authorized the entry of 202,000 displaced persons over the next two years but within the quota system. When the act was extended for two more years in 1950, it increased displaced-person admissions to 415,000, but Jewish DPs only received 80,000 of these visas, making them only 16 percent of the immigrants admitted. The law stipulated that only DPs who had been in camps by the end of 1945 were eligible and gave preference to relatives of American citizens who could be guaranteed housing and employment. Finally, in 1952, Congress revised the Immigration Act. However, the 1952 Act really only revised the 1924 system to allow for national quotas at a rate of one-sixth of one percent of each nationality's population in the United States in 1920. By 1952, only 137,450 Jewish refugees (including close to 100,000 DPs) had settled in the United States.

should go to South America.³⁶ I did that very successfully. That was a very nice and very rewarding activity.

John: When Israel was officially formed, was there any talk with you and your husband about going there? Was that an option?

Eva: There was some option, but he was very strongly oriented toward the West and so was I. We loved everything that we knew about America. Speaking fluent English—both of us—and reading literature and whatever, we knew about the States and the lifestyle, I had very little doubt that this was where I wanted to be. I was reading religiously the *New Yorker* in Rome, Italy, even though they were two [or] three-year-old issues, because they gave me a little insight as to what was happening in cultural ways, and in theatre, and everything here.³⁷ We didn't have any doubt that this was what we wanted to do. Regardless of my situation with this agency, we did get, independently, our immigration visas.

We came [to the United States] in 1950—with U.S. military transportation, because we didn't have the money, naturally, to buy private transportation—which was a very interesting trip, in November, in stormy weather, coming from Italy.³⁸ The Atlantic [Ocean crossing] was terrible. One young Polish guy died and we buried him at sea, which was a very sad experience. He went up on the deck, against the rules of the captain, and fell down. The wind blew him down. He had a concussion, and died, and we buried him at sea.

We both arrived in New Orleans [Louisiana] in November of 1950.³⁹ My husband was seasick all along. I was one of the few people that were handling the paperwork for the whole group—these were all immigrants. I prepared documentation so that when the group arrived, we were ready for the United States immigration authorities to check everything and handle the

³⁶ South America was an important destination for Holocaust survivors after World War II. More than 20,000 Jewish displaced persons immigrated to the region between 1947 and 1953. Their primary destination was Argentina, which became home to at least 4,800 Holocaust survivors. Others settled in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama, Costa Rica and other countries.

³⁷ The *New Yorker* is an American magazine with reporting, commentary, criticism, essays, fiction, satire, cartoons, and poetry. Started as a weekly in 1925, the magazine is now published 47 times annually, with five of these issues covering two-week spans.

³⁸ Eva and George sailed on the *USAT General Harry Taylor*, a naval ship first launched in 1943. During World War II, it transported troops in both the Pacific and European Theaters of Operation. After being decommissioned in 1946, it carried passengers to the United States and was assigned to Occupation service in Europe. In 1961, it was transferred to the Air Force and renamed *USAS General Hoyt S. Vandenberg*. By 1993, it was out of service and in 2006 sunk off the Florida Keys as an artificial reef.

³⁹ Between 1949 and 1952, 36 ships carrying over 6,000 Jewish DP's (displaced persons) arrived in the port city of New Orleans, Louisiana. The new immigrants were met at the gangplank by members of the Port and Dock Committee of the Service to the Foreign Born program, a program sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women that addressed the immediate needs of the travellers. Most survivors went on to other destinations.

paperwork for the people and designate everyone to their places. We didn't have any family in America.

John: You did not need a sponsor or . . .

Eva: No, we got a sponsor automatically since we didn't have any family.⁴⁰ Because of my husband's scientific background, they suggested that we come to Atlanta. They, I think, had Emory [University] in mind, which actually came through.⁴¹ He was part of the research team at Emory in the Biochemistry Department, for three-and-a-half years. But we didn't have any family member who helped us. We got a tremendous amount of nice lady volunteers who came and helped me find a nice little apartment on Boulevard, and brought kitchen equipment, and blankets, and everything. That's how we started our life. We had only \$200 in our pocket when we first came, which was much more money in 1950, of course, but not enough to really get going, but it was enough to get started...

John: Describe what Atlanta was like 58 years ago.

Eva: Since we traveled so much in Europe, and George was educated in Italy, and we had friends in Spain and France—my uncle on my mother's side lived in France—when we first came to Atlanta, it was quite a surprise. We knew about Atlanta through magazines and books, *Gone With The Wind* and all of that.⁴² It was a little bit of a letdown because I expected a huge, busy metropolis and in those days, Atlanta was a big country town, more or less.

In fact, this is an old story that goes in my family that when we boarded a train in New Orleans . . . When they shipped us off to Atlanta, we came by train. At the train station, we hired

⁴⁰ An Affidavit of Support and Sponsorship was among the criteria applicants seeking an entry visa into the United States during the 1930s and 1940s had to meet. This required two sponsors who were United States citizens or had permanent resident status. Sponsors had to provide proof of their financial status (Federal tax returns and an affidavit from their bank and employer) to ensure that the immigrants would not become dependent upon social welfare programs.

⁴¹ Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked 20th among national universities in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2014 rankings.

⁴² *Gone with the Wind* is a famous film based on the book of the same name by Margaret Mitchell in 1926. The film was made in 1939 and is an epic historical romance produced by David O. Selznick. It tells the story of Scarlett O'Hara, the strong-willed daughter of a Georgia plantation owner, from her romantic pursuit of Ashley Wilkes, who is married to Melanie, to her marriage to Rhett Butler. It is set against the backdrop of the American Civil War and the Reconstruction era. The leading roles were portrayed by Vivien Leigh (Scarlett), Clark Gable (Rhett), Leslie Howard (Ashley), and Olivia de Havilland (Melanie).

a cab because they told us to stay in a hotel, which the Jewish Federation used frequently.⁴³ They had cheap rates for people who were newcomers to kind of get the [first] few days over. This hotel was on Ponce de Leon and pretty much a rundown place, but it was heavenly for us because we didn't have much rest and sleep, so we slept 12 hours.⁴⁴ On the way to this hotel with this cab driver, I kept looking out to see how the city looks. I said to the driver, "When do we get to the city?" He turned around and looked at me, "You *are* in the city!" I said, "Oh, okay." We went to the . . . What's the name of the hotel? I can't think of it right now. It still exists on Ponce de Leon.

Ruth: The Clermont?⁴⁵

Eva: No. Heavens, no.

John: <Laughing> Not that bad?

Eva: No, it was a little rinky-dinky place, just a . . . but it was heaven for us. What was the name? It doesn't matter anyway.

John: How much of a Jewish community was there in those days?

Eva: Obviously, as I said, [it was] very strong because many of these ladies who volunteered came. They actually became our circle of friends because they liked us. We were young and they immediately perceived that we were educated people. Beyond the help initially, which consisted of bringing me some kitchen equipment or items that we needed to establish a little life for ourselves, they invited us to their house, which I think is not normally done with refugees. They became friends and stayed friends until the very last years. One of the old friends is still alive.

The lady whom I'm speaking of is Mrs. Herta Sanders.⁴⁶ Her husband was Artur Sanders.⁴⁷ He's

⁴³ The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds, which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, and educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA), which raises and distributes more than \$3 billion annually for social welfare, social services and educational needs with the objective of protecting and enhancing the well being of Jews worldwide.

⁴⁴ Ponce de Leon Avenue often simply called "Ponce," provides a link between Atlanta, Decatur, Clarkston, and Stone Mountain, Georgia.

⁴⁵ The Clermont Hotel opened on Ponce De Leon Road in Atlanta in 1924. When it first opened, it was a multi-family residence called the Bonaventure Arms Apartments. It was turned into a hotel, The Clermont Motor Lodge, in 1940. The Clermont Lounge—the city's first and longest continually operating strip club—opened in the basement of the hotel in 1965. By 2009, the hotel had fallen into disrepair and was closed. An investment group has since purchased and rehabilitated the hotel. Today (2019), it is a 94-room boutique hotel with a restaurant, cocktail lounge, and rooftop bar.

⁴⁶ Herta Sanders (1911-2008) was born in Austria, Vienna. She and her husband, Arthur, came to the United States in the 1940s and settled in Atlanta, Georgia, where they built Sanders Paints. Herta was active in the Jewish Community of Atlanta, volunteering with the National Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah, and was in charge of settling Jewish newcomers who came to America.

the one who was a very successful manufacturer of paint—Sanders Paint. They were one of our friends. Several other people were lovely and very friendly.

We really felt at home and very happy with the new crowd. Many of them . . . Actually [there were] no Hungarians in the crowd for some reason . . . They were mostly Austrian and German. We stayed close to them for many years. [They were] very helpful, very nice, and it gave us the feeling that we were welcome, that we were not on our own.

John: Were there other immigrant survivors then, in those days?

Eva: In Atlanta?

John: Yes.

Eva: I'm sure. There was a strong immigration trend in those days. That's why those ladies did this volunteer work regularly: because all of these people needed help, just like we did. Nobody had anything. I mean, people came with a few suitcases and the clothes on their backs. They were the ones who organized finding apartments that are affordable . . . finding jobs. Three weeks after we arrived, my husband started working at Emory. I got a job with a still-existing important big company, Puritan[/Churchill] Chemical Company.⁴⁸ I was secretary to one of the executives. The ladies in the office used to come to me and ask me how to spell, because I spelled better than they did. We were on our feet right away. Soon after that, we were able to buy a little second-hand car, a little Chevy, which was wonderful—a dream-come-true. We discovered the Varsity,⁴⁹ and all the wonderful things that . . .

John: Where did you first settle, what neighborhood?

Eva: We got this little apartment on Boulevard.⁵⁰ They still call it Boulevard, I guess, don't they?

John: Near downtown?

⁴⁷ Arthur Sanders and his wife, Herta (1911-2008), emigrated from Austria to the United States in the late 1940's and founded Sanders Paints in Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁸ Abrom Lewis (A.L.) Feldman founded Puritan Chemical Company in 1920. Feldman began as a sales representative for the Selig Chemical Company until he established his own firm, Puritan Chemical Company. It manufactured sanitation maintenance chemicals and was a competitor of ZEP. It is now Puritan/Churchill Chemical Company. (2016)

⁴⁹ The Varsity is an iconic chain restaurant serving burgers, hot dogs, fries, shakes, and other American classics. The original location was opened in 1928 but soon grew so popular it was relocated to its present location on North Avenue in Downtown Atlanta. Billed as America's largest drive-in, the present structure covers two city blocks and has the capacity to accommodate 600 patrons and 800 cars. The catchphrase, "What'll ya have?" once used by frazzled employees has become part of modern Atlanta culture.

⁵⁰ Boulevard is a street and corridor of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. The street runs east of, and parallel to, Atlanta's Downtown Connector.

Eva: No, not downtown. It goes off Ponce de Leon, very close to where Briarcliff comes in.⁵¹ They call it Boulevard. No, maybe they call it something else now. It was a little small apartment, one bedroom, and we put a few little pieces of furniture that we picked up . . . that these ladies helped me find, and we started living. Then after that, we relocated somewhere else that seemed like it was more comfortable. That was on **Mantell Drive**. That's also off that area in the Ponce de Leon area. This was a gentleman who had lost his wife at that time, and was alone in the house. He told the Federation that he would like to rent to somebody, so they recommended us and we did that.

We lived there for a while, and then something better came about that we both liked, which was close to Emory. That was a street . . . It was going parallel to Oxford Road near Emory. It was a huge mansion. In the back of the mansion, there was a little garage apartment. It was on top of a garage. The family had a three-car garage or something. On top of it was a darling little apartment. In the back of it was an enormous, huge backyard that was practically all ours because the family in the front, in the main house, never used it. They had grown children. It was an older couple who lived alone. [Their children] never bothered to come, so it was almost like having my own little territory. It was all part of the Woodruff Estates [neighborhood], in that area near Emory. We had some very lovely and happy years there. That's where my son was born. We lived there after a while, still in the apartment when he was just a few months old.

John: Were you able to continue any education at that point in your life?

Eva: I always continued my education. I was an avid reader until I started having trouble with my eyes. I have macular degeneration.⁵² I was very much a self-educated person and I never let down on reading . . . particularly art, which is my main interest . . . literature, and art, and paintings.

John: Talk about when you started having children. How did that happen and what was it like raising a family in the early days?

Eva: Those were very happy days because I was a full-time mom. Years after that, things were a little bit rough financially and then I had to take a job. But in the very early years, I was staying home and devoting time to the children. Then my husband accepted a job. Instead of

⁵¹ Eva is referring to Virginia-Highlands, a neighborhood in Atlanta, near Emory University.

⁵² Macular degeneration is the leading cause of severe, irreversible vision loss in people over age 60. It occurs when the small central portion of the retina, known as the macula, deteriorates. The retina is the light-sensing nerve tissue at the back of the eye.

research he was working for a company that was manufacturing chemicals and we had a nice income. They valued him and appreciated him. We could scrape together a little down payment for our first home—which became our home for 48 years. That’s where we stayed. Those were very nice years and very productive.

John: I was wondering what was your mother’s situation during those years?

Eva: My mother stayed in Hungary. She came out to visit one time and was very anxious to go back. Somehow she wasn’t quite happy here. I had to agree on that because she still had her little apartment and her privileges were maintained. She didn’t burn up all her bridges and went back. Then gradually, she became more and more depressed and despondent. They diagnosed her with some kind of a stomach tumor and suggested surgery. She was under the impression that they didn’t tell her the truth—that it was cancer and fatal. She wouldn’t allow them to do surgery and became more and more despondent. One day, [she] attempted suicide—took an overdose of sleeping pills—but for some reason, she left her front door open. Maybe subconsciously she was trying to let out the signal. Her neighbor, who came home that evening, late, found it strange that my mother’s front door was open. She went in and she found my mother. She found my number, she called me in Atlanta, and on a few hours notice, I left and went back to Hungary. By then, she was picked up by the ambulance and taken to the emergency hospital. They pumped her stomach and she was over the crisis.

The next day I left and stayed with her. We went through different diagnostic procedures. I found out from her doctors that it would be quite safe to do this surgery and I managed to talk her into that. She was willing to agree to that. I stayed with her for six weeks. She went through the surgery. After some weeks, when it seemed like it was safe for her to travel, I brought her back. Then she never did go back anymore. After she did come back with me after the surgery, she stayed in our house for about two-and-a-half years or so, but it was rather inconvenient because by then my children were old enough to have their own rooms and their own little activities.

I found a place for her at the Lutheran Towers, which was at that time built on Juniper Street.⁵³ Actually it was already functioning. It was government subsidized. As a consequence, the government made it possible for anybody to apply for rent, not just people who lived in this

⁵³ Lutheran Towers is a faith-based, non-profit residential community for seniors in Atlanta, Georgia. It opened in 1972 and is located in Midtown Atlanta on Juniper Street.

country. My mother wasn't even a citizen. She wasn't even a resident. I put in an application and they accepted her. I got this little efficiency apartment for her, which we furnished.

She was very happy and lived 11 years there, very happily. She came to my house by bus—at that time, she was fit to do that—and helped with the children and with housekeeping things. On one occasion, we went as a family on a vacation. She stayed at home with my dogs and cats and took care of them. Those were good years. I was very pleased that I did what I did. She had some homesickness, because when you change countries at that age it's not that easy, but basically I think that she was happy to be part of our lives.

John: What year did she leave Hungary? When was that? Was it after the Revolution or before?⁵⁴

Eva: Seven years. We came here in 1972. Yes, I brought her back in 1972. My husband went over in 1956, because at that time my mother was there [and] none of [her health issues or the Hungarian Revolution were] happening. My mother-in-law—my husband's mother—and sister . . . My husband arranged from here, from Atlanta, through connections, that there would be somebody who would pick up all these women and would help them through the border and come to Vienna. My husband was going to go to Vienna and bring them back to the States. He went there. Everything was prepared.

My husband went there and my sister-in-law became deadly ill and couldn't undertake the walk. There would have been a two-hour, three-hour walk through the border for her to meet George in Vienna. She couldn't handle the trip. My husband was waiting around for days, trying to wait, to see if she would be in better condition and have no fever, and trying to do it, and it didn't work. He came back with an unfinished assignment, with lots and lots of money that he spent giving this man, who was going to bring them . . . wasted. Of course, later on they came and visited—my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law—but at that particular junction it just didn't work at all.

John: You have two children?

Eva: [Yes]. A son, Lewis, who is a physician, and a daughter, who is a veterinarian.

⁵⁴ The Hungarian Revolution was a spontaneous revolt against the Communist government and its Soviet-imposed policies. In October of 1956, students and workers took to the streets, demanding more personal freedom, more food, the removal of the secret police, and the removal of Russian control. After initially promising to negotiate a withdrawal of forces from Hungary, the Soviets changed their mind. Instead, the Soviet Union and its allies invaded and crushed the revolution. After the unsuccessful Hungarian revolution in 1956 about 20,000 Jews and their relatives left Hungary.

John: What is her name?

Eva: Lynne is my daughter's name, Lynne Joyce [Goldman]. Lewis is the son.

John: Talk about being a mother in the early days. What was that like for you?

Eva: I enjoyed very much the children because essentially I started the family late. In those days, women had children earlier. Today it's not an uncommon thing for you to have children in your thirties, but in those days that was a little late. I enjoyed it. I was very happy.

Then things changed in my husband's business. It was necessary for me to go and work and to bring in some money. I was very fortunate to find a position right off the first few weeks when I looked around. I was hired by Rich's Downtown, in the Antique Department in the Connoisseur Gallery, as an assistant buyer.⁵⁵ That was a very gratifying job. I was working in the downtown Rich's and also at Lenox, which was a new department for Rich's at that time.⁵⁶ I loved it. I learned quite a lot in addition to what I already knew about things that I loved. That's why I was hired—because they felt that I was very much qualified for the job. That became my lifestyle, so I've been busy with antiques and interiors all these years . . . forty-some years. Still to this day.

John: How much contact or involvement have you still had with Hungary over the years?

Eva: I have one cousin there, who is the youngest son of my mother's brother. That part of the family is the one who lost their first-born son. He's the one who was taken in the Mengele camp. After that, my aunt became pregnant and had two children. This one that I'm still in touch with—who is 18 years younger than I am—is, of course, a first-cousin to me. We are in touch. I've been back visiting numerous times. In fact, I was there last year. We are close.

He's a very delightful and extremely successful engineer. He's doing a lot of research. He's also teaching at the Technology [institute?] in Budapest.⁵⁷ He has his own business with various inventions in different engineering fields. He has been invited to the United States on several occasions and he goes frequently to Germany. He has a system . . . he has an invention

⁵⁵ Rich's was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, that operated in the southern U.S. from 1867 until March 6, 2005 when the nameplate was eliminated and replaced by Macy's. The Connoisseur Gallery was located on the 5th floor of the downtown Atlanta department store and was known for its exquisite furnishings.

⁵⁶ Lenox Square is a mall in Atlanta's Buckhead community. It was built in 1959 and has undergone several major renovations.

⁵⁷ There are several institutes of technology or technological schools or universities in Budapest. Eva is possibly referring to The Budapest University of Technology and Economics, which is considered the most significant University of Technology in Hungary and the world's oldest Institute of Technology. It was the first institute in Europe to train engineers at university level.

that he was going to market—I don't think it quite worked out—a safety device that he patented to prevent train collisions. He's lecturing on other issues, also teaching. He's my only surviving relative. All the rest of them are gone. On my father's side, I don't have anybody. This is the only living relative I have. He has a daughter.

John: What has it been like for you when you're back in Hungary, walking those same streets again?

Eva: I enjoy the visits there because it's a very lively and extremely desirable place [with] beautiful restaurants, and shopping, and the view is fabulous. The Danube [River] is gorgeous.⁵⁸ The people are quite nice, but I do not like them. I look at them in a suspicious way, which is probably unfair because the generation that I see there now really had nothing to do with my problems or my family's problems. Because of this experience and because of the willingness of Hungarians being so ready to lay down and to oblige the Germans, I have very few kind feelings about them. But that doesn't detract from the scenic view of the country and all the beautiful things that are there, which are definitely enjoyable. I'm looking at it like a tourist, let's put it this way. I don't feel in any way homesick for that part of the world. I wouldn't ever dream of living there, even if I were young.

John: How do you feel about being a survivor, being one of that special category of people? Does that mean anything special to you?

Eva: It means a lot to me because since we came to America, I learned to be proud as a Jew, which was always an ambivalent feeling in Europe and particularly in Hungary. I always tried to sort of fudge on this thing and not to declare my self as a Jew. It's a carry-over from childhood, obviously. I'm very happy to be an American and very proud of my voting rights.

George and I got a very unexpected and unsolicited honor. Actually that was before my son was born. That's going to be like 1955, I think. The DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] was asking the immigration office for records of people who made a very successful resettlement in America.⁵⁹ Unbeknown to both of us, they recommended George and me. The DAR ladies invited us for a special session, and they gave us beautiful gold medals, and awards

⁵⁸ The Danube is Europe's second longest river, after the Volga. It is located in Central and Eastern Europe. The Danube was once a long-standing frontier of the Roman Empire, and today flows through 10 countries, more than any other river in the world.

⁵⁹ The Daughters of the American Revolution is a lineage-based membership service organization for women who are directly descended from a person involved in the United States' efforts towards independence. It was founded in 1890 in Washington, D.C. A non-profit group, they promote historic preservation, education, and patriotism.

for outstanding citizenship. I still have those in my safe deposit, which I'm very proud of. Of course, I don't agree with many of their ideas, but that's another story.

John: Did you raise your children with Jewish values?

Eva: Absolutely. Amazingly, when my daughter graduated from college, she and her friend were backpacking in Europe. She never even told me that she was planning to go to visit the concentration camps. Then after her visit, she communicated and told me what a horrendous experience this was. I was quite impressed and very pleased that they have developed this strong identity with Jewishness. My daughter has two children. They live in Colorado now. They're moving back to California again. Her children are raised in this religion.

My son, who is not married but lives with somebody, [has] two children. He raises his two girls very intensely with Jewish ideas. Every Friday they go to synagogue, and the older child is going to start Sunday School. If I'm there, we light candles together. It's a very strong, supportive element in our life. I'm very proud that my children sort of arrived at this—partially on their own. I reinforced it and all that, but they could have strayed away, but they didn't.

John: How do you suppose the war experience affected your husband?

Eva: In what way? Intellectually?

John: Emotionally, in terms of his values . . .

Eva: He was very supportive of Israel. In fact, he was trying to take a bunch of people . . . I'm not sure about the details. I have a close friend to whom George told the story, actually in more details than to me. He was attempting to take a bunch of people to Palestine and it didn't work out.⁶⁰ That was even before this other assignment came about. No, he was very closely related to Judaism. He didn't go to synagogue frequently, but we observed all the holidays, and he was very much in favor of the children being raised this way. There was no question about that. He didn't ever want to deny it, or cover up, or whatever.

⁶⁰ It is unclear whom George might have been working with, but it is likely he was involved in underground immigration efforts into Palestine. After the war, many survivors and displaced persons remained in Allied controlled parts of Europe rather than returning to their homes because of persistent antisemitism, the destruction of their communities during the Holocaust, and the trauma they had suffered. In 1946, a large wave of Jewish survivors and refugees from the Soviet Union and territories occupied by the Soviets flooded into the western Allies' zones, hoping to escape further persecution from Stalin's regime. As the flood of Jewish refugees poured out of Eastern Europe, Zionist organizations—most notably the *Brihah* [Hebrew: flight, escape]—operated in DP camps to organize the “illegal” immigration of Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine. Refugees were often placed temporarily in Austrian DP camps and would later travel from Italian ports to Palestine.

John: Is there anything else you can think of that we have not covered—any other memories or anything else that you want to add?

Ruth: Do you want to outline George's experiences during the war a little bit—just because this is a historical tape that will go into an archive?

Eva: George's story? My knowledge of his experiences is secondhand, as you understand, because I wasn't part of his life then. I found out all about his experiences after we met, which was after the war, when things were in a different situation. He was in three different forced labor camps, and he worked his way out of each one. On one occasion, he was together with an old friend from his childhood, who was an actor. George always liked the theater world and he had many friends: actors, performers and people like that. He happened to meet this guy in one of the forced labor camps. They decided they were going to fake to be crazy, to be dismissed, and acted up in crazy ways, carrying on, talking silly, and hopping around, and doing crazy stuff. Actually they achieved it, because he was dismissed. He came back to Hungary, to Budapest.

Then he was called in again on another occasion soon after that. In that situation, he was further away. I do not know the names. I am going to need some help from your librarian to look at some books, because I might recognize the names of the forced labor camps where he was, but at the moment I don't remember. In that place, he bribed this guy with the gold coins that his father gave him that were hidden . . . sewn in his belt. The guy provided this Hungarian officer's uniform for him and smuggled him out of the place. That's how he made his way back. But before all that happened, he went through all the marches and the difficult assignments that they had put on him. He was quite lucky, and very inventive, and very resourceful to save his own life.

John: Was he within Hungary the whole time or was he sent out [of the country]?

Eva: No, the last time he was out of the country but, as I said, he worked his way back. Then he found his mother in this house in the Buda side of Budapest. He found out from other family members in his family where his mother was. His mother and father were hiding in different places and his sister was in a different place, but they all were safe and finally ended up together. But before all this happened, he found his mother through information and ended up in this house in Buda, where there were Germans. That was at the very end, when things were already falling apart. He befriended these two Germans, who were giving him chocolate and little snacks that they had left in their possession. His mother was in that same house hiding, but he didn't tell

these Germans that this was his mother. He just said, “This old lady is nice and I’m trying to talk to her,” so he smuggled the little goodies that these people gave him.

Twenty or some years after all this, we were already here in America and George was in the chemical business. One day, he talked to one of his suppliers in New York where he purchased raw materials for his product and this guy said, “George, you have an accent. Where are you from?” George said, “I’m from Hungary. I’m a Hungarian.” The guy said, “Oh, really? I was in Hungary right at the end of the war when everything was already breaking down.” Come to find out through the telephone conversation, that this was the guy that gave him the chocolate in the basement of this house. This is G-d’s honest truth. They talked on the phone and the guy came down some months later to visit and get acquainted with us, which was an unbelievable experience. He was the one. He said, “You know, I had this funny feeling about you that you were not a Hungarian officer, that you are a Jewish refugee, but, naturally, I didn’t want to hurt you or get you in trouble.” It became a very nice friendship.

Ruth: Did George’s risk-taking, adventurous, kind of intelligent way of knowing the landscape also extend to his business? It sounds like he tried a number of different enterprises.

Eva: He didn’t try that many enterprises. He first was working at Emory in the Biochemistry Department in research, but, as you well know, in those days research—even today—is not paying much. He decided to get into industrial chemistry. He spinned away from Emory and started his own chemical manufacturing business, and made his own formulations, and started marketing products, and organizing a sales force. He had a very well established and successful company after that.

Ruth: What was the name of the company?

Eva: Custom Chemicals.⁶¹ That was after the short little time he spent with the Zep people.⁶² We already talked about that experience and all of that. He did very well. After 25 years, he kind of got burned out with everything and wanted to sell the business. He looked around for somebody, who actually ended up buying and taking over the whole procedure and the manufacturing place. For several years, it continued in the same location. It was on

⁶¹ In the mid-1960s, Dr. George Friedlander established his own business, Custom Chemicals Inc., conducting research on pollution, fog control, home care products, lawn and turf control chemicals and gasohol.

⁶² Mandle Zaban founded ZEP in 1937 with two others—William Eplan and Samuel Powell (thus ‘ZEP’). The company manufactured and sold sanitation and cleaning chemicals. Erwin Zaban quit school joined the business when he was 17, eventually in 1948 assuming the leadership. In 1962 ZEP was sold to National Linen Service. ZEP still exists today (2016).

Chattahoochee Avenue, right close to where Crest Lawn Cemetery is.⁶³ Strangely enough, he is buried at Crest Lawn Cemetery. He sold the business.

After that, he was lost and not really functioning very well. He didn't have a specific hobby or something he enjoyed, like many people who wait for retirement. I think it was a mistake to do that. He should have stayed and worked longer, but he just didn't manage to do that. That's when the tragedy happened, when he fell and suddenly became blind. He had several heart attacks after that and ended up in a nursing home, where he lived for a little over two years.

Ruth: How did he fall?

Eva: He had glaucoma on one eye, but the other eye was good. You can function with one eye. One day he left our house, where we lived for all those years, to go out, and have lunch, and meet a friend. He was opening the gate and somehow he stumbled or he had a blackout. We really never found out what happened. He fell. Next to the gate there was a huge stone boulder—a decorative piece—and he fell face down on that boulder and immediately crushed his only good eye. He instantly became blind. He had high blood pressure before that and had hardening of the arteries and things like that. But all this became much more severe and he had several surgical interventions. For a whole year he stayed at home in this condition.

We had physical therapists and occupational therapists to come and help him learn skills [like] how to eat, and how to dress, and how to move around in the house. For a while, it looked like it can work, but then he just didn't function anymore, and became disturbed, and had delusions, and kept talking about the Germans coming with the dogs, and the visions . . . Things turned real bad. It became impossible for me to care for him. In the daytime we had some help, but at the night I was the nurse. It developed into a situation where I could hardly have a night's sleep. He woke up in the middle of the night frantic and his [blood] pressure was sky high. I had to give him medicine, take care of him, and try to settle him back.

At a certain point, it was obvious that I can't deal with that. He was losing balance, fell down several times. Much as I hated to do this, I had a feeling that I can't deal with this anymore . . . short of me coming down, and falling, and getting hurt. Unfortunately, I had to put him in the nursing home. He was very unhappy and extremely depressed about that. [He was] always hoping that he will get out and kept talking about, "Let's get our life organized. We need to get

⁶³ Crest Lawn Memorial Park is a 145-acre cemetery that was established in Atlanta in 1916. It has a sizable Jewish section.

out of here. We need to resume our traveling,” just sort of fantasizing in a nice way—not sick, but just sort of hoping against hope. We went to Mayo Clinic and various fine eye specialists but nobody could restore the vision anymore.⁶⁴ He was basically an invalid and went downhill.

Ruth: It is interesting that at this point, when he was so kind of weakened by his circumstances, the nightmarish views from the Germans, which he had probably tamped down for most of his adult life . . .

Eva: Probably. Yes.

Ruth: They just came right back up.

Eva: He kept seeing animals. He kept looking up with his blind eye to the ceiling, [saying], “Don’t you see the little animals? Look at these little animals.” He was talking very intelligently—not in a daze, because he was awake. He actually saw, with his blindness . . . He saw these tiny little animals. [He would ask,] “Don’t you see the little animals? They’re coming down from the ceiling.” We kept telling him, “George, this is just your imagination.” [He insisted,] “No, it’s not my imagination! Look at it! Look at it!” He insisted that they are real, that this was not fantasy. He was on tranquilizers and various different things.

Most of the time, he was totally coherent, and still had his sense of humor, and enjoyed tremendously his son’s visits, who lived in Atlanta. We used to bring in movies because he adored some of the funny movies—*The Three Stooges* and stuff like that.⁶⁵ He knew the conversation better than the whole movie and anticipated all of that. Of course, the James Bond movies . . . Both my son and my husband were addicted to James Bond movies.⁶⁶ They had every single one of them. Even if he didn’t see it, we played the tapes for him because he enjoyed the music, the conversation, and the voice of the actors. Those were the real pleasures he had. And some food—things that he shouldn’t have eaten. We kept bringing him snacks that pleased him just to give him a little pleasure.

⁶⁴ The Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit academic medical center based in Rochester, Minnesota, focused on integrated clinical practice, education, and research. It was founded in 1889. Today (2019), it employs more than 4,500 physicians and scientists, along with another 58,400 administrative and allied health staff.

⁶⁵ “The Three Stooges” were an American vaudeville and comedy team active from 1922 until 1970, best known for their 190 short subject films by Columbia Pictures that have been regularly airing on television since 1958. Their hallmark was physical farce and slapstick. Six stooges appeared over the act’s run (with only three active at any given time): Moe Howard and Larry Fine were mainstays throughout the ensemble’s nearly fifty-year run and the pivotal “third Stogie” was played by (in order of appearance) Shemp Howard, Curly Howard, Shemp Howard again, Joe Besser, and Curly Joe DeRita.

⁶⁶ Commander James Bond, CMG, RNVR, is a fictional character created by British journalist and novelist Ian Fleming in 1953. He is the protagonist of the James Bond series of novels, films, comics and video games. Fleming wrote twelve Bond novels and two short story collections.

Ruth: It is hard to say no at that point because, what is the use?

Eva: He was not supposed to have the Cheetos and we had the Cheetos on the night table.⁶⁷

John: How are you nowadays?

Eva: I'm a survivor. I'm okay. I'm a little scared of my numbers. I was 87 on May 11, so there isn't much ahead of me; everything is behind. I'm very anxious to try to put the biography together because it would be a great deal of gratification to have something published that is my work and hopefully [make] some money out of it for the children, if not for my own purpose. I have friends. I enjoy my little place here, which is beautiful, and very safe, and comfortable. I do everything I can—short of reading—and I'm doing a little bit of that with the special equipment that I just finally recently got hold of. It's small little box that is magnifying equipment. I can handle a lot of paperwork slowly, but somehow I can do that: reading my bank statements or incoming mail, and so forth and so on. Of course, I do need help. I have somebody who comes periodically [to help] with filing, and writing letters, and stuff like that. I yesterday purchased a new typewriter because the one that I have is a 50-year-old one that is standing on the table.

Ruth: Wow, people still sell typewriters.

John: The last one on earth.

Eva: The last one on earth. I have a couple of ribbons and the ribbon got all messed up. I got so upset. I said, "This is it! Enough!" I went out and bought the little electric Brother.⁶⁸ I'm studying that now, to work with that, because I do write material for the manuscript and notes to my friends and people overseas. My writing is not very good because my vision is bad, so I'm better off writing people typewritten notes rather than handwritten notes. Then I don't have to struggle with writing. I can't read my own writing many times, let alone somebody else's.

John: Is there any last thought to close this out? If somebody see this 100 years from now, what would you want the future . . .

Ruth: What would you want your grandchildren . . . If you wanted to tell your grandchildren something special . . .

⁶⁷ Cheetos (formerly styled as Chee-tos until 1998) is a brand of cheese-flavored puffed cornmeal snacks made by Frito-Lay, a subsidiary of PepsiCo. They were first introduced in 1948.

⁶⁸ Brother Industries, Ltd. is a Japanese multinational electronics and electrical equipment company headquartered in Nagoya, Japan. The company was founded as the Yasui Sewing Machine Company in 1908. In 1955, Brother International Corporation (US) was established as their first overseas sales affiliate. They manufacture printers, sewing machines, typewriters, fax machines and other computer-related electronics.

Eva: I'm hoping that they have the courage and the stamina to go through difficulties in life, which I hope will be far less threatening than mine. More likely their possibilities are wide open—far more than ours were—with no limitations. Hopefully they have enough ambition to get the education, whether its formal or informal, that helps in life and reach beyond the limits.

John: Thank you.

Eva: I thank you. I'm very honored that you took the time to do this with me.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

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