

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

EVA CUTLER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: July 27, 1984

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EC - Eva Cutler¹ [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Date: July 27, 1984

Tape one, side one:

NL: Interview with Mrs. Eva Cutler. Nora Levin interviewing, July 27, 1984. Now, Mrs. Cutler, would you be good enough to tell us a little about your childhood, your place of birth, the composition of your family?

EC: I was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1925, and I had what I would call a very harmonious family life. We were only four of us. I only had a brother, and my parents and myself. And, I can only remember my family life with warmth and loving memories.

NL: Can you tell us the name of father, the name of mother, and father's occupation?

EC: Yes, my mother's name was Margaret, Margit, in Hungarian, and my father's name was Henry, Henrich, and my dad was a builder, he was a contractor, he was a one-man businessman who did his own contacts, and he ran the business all by himself. He was qualified to do all his own designing and architectural work, all up to the completion of the buildings. It was required, in that time, that's the way they taught people to practice.

NL: Was he born in Hungary?

EC: Oh, yes. My parents were born in Hungary.

NL: And your brother was younger than you, or older?

EC: My brother was three and a half years older than myself.

NL: And his name?

EC: George.

NL: Did you live in a general neighborhood, or was it a Jewish neighborhood?

EC: We only had one really designated Jewish neighborhood, and it wasn't designated by the government, it was designated by the people who wished to live in such a fashion. And they were really the Hassids. I was living in a neighborhood that was fitting our financial circumstances.

NL: Upper middle class?

EC: Middle class, I would say. We were not financially affluent.

NL: Oh, you were not?

EC: No, we were not. We were culturally affluent but we were not financially affluent. My father had a tremendous struggle to keep things on an even keel.

NL: Was this perhaps because of any antisemitism with respect to his work, or was it just that these were rather difficult times?

¹A middle name of Frederick is indicated in some of her forms.

EC: I believe that he had a very difficult start, and I don't think it was due to antisemitism at that time. They had problems preceding that time, because they went through the first World War, and they had a wave of antisemitism in Hungary at that time, following the first World War. But as time progressed, I believe that it was due to the fact that starting out life and being married and having a family was a difficult task, and under those circumstances, the economy of the country wasn't anything to compare with the United States.

NL: It was not fully developed.

EC: It was very difficult. But he was a clever man, and he was a very fine and a knowledgeable person, and he progressed, and he got into a very good situation afterwards, just before Hitler came in.

NL: I see. Were your parents involved in Jewish communal life at all?

EC: Not my parents, no. My father's parents, particularly his mother, was very religious. I never had a chance to know her. She died before I was born. My mother's family, I didn't really know either of my grandparents, because they died before I was born. I knew my grandfather just for a short length of time when I was a very small child. But...

NL: So your parents partook of general...

EC: Not Jewish oriented.

NL: Not Jewish oriented. Do you remember any experiences in synagogue at all?

EC: Yes, I do, because in spite of the fact that they weren't really Jewish oriented, we kept the High Holidays. My mother always observed the High Holidays. And unfortunately, you know, due to facts of life, my father was never able to come home in time for the holiday dinner, and that caused a lot of problems, but we kept Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and, interestingly, the school system was devised in such a way that it was compulsory for us to learn about our own religion. We had designated heads of, religious leaders, that conducted classes in the public school, and it was, we had, I had two, four hours a week, and it was compulsory for me to attend synagogue. It was part of the curriculum.

NL: Is that so?

EC: Yes.

NL: Did you resent that as a child?

EC: Well, I didn't particularly enjoy going to the synagogue, because it's not in my nature. And I was, however, I evolved to be much more Jewish than I believe my parents, particularly my father, wanted to be. My father really did not want to continue in the faith. My mother was more loyal to the faith.

NL: And your brother?

EC: My brother was, I recall some conversations with him later on, as we got older, and he was more an atheist.

NL: So he wasn't *bar mitzvahed*, for example?

EC: No. To be *bar mitzvahed* in Europe, I mean in my part of Europe, I can't refer to all of Europe, and in our particular circumstances, you had to have some means.

NL: Is that so?

EC: Yes. Your religious practices cost you money. Because it wasn't supported by the government. It was an interesting structure. The Jews were self-supportive. We had a so-called, it was like a government within a government, where the Jews, they kept a file on our birth records, and so on and so forth, and like the synagogues and the matzah factories, you know, everything concerning the Jewish practices, had been maintained by a taxation from that body. And, it was an accepted form of existence. We had been taxed, and if you were Jewish, and you were documented to be Jewish, you were obligated to pay.

NL: This was true in other countries in Europe, too, I gather.

EC: I don't know.

NL: Yes, certainly in Germany.

EC: And, we took it as a part of life, and we have life, and that was it. As a matter of fact, my father had been very much involved with that organization, through his...

NL: A *kehillah*? Was it similar?

EC: I don't know what a *kehillah* is?

NL: A Jewish communal body, *Gemeinde*. A *Gemeinde*.

EC: Perhaps. Well, those words mean nothing to me. I am sorry. What we called it was a *Hitkesek* which would mean, in translation, a faith community.

NL: Yes, that would be the same, as *kehillah*. And so your father was involved in that?

EC: Oh yes, my father was involved, because of his trade. They sought him out, and he was working for them, on maintaining, for instance, I remember, before the holidays, before *Pesach*, the *matzah* factories always had to be painted, and, you know, maintained, and the synagogues needed repair work, or what have you. And yes, he was working for them. He was one of the people on their staff. Religiously, I was rather expressing myself as religiously, my family was not all that involved.

NL: But you say that the *Bar Mitzvah* would have been costly, had your brother gone...

EC: Yes. I never questioned it. It wasn't such a traditional kind of observation, in my circle, as it would be here. I mean, it's expected here. When a child reaches that age, you know that he's going to get *bar mitzvahed*, unless they are completely turned away from the faith. I don't remember ever attending a *Bar Mitzvah* in Hungary.

NL: That's interesting. You may have had a very different tradition there.

EC: I wasn't involved with the Hassids. It probably was an existing practice there. I wasn't involved with it.

NL: Now, you said, culturally your family was very affluent.

EC: Not very affluent.

NL: Culturally.

EC: Oh, culturally, I am sorry.

NL: So this meant that they were interested in music and drama?

EC: Very much so.

NL: Any specific arts?

EC: Particularly in music. My brother was studying to be a concert violinist. And, unfortunately, that came to a very abrupt end. He was very fine, he was talented, and it was really both my parents', and particularly my father's dream, and so we had every conceivable exposure to music.

NL: Did you study, too?

EC: Yes, but I wasn't talented. I still play a little bit, and I passed it on to my children.

NL: And so, your school life, I take it, was quite happy?

EC: Well, I think it started out to be a normal school life, and ended up to be a disaster.

NL: You entered at age seven or so?

EC: At six.

NL: That was in 1931, or so. And were there a number of Jewish children in your class?

EC: Yes, as a matter of fact, it was very well mixed.

NL: And no noticeable antisemitism at that time?

EC: Not as a child, I didn't observe it. I don't know, I heard it here and there from the lips of the adults, you know, when they got together and discussed it, you know, they had comments that they made about this, that, and the other thing, but it really didn't affect me, not at all.

NL: And, you had non-Jewish friends then, I suppose, as well as Jewish friends?

EC: I had some. We didn't live in a Jewish neighborhood, and it was inevitable, when you go to school, you pick up friends, with whom you hit it off.

NL: Do you remember when the coming Nazi influences first began to impact on your family, or on you personally?

EC: Well, I have one memory standing out in my mind, particularly. I was in high school, and the class, the home room teacher, I would say, the woman who was in charge of our class, primarily, she seemed to be very much under the influence of Hitler. I never heard the name mentioned before, and I didn't know who she was talking about. She addressed the class at one point, and praising him to be one of the upcoming heads of state who was going to imprint his memory into the history of the world. And I never realized how true that was. Her prediction was true to life.

NL: About how old were you then?

EC: Let me think. I had to be like about 14, somewhere around 14. I don't quite remember what grade. It had to be about when I was 14, because it would have been like--well, anyway, I can't really...

NL: But you were already...

EC: But I was an extremely unaware youngster.

NL: Well, I think most children are until there's some devastating event. And your parents, did they speak to you at all about any distress they may have felt, or anxiety?

EC: Well, I brought this story home to my mother, because I was one of those kids who always went home and gave full reports of what happened in school, and I told her about this great guy who was coming up in the horizon, and I said, oh, and Ann Margaret said that he was just a fabulous man, he's going to change the whole world around for the better. And my mother was horrified, because she also, by that point, she already knew who this man was. And blasted her, and she was really--and I didn't understand why she got so upset. And then after that, I heard, little by little, I heard about what was happening, and what was in the making. Not exactly, I mean, we really weren't informed of exactly what developed, but we got the wind of it. And we also had a friend, a Christian friend, who was Communist. and he was coming around always talking about, projecting from what he knew, and at one point he made a very upsetting comment that my mother oftentimes brought up afterwards. Fortunately, they lived through the Holocaust, my parents. And he said, it won't be long before we're going all be maggots, or something to that end, or our bodies are going to be crawling over by maggots, or something like that he was saying. It was a horrifying thought and comment, but he knew what he was talking about.

NL: Was father's business affected? This would bring us to the late 30's, early 40's.

EC: We were all very much affected. It was a very slow process in Hungary, particularly in Budapest, because it was the capital city. We weren't hit as strong and as quickly. There is one other incident that I would like to bring out, that would be an answer to your question as to whether I realized there was any antisemitism. When I really started to learn that I was different from the rest of the people, I had just entered, I think it was when I just started high school, and I had a girlfriend who was at the same time going to a Catholic school. And after the first couple of weeks, we always gathered in the courtyard playing in our home. I lived in an apartment building, and we always gathered in the courtyard after school, and we were just playing around like kids would, and she turned around and said, "I'm not going to be your friend anymore. I can't play with you anymore." And I said, "Whatever for? I haven't done anything." She said, "You killed my Christ." And I said, "I don't even know who it was. How could I have killed him?" So that's how it all began.

NL: This was the first time you heard that?

EC: Yes. I was hit by it, and I couldn't understand. I was bewildered, by her attitude and action. I was bewildered more than anything else. So...

NL: Did you discuss that with your mother? Do you remember?

EC: I discussed most everything with my mother at that time. The only thing is, you know, parents, they didn't really sit down and give an in-depth introduction to life to their children, you know, in those days. I don't know, they didn't have the time, or they didn't think that it would really be necessary.

NL: And they may not have known what to answer.

EC: Yes.

NL: Did you feel defended against this kind of attack? Did you feel strong enough in your own Jewishness to feel that strength, or was it crushing?

EC: Well, I wouldn't put it that way, that I felt strong enough in my Jewishness. I was feeling strong enough in my humanness that I didn't feel that this attack was warranted. And so, therefore, I didn't know what to make of it.

NL: Did you retain your friendships with other non-Jewish children?

EC: There was one, but little by little, we more or less oriented ourselves towards our own. And consequently, what happened, it brought out a much more of an awareness of who you were.

NL: It had to.

EC: Yes. Circumstances had forced you to.

NL: And your parents, I suppose, were losing their non-Jewish friends?

EC: They didn't have any. My father had some non-Jewish friends. My parents were not very, they didn't have a big social life. They had limited friends, It was just the family they were more or less involved with. But my father, in his association in business, had found some friends, and fortunately he found some excellent Christian friends, because that was their savior, that was the life saver later on. So, as a result of what was happening, I think that I have created a much tighter alliance with my Jewish contemporaries, and I'd become a member of the synagogue that was nearby. They had a Jewish group, an organization, a youth organization, that I allied myself with, and that's where I had my friends.

NL: This was in Budapest?

EC: That's right, in Budapest.

NL: There was a special youth movement there that you liked?

EC: Well, every synagogue had a youth organization, and culturally oriented...

NL: It wasn't Zionist?

EC: No, it was not Zionist, no. It was strictly social, recreational. So now in the synagogue, I was familiar with, because as I said before, I had to go to synagogue whether I liked it or not. So, I wasn't alien.

NL: And were there other relatives in Hungary that you were in touch with, your parent's sisters, brothers, or cousins, for example, at that time?

EC: My mother had a brother and a sister. My father had some cousins. And we were relatively closer to my mother's family. But my father also, we had a relationship. It wasn't what I would call a very...

NL: But they were also undergoing these changes?

EC: Absolutely, yes. Sure.

NL: And were you aware at all, or did you have any consciousness of any governmental measures that were being taken? Any specific anti-Jewish measures?

EC: Well, you had to be aware of it, because it was happening, and it was affecting you. But they were gradual--they crept up on you. They were from day to day--you never knew what was going to hit you next. And there were other pressures. Although, I must say that, of the government that existed at the time, they didn't really have to be pressured that much. Now, during the Horthy Regime, I think Horthy was trying to resist, I think was trying to resist, I think for his own sake, if anything, because his existence as a Premier was threatened, and I don't think that he held any love for the Jews himself. I mean, who does, really. When it comes down to the bare facts, nobody does. If it's politically advantageous, then they're going to do something for the Jews. If it isn't, then they are more than willing to have the Jews befall the victim of any kind of circumstance. You know, so this is the bare fact of life. So, in my situation, this was the same thing in Hungary.

NL: I do understand that there was a very special rapprochement with Hitler, because Hitler promised to restore some of Hungary's lost territory, in Transylvania, for example, Czechoslovakia, I don't know whether that impinged on your family at all?

EC: It didn't affect us. The only way that affected us was, we were getting a lot of refugees.

NL: Tell us about that please.

EC: From Poland, and, oh, we got a lot of Polish and Yugoslavian refugees, and they were hiding out, and they were, it was horrendous. I didn't quite understand what was going on. As a matter of fact, one of my aunts, my mother's sister-in-law, the wife of her brother, had, she divorced a man from Yugoslavia, and she had a son who was a Yugoslav citizen, and he came up and back and forth. But see, these things weren't discussed in front of the children. So what I only knew was that all of a sudden I met this person, and I heard that he was or she was from a particular area that I wasn't even familiar with, and that we have to do this, that, or the other thing for this person, house them, or clothe them, or aid them in some way.

NL: Did this young man stay with you for a while?

EC: Not with me, but with his mother, and, also, the same aunt had a niece that came from Poland, somewhere from not quite Poland, but from that region, because she spoke Hungarian. From the border of Czechoslovakia, Poland, that area there, people did speak Russian and Polish or what have you.

NL: Teschen?² [also known as Cesky Tesin in Czech and Cieszyn in Polish]

EC: Yeah, something and Carpathian.

²Probably not the town. People there spoke German and Polish or Czech not Hungarian. It is located in the southwestern part of Poland, the Carpathian Mountains are in the southeastern part.

NL: And so your feeling is that Hungarian Jews, at least within your own circle, were helping the refugees to find hiding places or places of refuge?

EC: If they were relatives.

NL: Otherwise, I guess it was very threatening?

EC: I don't have a very fond feeling of Jewish behavior during those days, I don't, very secretive. Anybody who had access to any kind of a situation saving measure, they certainly didn't hand it down to you. They sold it to you. It wasn't their brotherly love.

NL: In other words, if they had certain advantageous positions or certain advantageous knowledge, they didn't share it.

EC: They did not share it. You had to have the contacts. You had to be able to be clever enough or inquisitive enough, and oftentimes, if you were inquisitive, it wasn't welcome. It was not a nice awakening, no, for me.

NL: Can you remember any specific situations where that came to the fore?

EC: Many, many, because without knowing really what was happening, because we weren't very sophisticated people, and we weren't mingling with those who were. So our knowledge was very limited. We only knew things when they actually happened. And, we didn't have the ins and outs of getting these informations. And all of a sudden we would notice that somebody is no longer there, so we would hear, oh, this person was able to go to Switzerland, or that person was able to get to the United States, or he had papers, or he had a way. But how? Some people went to Israel. Now, I had two cousins in Israel. They were Zionists. And, they wanted to take us there, and my brother and I, after much agonizing discussion, decided that we were going to take that route. I didn't want to leave my parents, and my brother would say at the time, "You can't help if you stay. Maybe if we go out, we can help." So we went up to the Consulate, and found out that there was one more transport that was going to leave, and that was that transport that we didn't get in, and that's what saved my life.

NL: Because that was destroyed?

EC: Yes.

NL: What happened to it?

EC: I think that was the transport that Hitler got word of, the last transport that went to Israel. I'm not quite clear on these...

NL: Would this be now already '42, '43 or so? Not the late '30s already, but into the '40s.

EC: Yes.

NL: And the Zionists were organizing these transports?

EC: Yes.

NL: Fortunately you weren't on that one. As you said...

EC: Yes. But I know about it, because of what has happened. My cousins were insisting that we would come, and that's why we sort of made this decision.

NL: And did your parents ever discuss the possibility of leaving themselves? Did they ever come to that point.

EC: My mother always wanted to leave Hungary. And she always wanted to leave, and my father didn't have the nerve to do it. I think he didn't have a good self-image. And he was afraid to make such a drastic change. He felt so responsible for the family. I had an aunt here, my mother's sister, who came after the First World War. And they were discussing the possibilities of my father coming here and getting started, and then bringing us over, and father didn't have the--what it took.

NL: Self confidence.

EC: The self confidence, that he would be able to do that. He didn't want to leave us.

NL: Well, it was a very big wrench, of course.

EC: But my aunt and uncle, and my mother, I know she was begging my aunt and uncle to bring us, the children, over, because by that time they knew that something horrible was going to happen. And we knew of another family who had relatives in the States, and got their son here just before he was drafted into the service. And my mother was begging my aunt, and my aunt found all kinds of excuses not to do it.

NL: She just didn't want the responsibility? Even though she had wanted your father to come there?

EC: No. Actually, she didn't want my father to come. They didn't want my parents to come. They just would have obliged, I imagine, if we asked them for an affidavit. But she flatly refused to bring my brother and I over. And, so, we didn't have any financial means or contacts or anything to do anything. We were trapped.

NL: And the Jewish community leaders weren't informing you about what was happening elsewhere in Europe?

EC: We weren't really informed. I think few of us were listening to BBC, and we were glued to the radio. I mean, we heard of all sorts of things happening, but we didn't really know what was happening. But we knew we were surrounded, and we knew that it was inevitable for the Germans to consequently come in and take over completely. We knew that. I mean the writing was on the wall.

NL: I'm wondering if the refugees from Poland and Yugoslavia, for example, would have told your parents what their experiences had been?

EC: They didn't have the kind of experiences that evolved later.

NL: Not the deportation? To the death camps? Just persecution?

EC: No. Just persecution. Now, we had persecution that was very gradually put upon us, that was, that you must have heard, the restrictions.

NL: Can you spell them out a little?

EC: Of course, I was an apprentice at the time. I apprenticed dress making...

NL: You were allowed to finish high school, Eva, or not?

EC: I was allowed to finish high school, but I couldn't go any further. Now, when I'm speaking of high school, it was four years of what would be, you know, the terminology is still different, the educational system was very different, I had a high school education compared to what high schools are teaching here. But it only took four years over and above four years of elementary studies. So it was the four years, and after that, you would enter to higher education...

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is side two, continuing our interview with Mrs. Eva Cutler. Yes, you were saying that after this high school equivalent, you were apprenticed?

EC: Yes, I apprenticed dressmaking.

NL: As a dressmaker. And what was that experience like?

EC: It was an exciting experience. I was fortunate enough to go on into a very exclusive salon in center city, catering to the high class clientele, ambassadors' wives. It was an international trade.

NL: There obviously was no restriction as to the young apprentices who were allowed to enroll, or was this a Jewish firm?

EC: It just so happened that the owner of that firm was Jewish, but it had nothing to do with anything, because we were not allowed to go into higher education, but the trades were open. We could pick and choose any of the trades we were so required to take.

NL: This must have been because Jews were so important to the economy of Hungary. Would you imagine.

EC: I would say that it was because they didn't know what else to do. I mean, what could they do with us? Lock us up, or we would have been totally dependent on the state, which was not the case. You know, that state did not take care of its dependents so much. I don't know, they just closed the doors on higher education, and they gave us this option.

NL: And your brother was also apprenticed, Eva?

EC: Well, my brother had a very sad situation, because as I said before, he was studying to be a concert violinist, and he wasn't given the opportunity to go to the Academy. And my father was in business, so my father engaged him as an apprentice in the masonry field, and, of course, you know, that that was certainly not what he wanted to do. Not only that, but it spoiled his hands, you know, a musician's hands have to be very preserved...

NL: That was the only alternative he seemed to have?

EC: He didn't want to do anything. And so, as a consequence, my parents were very strong on one thing--you have to do something. That's how I became a dressmaker. I didn't want to do anything, either, but I had to do it. In fact, before I became an apprentice, I tried doing some things before I made up my mind finally what I would choose, because my mother wouldn't tolerate having me sit around the house.

NL: So you began to like your work? You wouldn't go that far?

EC: I developed an attitude, and I thank the good Lord that I learned what I did, because without that, I would have been lost here.

NL: How true.

EC: And so, I have an excellent skill that I have taken further.

NL: And how long did you stay in this?

EC: Well, the term was two years, and I just finished the two years, and I was scheduled to graduate, when the Germans came into Budapest.

NL: That would have been March '44?

EC: I don't remember the date. Dates mean nothing to me anymore. I know that it was that day that they came in, and I still went through with my graduation. I was determined to get it finished.

NL: You got the diploma?

EC: I got the diploma. I never had any use for it.

NL: Well, it must represent something? Some sort of achievement.

EC: That's why I was determined to get it.

NL: Didn't you have to use it here when you came over?

EC: No, here they never asked. But I knew I completed something. And also, under the circumstances, which might be of interest to you, we didn't have access to all fabrics. And how that was, the way the requirements were that we bring in a garment that was already cut out. Now this salon that I was working at was not longer in practice, because the woman who was the proprietor of the salon had been captured and taken to Auschwitz.

NL: When was this?

EC: Just before I graduated. It was days, it was the last week, or so.

NL: Were other Jews being seized?

EC: Yes, it was happening now. Unfortunately, the way that happened with her was that she had a lover, who was non-Jewish, and he was in the military. And he had her captured. I mean, things were going on there that you, only in your wildest imagination, you could read books--It was horrendous times. You didn't know who your friends were, you didn't know who your enemies were. Maybe you knew who your enemies were, but sometimes your friends turned out to be your enemies, too. Actually, these things were already happening and they were like, sort of like on the sneak. Cause you never really knew when you walked out on the street what was going to happen to you next.

NL: I'm wondering if this might not have been later in 1944?

EC: Couldn't have been in '44, because that's when I was already away. When I went on my way was in '44, in November.

NL: November?

EC: November '44. This was happening in '43. I think it was '43.

NL: This was happening in '43, because I had never heard of any Budapest...

EC: It was '43.

NL: Cause the Germans, I know, didn't come into Hungary until March of '44.

EC: OK, March '44 then it must have been in the spring.

NL: And just before the German occupation, Eva were there any intimations, any hints or threats this was coming? You knew this was inevitable?

EC: Absolutely. And there were some terrible things happening, because there was an organization in Budapest that took over from Horthy, that were very strong followers of Hitler, Hitler's henchmen, it was like the Hungarian SS.

NL: The Arrow Cross.

EC: Yes. Salash. Now the Arrow Cross...

NL: S-A-L-A-Z-I?

EC: Szálasi.³ Yes. The Arrow Cross.

NL: He was, I think, the ambassador to Germany from Hungary, and then eventually became the Prime Minister.

EC: And he had done all the atrocities that he didn't even have to be ordered to do. So, of course, we were very much affected by that. You couldn't go out down the street without the threat of being captured and never come back again. I mean people had disappeared without any warning. You were not allowed to make a telephone call from a public booth, but they wouldn't tell you until they captured quite a number of people, and then, the following day, the order would come out. These were the kind of things, underhanded methods, in which they dealt with many things.

NL: Did you know what Auschwitz meant in this early period?

EC: Not really. We didn't know what was happening, or how. We knew something horrible was happening, but we didn't know what it was. Now, my brother was drafted because of his age. He was drafted into the Hungarian Army.

NL: Into the Hungarian Army? Interesting? They were taking Jews?

EC: Yes, but they separated the Jews into the work brigades.

NL: Into labor battalions?

EC: They were not labor battalion. They were not given arms, they were not given the benefits, they were not given clothing. They had to wear their yellow arm band and they had a cap, an army cap. That was all their uniform. And the families had to maintain these boys, but they were given food while they were away, but not enough.

NL: Did you hear from Henrich, I mean George, did you hear from him during this time?

EC: Yes, we did. He was coming home regularly, because he was a likable fellow, and he got back to his violin. And he used to come home because he was very much liked. And they put him in the KP, acquiring food, and they always came back to Budapest to get the food, and he was stationed not far from Budapest, in Varzt, [phonetic] and he was stationed there, for the longest time. In the beginning he was away and my parents went to visit him, but just before the whole catastrophe happened, he was close to us in Vartz, he was stationed there and kept coming home now and then.

NL: What were some of the other Jewish men doing in these work brigades? Did he tell you?

EC: They were working. I know they were working. It was hard.

³Ferenc Szálasi, co-founder of Arrow Cross, most extreme of Hungarian Fascist movements.

NL: Treated harshly?

EC: It all depends on where you were. If you were lucky and you were still in the motherland, it was slightly different. Really, I only knew from here and there, knowing some other fellows that came home, and after the war, that I have heard some horrendous things were happening with them, like, they took them out into the battlefields and used them to pick up the unexploded shells and things, and they were working in the mines, and died in the minefields, and they died as a result of explosions and the like. Then there were some horrible things that were happening. They didn't know really too many details about them.

NL: But George's own situation was not too bad.

EC: But George's own situation was not bad up until the time, until while I was at home, and he used to come home, and would stay home for a day at a time.

NL: And what was happening to Mother and Father at this time?

EC: My father, oh, when the Germans finally came in, they seized Budapest, oh, there are so many things. I don't think you have enough tapes for me.

NL: Well, as much as you wish to share. Please, just keep talking.

EC: My father, for instance, was one that didn't believe it could happen. It won't happen. And it won't happen to him. And as a consequence to that, he was very brazen. When he realized that there were police around the eastern railroad station we went by on this particular day, and he saw that there were crowds of people, and he didn't know what was happening, he really didn't want to know what was happening, but he went up to this policeman, and he said, "Well, what is going on here?" And he said, "Well, they were asking for identification for Jews", and my father didn't look Jewish at all. And he said, "By the way, where is yours?" And so he was kept, he was detained. And we didn't see him for two days. My mother was tearing her hair out. When we realized, we called up the police department, and what I'm saying, we were fortunate because we had some very good Christian friends. One of his friends was a police officer who happened to be in that particular precinct where my father was brought in. And they were so overcrowded, number one, that they didn't know, they were detaining the people there, and after they were overcrowded, they transferred them out to some other destination. But he took my father out of the crowd. And he sent him home, and he said, "Look, why don't you learn your lesson and keep your mouth shut. Stay away from trouble!" He warned my father on several occasions, so he was really a true friend. So my father came home. But he had such a--it gave him--it put such an imprint on him. He said that his experience was undescrivable. It was devastating.

NL: Was he allowed to continue his work?

EC: Yes. Not only that, but what happened was, when the Germans came in, seized the city, they took over this Jewish body of the community, and this is how they put their fingers on all the Jews in the city. So, they engaged my father to continue working for them. But it was strictly working on construction work. And again, it was a miracle, I mean,

I don't know how this tape is going to come off, because you're interviewing me as a Jew, when I'm very Jewish in my feelings, and I had many occasions, in fact, my father very much wanted us to change at the time, because he thought that it would save our lives, and I was reluctant to do that, basically because my philosophy is that you are what you are. And you can't really change it, you can't really change it. You don't change yourself. Just because I would have a different religion, I would still be who I am. It really made very little difference. But, I came away from this with an experience of an entirely different nature.

NL: That's what makes it so valuable, Eva, so please, go ahead.

EC: Than most people. I find that human beings are so much alike. Human beings basically are all the same. There are certain differences in the way that we believe and we act, and our philosophies and our regards to humanity. And we had some very interesting experiences on this score, and one was this *Hauptscharführer* [warrant officer], whatever, my father was under in Hungary, working under him, who was an extremely decent. Now, he wasn't an SS, he was a Wehrmacht. But he was such an unusually good person, an honorable person, and he was helping the Jews as much as he could.

NL: Tell us about that. In what way?

EC: For instance, with my father, I mean, he had a comradeship with my father because he respected my father for his knowledge and for the person he was. And he helped him with food, and it wasn't only my father, whoever he was in contact with. And on the end, when I wasn't any more there, I understand he saved a lot of Jewish lives.

NL: It is very important to know that. Important to preserve that knowledge.

EC: I feel that it is very important, because I can't condemn the whole nation.

NL: No, one shouldn't. One shouldn't. And we have much evidence in our archives that deals with the righteous Gentiles. So, I'm glad to have this testimony. And were there any other experiences that you recall that you'd like to share?

EC: You know, this particular *Hauptscharführer* had called on the people around him, and told them that he, that all these men that were working under him, should bring in their families, and they should, and he had a plan, and my brother and I didn't want to go. We didn't trust him.

NL: What did he want to do? What did he do?

EC: What he ended up doing was he somehow found a way to help these people escape. Or he shielded them, put them, housed them somewhere, I don't know.

NL: Do you know his name?

EC: No, but my parents, in the end, you know, because I was reunited with my parents after the war, they told me that he actively, he had saved the lives of many.

NL: Maybe he had given them some special status, and the Germans respected paper?

EC: No, he did it against German regulations. He stuck his neck out. He stuck his neck out. Because he had the power in Hungary, but I don't believe he got any kind of

approval for it, for what he did. And had my brother and I, if my brother had trusted him, or trusted this whole situation, he would have had some trust in somebody, he would be alive today.

NL: But he was decent and honorable to your father?

EC: Yes.

NL: And your father continued his work?

EC: Yes. And father continued in his work. Now, what happened was, I was, at that time, I was 18 years old, and I continued going into the synagogue. We had our group, we went on excursions, in spite of the air raids. We were stuck in the middle of the bridge during air raids. I mean, you can't keep a young spirit down.

NL: These were Allied air raids?

EC: Allied or not, I guess Russian, yes, Russian and Allied. Russians came by night, no, the Russians came by day, and the Allied, the English and American troops came at night.

NL: Came to bombard you?

EC: Oh, yes. We were, I don't even want to go into that, because it really doesn't make any sense.

NL: But you were able to maintain your apartment?

EC: Well, we moved from one place to another, because they designated houses, where mixed houses where Jews could dwell. We didn't have what they later on have established as ghettos. But we had marked houses with the *Mogen David*, and we had to wear arm bands, and it had to be on the outer clothes, and I was harassed several times because as a youngster, I was rebelling in a way. I didn't understand how dangerous it might have been, and I put my sweater over it, and I was harassed in the street by, several times, by, you know...

NL: Hungarian police?

EC: Hungarians, not police, civilians.

NL: Civilians. These were in the Arrow Cross Movement possibly?

EC: Everybody was.

NL: Or just sympathizers?

EC: It seemed that way. But, in spite of it, like I said, young spirit is a wonderful thing, and we were at it still, we had our cultural events, and we had our, you know, exposure to other things that we were determined not to cut away from, but little by little the boys were drafted in. And then, little by little we were left pretty much alone. And a friend of mine, my very dearest girlfriend, who also didn't look Jewish, she looked like a German, with blue eyes and blond hair, and her mother was a widow, bought her papers to escape, and she had a destination to go somewhere to the Transylvanian part of the country, and she was captured on the train, and we read the notice in the paper that she was taken to Auschwitz.

NL: That was in the paper?

EC: That was in the paper. That's how we knew that she never got to her destination. And her mother and I and she has a brother, we were all broken up about it. That was the first time it really hit close.

NL: You knew by then what Auschwitz was?

EC: We knew that there was an Auschwitz. We didn't know what was happening in Auschwitz.

NL: You still did not know?

EC: No, we didn't know what was happening in Auschwitz. We did not know about the gas chambers, things like that.

NL: Was this notice put in one of the Jewish papers or Hungarian papers?

EC: Hungarian papers. And...

NL: Were there many Germans on the street, or would you say they were somewhat concealed, and you had to face mostly Hungarians?

EC: Hungarians. I don't think the Germans had to worry about the Hungarians carrying out any orders. The Hungarians were overzealous. They were so happy to do this.

NL: So that they could get Jewish property?

EC: Well, I can't explain this. This is something that doesn't make any sense. It wasn't just the property, it was just this human fallacy, it is something you hate. The hate you feel superior. You know, they were given the opportunity to feel superior. And somebody they thought were superior to them, it gave them the opportunity to turn around and say hey, you know, you're no good.

NL: To have victims.

EC: Victims yes. I can't explain hate in any other way, because somebody who doesn't do anything to harm you, why would you hate them?

NL: So, your impression was then that there weren't many Hungarians who helped Jews?

EC: No, there were very few of them, few individuals. Generally speaking, I think that the Hungarian people are antisemitic to begin with. They had a whole history of how it evolved, and whatever. I don't consider the Hungarians humanitarians. I don't. And that's why they have such a very sad history. I think they bring it on themselves. They are so-called, they were always very patriotic, and their patriotism was, I don't know what it was based on. You know, I don't understand this.

NL: Probably dreams of the old Hungarian empire, the glory of the old empire.

EC: You know poetry is magnificent. You know, Hungarian culture is beautiful, rich, literature, very, very wonderful. Hungary has even today, it has its outstanding talents and I'm very proud of my Hungarian heritage, I really am.

NL: So you're a patriot in a way, too.

EC: I'm dedicated to the culture of it. I'm dedicated to the beauty of it, the beauty of the terrain. You know, I mean, that has nothing to do with the people.

NL: Interesting. Now, do you have any memory of the Germans capturing Horthy,⁴ making him a prisoner, threatening to kidnap his son?

EC: There were some who were there, and then they said that Horthy was Jewish. Oh, everybody had to be Jewish. They had to justify to the public why they had done this, that, and the other thing against people. So they dug it up that Horthy had a Jewish grandmother, or Horthy's wife was Jewish, or I don't really know. I remember these things vaguely. All I know is that it was like, you know, we were sitting on top of a volcano, ready to erupt.

NL: Did you hear specifically that there were deportations to Auschwitz from outside of Hungary,⁵ from the provinces?

EC: We heard of deportations. We had a place called *Kistarcsa*, in Hungary, and beyond that, we didn't know where people were taken.

NL: Beyond that you didn't know.

EC: We didn't know. We heard of Auschwitz, but that's about it. We didn't know of any other place. At least, I didn't.

NL: There was a massacre at Kamenetz-Podolsky, Did you ever hear of that?

EC: I didn't, which doesn't mean anything.

NL: No, I was just wondering. So actually, within your own ken, there's no comprehension of what was going on, or what was happening to Jews elsewhere?

EC: We knew what happened in Poland, that they were deported. We knew what happened in the small towns and the rural areas in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. We knew about it, but we didn't know the extent of it. We were horrified. We really didn't know what was happening, it was kind of a shadowy mystery. What they were trying to make us believe is that what they were doing with the Jews was gathering them and taking them to work camps.

NL: Resettlements.

EC: Yes. We really didn't know anything more than that. Then they used the method that they applied to us. Like, for instance, my father, first they gathered the men under the age of, I would say, what 55, or whatever, or how old my father was at the time. It's immaterial. Anyway, they had a certain age limitation, and they gathered the men of workable age, of workable condition, and they recruited them. They just came from house to house, picked them up, and took them. But we were told that they have to be ready. Of course, by that time we weren't allowed to go in the street at certain times, we weren't allowed in certain stores, we weren't allowed, you know, they had restrictions.

NL: This would have been what, the middle of '44?

EC: '44, somewhere around there. But I think it was before that, because it was lasting for quite a while.

⁴Admiral Horthy, Hungarian head of State, was abducted by Germans in 1944 after he tried to withdraw from earlier cooperation with them.

⁵May mean "Budapest" rather than "Hungary".

NL: So then your father didn't work under this German for a long time, but just a few months?

EC: You know, this is why I say that my account of this is a little bit hazy, because time elements somehow at this point means nothing.

NL: I understand.

EC: I am giving you an outline of what has happened, but how and what sequence and when, and how much time elapses between one and the other, I can't tell. My father was taken, I think he was still working for the Germans, but it really didn't matter, he wasn't exempt. They took him, and then shortly after that, they recruited the women between the ages of 16 and 38.

NL: Where did your father go?

EC: We didn't know. So that left my mother out, and it took me. And that's when I left home.

NL: And where did you go?

EC: We had gathered, that was a horrendous experience. This was a horrendous experience, that I have not really been prepared for, and, fortunately, I must really emphasize, I was physically and emotionally very stable. And I also must emphasize that because I was as naive as I was, and because I was so unaffected by so many things up until that time, it gave me extra strength to endure.

NL: That's an important point.

EC: Yes, I was young, I was 18, and now compared to today's 18, I was a child, but sturdy. I had, physically, I was very well preserved. I was very strong, in physical condition, and healthy. So we got our knapsacks. I went together with a young woman from the house who was newly married, and her husband was also in the service, and the two of us stuck together all the way to Bergen-Belsen. And we went through the hell of life that I could not describe.

NL: Where did they take you first?

EC: The first route was walking all the way over to the other side of Pest, which is Buda. They took us into a place that used to be a swimming resort place, and they said it was down there, no, pardon me, no, the first was, we had to go, it was a huge football field. And that was in Üjpest, which is the outskirt of Budapest.

NL: Can you spell that please?

EC: Ü-J-P-E-S-T. And the "U" has an umlaut on it. And it was a football field, a huge very popular football field. And we went up on the tribunes...

Tape two, side one:

NL: Tape two, side one. Interview with Mrs. Eva Cutler. So you were saying that they put you up on the grandstand of the football field...

EC: Well, what happened wasn't just the grandstand. You occupied any space you found, and we were a great number of us.

NL: A thousand.

EC: Thousands of women, yes. We were absolutely exhausted, because we didn't know what was happening, and we were walked all the way over there on foot, and without belongings. And it was raining. It was a horrendous experience simply because we were so unprepared...

NL: Where had they told you they were taking you to?

EC: They just told us to go, and we gathered in the field, and they didn't tell us anything much.

NL: You were being led by Hungarian police or guards?

EC: Guards.

NL: And what time of the year was it, do you remember?

EC: It was in the fall.

NL: This was the fall of '44.

EC: I was, I thought I was on the last transport, but I was on the one before the last.

NL: Had there been earlier transports of women who had been drafted?

EC: Not that I know of. I don't think so. This was the last effort, and I learned later that it was a result of Eichmann's doing. Eichmann was in Budapest, and I didn't know anything. We never heard his name.

NL: I was going to ask you. You never heard his name?

EC: We never heard his name mentioned, never. We knew that the SS had, up in Svábhegy, one of the mountains in Buda, they had their headquarters set up there, but we didn't know who was there.

NL: Curious that you never heard his name.

EC: We never heard his name, no.

NL: So what happened to you after you were walked to this football stadium?

EC: Well, my mother, in her last effort, whatever we had in the house, she prepared food for me and put it in my knapsack, and put in part of my things she had gathered for my dowry, linen stuff and things, to take with me, because we didn't know what was happening. And when I finally got out there, I lost half of my food, it got soggy, and it fell out of my sack, and I was distraught and was tired, and the uncertainty of things, you know, we didn't know what was happening. We had no control over the situation. And, unfortunately, you know, there were a lot of women who, friends that had ways to get out,

that they managed to get back home somehow. I had a friend who proved not to be a friend. I mean, it was like they turned people against people all the time.

NL: Every man for himself.

EC: Yes.

NL: But some were able to escape and go back home?

EC: Some of them had ways of getting back to a community, or whatever. But later on they were gathered up again. It was chaos, total chaos. So, as a matter of fact, I had a friend of mine, who was married at the time, and she, they separated the married and the unmarried in lines, and she had to go into another line. And after the war she was telling me, she had such pangs of conscience that she had abandoned me, and she wanted to always know what was happening to me, to tell me how she felt, and to tell me that she had no control over the situation. Fortunately, I managed to see her after the war, I mean, just recently. But at any rate, chaos. And from there they took us to Buda, it was used sort of a summer resort, a swimming pool resort, like a swim club. We were there for overnight. And the kinds of things that they pulled on us, like for instance, they would cook meals, they would cook a meal, and we were hungry by that time, we were very tired and hungry, and distraught, and frightened. And so, just before the food would get done, they would get us together and leave. And consequently, what happened, some people almost fell into the pit where they were cooking the meal, because we were hungry, and wanted to get something, and they would give you maybe a slice of bread or something. So this was consequently a pattern that they were trying to apply, to break our morale.

NL: These were all Hungarian guards?

EC: Oh, yeah, sure. And then, we went through town after town after town.

NL: Just marching?

EC: Marching on foot. And we were attempting a few times, we attempted escape. We ran into the properties of landowners, in stables, we were trying to hide in the stables, in the haystacks, and we had experience there that were really horrendous. The kids of the property owner discovered us, and he was luring us out by the food. He said, "Ladies, here is the soup." We got out, and the guards were there waiting for us. You know, that kind of stuff. We were walking on the Viennese highway alongside of the ditches, you know, the side ditch, and we were sleeping in there, huddled in there, sleeping, with our blankets on the ground, huddled together, and of course, winter came upon us, and a lot of people had frozen to death. A lot of people had gotten injured, and they would do away with them on the way. They wouldn't want to take anybody who couldn't walk.

NL: You were in the so-called death march?

EC: Yes. Sort of, yes.

NL: Did you have any contact with Wallenberg?

EC: Yes, at the border.

NL: All right, I don't want to interrupt you. This obviously was the so-called death march.

EC: Yes. I faced, what do you call it, I was almost shot, because at one point, we were in *Hidek* [phonetic], I think that was the last part. And we went to sort of a farm land, where we were stationed in a huge stable, where there were some men also from Rumania. I had met some people from Rumania. We went through horrible things. Men in the wagon, and we were stopping to get water. Nobody got water, and I recognized my uncle's brother, who looked like death warmed over, and he called out, he recognized me, to give him some water, and we went and picked up ice or snow and tried to--It was, you know, these were the kind of things that one sees in a movie, and I don't relate to it. I got it out of my system in a way, because I couldn't live with it. I just couldn't live with it.

NL: This went on for weeks?

EC: It lasted for weeks, for months. And...

NL: You never stopped?

EC: We never stopped. We stopped at this one particular place for some time, and I was with this friend still, and she went out to work. They wanted us to go out and work. And it was at the point where I just decided that I wasn't going to do anything. I had my, my feet were frostbitten, and my shoes didn't fit my foot. My feet were swollen. And I couldn't put my shoes on. And besides which I was lethargic. I just decided that it was ridiculous. I just wasn't going to do anything about it, and I just stayed behind. I figured whatever will happen, will happen. And they lined us up one morning, and they said if you're not going to work, this is it. I said the hell with it. This is it. They were going to shoot us. But they didn't shoot us.

NL: They didn't.

EC: No, because I'm here. And at one point we started walking again, and in the meantime, I went out a couple of times to dig ditches, that was some other things that happened. Not at this time, this was the last stop. But before that, and it's kind of hazy in my mind, because we went out, and we were sent out in the mornings to do the ditch digging, and the men were separate from the women. And something happened in the men's camp where a man, somebody kicked an SS's gun, and it went off, and the SS got hurt, and they didn't want to say who it was. So they took all the men, because they didn't want to squeal on each other, they took them all and they shot them all down. But before they did that, we had to circle around, we had to watch it, they had to dig their own grave, and stand by their grave, and they shot them down. And there was a young woman who tried to escape, and they caught her, and they did the same thing with her, had her dig her own grave, and shot her into it. So there were some horrendous things not to remember. Not to remember.

NL: And when did you contact, when did Wallenberg reach you? Had you heard about him earlier?

EC: No, I didn't know who he was. I had no idea who he was. What happened was--and here I would like to mention something that I think is of utmost importance also. This was the last mile that I had to walk, where they really didn't have any kind of mercy.

If somebody couldn't walk, they just shot them. They didn't want to carry them on. And, I couldn't walk because of what I told you about my feet. And, my girlfriend was begging me, because I was ready to sit down, to give in, and there was an officer, a German officer, who came and helped me. He told me to put my arm around him and he walked with me.

NL: Where did he come from?

EC: He was one of the Wehrmacht.

NL: He just came out of the blue?

EC: Yes. They were with us. We never knew who was going to be with us.

NL: You kept meeting different detachments?

EC: Yes.

NL: I see! And by this time, of course, your group must have dwindled to a very few, or did you keep meeting new groups?

EC: No, our group was still going on together, but I remember a lot of us, but we were going to a destination, we knew at that time, but we didn't know where it was. They took us to *Hidegkut*, which was the last station. Have you heard of it?

NL: Yes.

EC: And *Hidegkut*, I wasn't familiar with it. It was near Schuttrun I think. And they had then, before they took us to *Hidegkut*, or was it after or before, that's when they turned us over to the Germans officially, at the border.

NL: And this is when you met...

EC: That's when I met Wallenberg.

NL: Oh, but the German officer you had met earlier?

EC: That was before.

NL: And he helped you and walked with you and kept you going?

EC: Yes. He put his arm around me, and said put your arm on my shoulder and he helped me walk.

NL: That's an important episode to record. And so, at *Hidegkut*, then you encountered Wallenberg. Now what was he doing?

EC: He was standing at the border. He was a very tall, good looking man. I didn't know who he was, and he called out to the group, and he said, in Hungarian--he must have known Hungarian, he said, "Anybody who has in her possession or not in her possession a..." what do they call it in Hungarian, a, what do they call it in Hungarian, oh well, a...

NL: A *Schutzpass*?

EC: Yes, *Schutzpass*, yes, protective pass, from the Swiss or the Swedish Governments, should stand out of line. And I was dumb, and by that time I was also fatigued. And, I figured I don't have it, never had it. I knew of it, that was another thing that the Jews didn't share.

NL: You did know of it?

EC: I knew of it. It wasn't available for us. We couldn't afford it. And in Budapest, the Jews did not share this kind of information. There was also a Swiss house

which the Swiss Government had declared to be neutral ground, and they took many children in there, as many as they could.

NL: I never heard of that.

EC: Children and youngsters under age. And I understand that that was later invaded by the SS anyway.

NL: Oh, so those children didn't survive.

EC: Yes, they suffered atrocities. It was horrendous.

NL: Must have been the Arrow Cross.

EC: Yes. But anyway, I didn't know who he was, I knew what he was talking about, but I said, well, I just don't have it, it doesn't make any difference. And I just ignored it.

NL: Did many people step out?

EC: Quite a few people stepped out, and I understand from one account that he took them back to Budapest, and then they were recruited all over again.

NL: But you went on into Germany?

EC: I went on to Germany, I went on to *Hidegkut*, and that *Hidegkut* experience was worse than my fears. It was the coldest time of the winter, we were unprotected; we were sitting there; we were not allowed to sit, but many of us were sitting down.

NL: Was this in the open?

EC: In the open, there was absolutely no shelter. By that time our clothing was ragged, our conditions were fragile.

NL: You were not eating.

EC: And the food was not, I mean, it was just--and a lot of people who stayed there were frozen, they just died. And that's where they came in with the cattle cars, and that's where we were herded into cattle cars and taken. But, preceding that, I want to point out something that I have very deeply imprinted in me. The attitude of the people as we were marching through the towns, it varied from town to town.

NL: Now you were going through, of course, Hungary and Austria?

EC: No, just Hungary.

NL: And then into Germany?

EC: Well, through the Austrian border, where we were put into these cattle carts, and then we didn't come in contact with anybody.

NL: Tell us about the attitude of the people.

EC: The Hungarian people were a very curious bunch, because there were townspeople that were waiting for us with warm soup, hot soup.

NL: Is that so!

EC: And with consoling words and with compassion, and with sympathy, and there were towns, in which it was just extremely the opposite. They took the stuff from our bags, hurled all kinds of nasty, unkind remarks at us, were telling us that they wouldn't barter with us, we were bartering for food, or whatever we had. They wouldn't barter with

us, because what are we going to do with our belongings anyhow--where we go we don't need it. And it went from town to town. It was an experience, and if I was a writer, oftentimes I think I really would like to write a book.

NL: I never heard this either, that there was such variation, and that you did have some compassion and help.

EC: Yes.

NL: That's important. So you were able to sustain yourself with this intermittent help.

EC: Yes. So, as far as I'm concerned, my person, my personal experiences have really been valuable, because it did give me a great deal of strength.

NL: And insight.

EC: Yes. Insight.

NL: Do you have any theories as to why there should be such variation? Or is it just that some people are nice, and others are not?

EC: What's very curious about it is, it varied not by individuals sometimes, but by environment, areas. and I don't know what the influence might be. Whether it's the terrain, whether it's the circumstances by which they lived. What kind of influence triggers off this kind of behavior?

NL: Certainly intriguing. Did these people know that you were Jewish girls?

EC: Yes. They knew that we were Jewish. They knew that we were going to be taken some place, and that they didn't have to deal with us anymore.

NL: Interesting. Without this help you probably would have perished.

EC: Well, yes, I'm pretty sure, I couldn't go that far to really analyze it. I don't know what kept me alive. I really don't know. I guess it wasn't my time.

NL: Well, there must have been something pulling you, pushing you, perhaps the thought that you would see your family again? Or is it your friend?

EC: We didn't know. It was just the kind of thing that in a situation like that...

NL: You didn't intellectualize so much.

EC: You can't. No. You don't know what's hit you. You don't know why they're doing this to you. You don't know why the rest of the world is just not even taking notice. We were waiting for the American troops to come and liberate us, and we were waiting for the paratroopers to fall out of the sky, and, here we are, you know, out in the open fields being bombarded while we are walking through the land. As a matter of fact, I was so resigned that I fell asleep during the air raid, and I didn't even want to take notice if a bomb fell on me. People went home to tell my mother, and my mother said, "That's my daughter!" I mean, I have a certain attitude, a nature, that I think helped me through many crises, even after the concentration camps, that helps me sustain and stay above.

NL: Obviously some spirit. Spark.

EC: That trip in the cattle car was one that I could not, even if I wanted to give you an even close description of it, it was something so inhuman, it was something so, I think the animals are treated better when they are being carted away.

NL: And now you were in German hands?

EC: We were in German hands, I believe, yes. They didn't know what to do with us, because the roads were cut off. They were determined to get us out to the camps. We were rerouted, no food, no drink, and people were mad, there was a woman who went berserk, and lice...

NL: No toilet facility.

EC: No toilet facility and like I said, you know, it's useless to elaborate.

NL: Such brutality!

EC: Because you can't, I mean if you have never seen things like that, from my description, you can't visualize it.

NL: Did this happen for days?

EC: For weeks. I don't remember how long it took us, because we finally got there...

NL: You were in sealed cars?

EC: Yes. Well, it wasn't really, I don't know what you called sealed, it was sealed in a sense that only they could open it up from outside, and they would leave us out for drinks, sometimes. But we were without water and food, and I don't remember the details, OK? This is something only the very strong impressions that remain with me. But the details are totally washed out.

NL: And you eventually went to Bergen-Belsen on these trains?

EC: Yes, and there that was another--Now that made a difference in my later life as to how I relate to my Jewish brethren, and it's not complimentary, not at all complimentary.

NL: There was a lot of selfishness...

EC: It was worse than that. It was just, just as--I was human as everybody else and I didn't expect that.

NL: These were all Jews at Bergen-Belsen?

EC: Yes.

NL: And, of course, not only Hungarians, but others?

EC: Polish Jews, whom I have suffered a great deal from. Polish Jews I suffered from, the Jews from Czechoslovakia suffered from, anybody who didn't come from Budapest I suffered from. Because I happened to be a Jew from Budapest.

NL: There was this hostility, this hatred on the part of other Jews toward Hungarian Jews?

EC: Yes, particularly if you happened to be from the capital.

NL: Did you understand that?

EC: I never did, and never will until my dying days, and never will accept it. Never. Because I can't relate to it. Under any circumstances, I can't relate to it. People are giving me all kinds of opinions, that I voiced my opinions to, and they say I'm antisemitic. I'm not antisemitic.

NL: You are not antisemitic! Of course-

EC: How could I be antisemitic when I'm a Jew? I'm anti anything or anybody who was in disagreement with my concept of brotherhood.

NL: Can you tell us just briefly, I know it's very painful, how this hostility toward you manifested itself? How did they know you were Jews from Hungary?

EC: Well, when we first came in, they knew where we were from, and they treated us, I didn't know who they were, I didn't know they were Jewish. I didn't know who they were. They stole our food.

NL: You were given food?

EC: We were in the hands of those who were there before, who were in the higher positions, and they stole our food. They gave it to their own. They were helping their own. They were helping their own. I mean, we were victimized by them, not only the Germans. You know, it's a chaotic situation, and some people tried to justify it.

NL: They were there first, so...

EC: They were there first, so they were entitled.

NL: It's a hierarchy.

EC: It's a cockeyed thing. Of course, they were so dehumanized, that maybe I shouldn't be so harsh on it. But, it happened to me after we were liberated. After we were liberated I was hit even harder.

NL: How long did you stay at Bergen-Belsen?

EC: Well I got there in January, from what I recall, and I was liberated in April. And by the time the liberation troops came in, I was on the verge of death. I had typhus; I wasn't able to move. I was in the barracks without food for two weeks, food, or water, or anything.

NL: No medical care, of course?

EC: Out of the question. I was transferred to those barracks because I got sick, and I was just laid up there. I won't go into the barracks, because you know already about them, without my saying it about the conditions.

NL: Excuse me. Were you part of a work detail at Bergen-Belsen, or did they just intern you?

EC: Interned me, that was it.

NL: It was not a work camp?

EC: There were certain things there, but I didn't know what it was. And later on I heard they might have been performing abortions. But we were missing it, and I didn't know what it was, because I didn't see it, I heard it. And it was just horrendous. There were certain things going on there that, you know, it's useless to repeat. I must say that what I

really didn't understand, I'm very happy and I'm very thankful that I was given this kind of deeply seated decency, because this is something you can't acquire. You are or you're not. That I was unable, and I'm telling you the truth, I was unable to steal any food from anybody. I tried.

NL: It's remarkable.

EC: I couldn't. I was already there, and I was able to get hold of it, and I walked away from it. I couldn't do it. And I am still alive.

NL: Remarkable.

EC: So, I am not saying I can take credit for it is because it's something from my...

NL: From your parent's values, perhaps?

EC: I don't know what it is.

NL: Your home and love.

EC: I don't know. I understand my brother was...

NL: And your son has it obviously.

EC: Yes, all my children do. It's some heritage that I imprinted into them.

NL: It's priceless.

EC: And my brother had it.

NL: So, you were at Bergen-Belsen until liberation, at death's door. What saved you there?

EC: The Red Cross came in, and nothing, I don't know what saved me. I don't know what it was. I guess my time wasn't up. And I was taken to Sweden, and I was in Sweden for a year before I came here.

NL: A whole year. Did you hear at all about what had happened to the rest of your family during that time?

EC: I tried to contact them, and I sent mail, and as you know, the connections were very--there was no real postal service at the time, and I finally sent a letter through the Red Cross to this friend, this Gentile friend of my father's, who was my father's chess partner, and the Communist that I told about, he was really a very deep-seated Communist, ideologically speaking, because I believe that when the regime really started, he was harassed by the Communist regime as well. It's a very curious statement of happenings, you know. So I sent him a letter because he was trusted with all our valuables, we gave him, and we had a pact between us that anyone who remains, who survives, will try to make contact through him. And, so I sent him a letter, and he contacted my parents. He got my letter.

NL: And what had happened to your parents?

EC: Well, my parents went through a lot. They had the ghetto.

NL: Your father, when we last heard was in a labor camp.

EC: My father escaped from the labor camp. He pretended, or he brought it upon himself, to get dysentery, and they took him to Budapest to a hospital. And so he snuck out

of the hospital, you have to know my father to believe it, it was impossible. I mean, he was a small man, I'll show you a picture of him. He was a small man, he was a quiet man. He was, I didn't know my father too well. Yet he had determination, and he had a spirit, and he was, he knew his values. He had his values pretty straight. And he knew that my mother was probably there by herself, and he took out from the hospital and ran home and got my mother, and I think that's when they herded them into the ghettos. In the meantime, my brother had also escaped from his post, because they were taking his transport to Germany, and they came through Budapest, and he came to my parents in panic, and my parents hid him out. They took him into a bomb shelter, no, a bomb fell on a school, a bombed-out school, and they were hiding him there, and took him food for like a week undercover, and I heard this afterwards, and at one point, my brother couldn't tolerate it, and he gave himself up, because he saw what happened to the young men who were discovered. They flogged them and they tortured them. And he said he couldn't take it, couldn't go through that, and he was taken to a concentration camp, and he sent a note to my parents and explained that he gave himself up. And at that point my parents went to the ghetto, and from the ghetto they were herded. I understand my father was even there while they were in the ghetto...

Tape two, side two:

NL: This is tape two, side two. continuation of our interview with Mrs. Eva Cutler. And so father removed his identification.

EC: And he would go out, and he would get all the food, and take it in distribute it.

NL: Oh my!

EC: And he would do that--I heard it from other people. In other words, my father never talked about the things he had done, he just did them.

NL: He had non-Jewish contacts that he could seek out. And how long were they ghettoized, for months?

EC: I don't know. All I know it was in the Hassidic area, where the Jews were congregated to begin with. It has a big, beautiful synagogue in that area, behind the--temple, that is a beautiful architectural--you've probably heard of it.

NL: I think I've seen pictures of it, yes.

EC: Now it's no longer a synagogue, from what I understand.

NL: The building is still there.

EC: They couldn't keep it up as a synagogue. Anyway, that's where I was confirmed.

NL: That's the synagogue you went to?

EC: No, that's not that one I went to, that's where I was confirmed.

NL: I see. So they survived the ghettoization.

EC: But what happened was, how they survived, was that they were herded out of the ghetto, and from what I understand, that was the incident that I also heard of, and you might have, that they took them down to the Danube.

NL: Oh, and put them on the boats?

EC: No, they just shot them down.

NL: Some of them were put on barges?

EC: And what did they do with them?

NL: They just let the barge float, and they drowned. But in this case, they were shot.

EC: So, my father first didn't know, they did not know what was to become of them, and my dad said to my mother, they had their sacks, and my mother didn't look Jewish either. Probably that's what saved them, partly, or whatever saves you. You know what saves you. They were going, with these guards around them, you know, with the bayonets and guns and such, and at one point my father said to my mother, "Look, I'm going to give you a signal. When I tell you now, you take the *Mogen Dovid* off and we are going."

NL: He was really a fighter.

EC: Yes, "We are going." So Mother said that she was like in a trance, and my father said, "Now," and she did what she was told, and she went with him. And with all their stuff, they got on the trolley car.

NL: Oh no!

EC: Would you believe that?

NL: Oh my!

EC: And he went to Gentile friends who put them up for a while. They were already almost liberated. The liberating troops the Russian troops, were all around there, and that's how they survived.

NL: Do you know if other Jews attempted to do the same thing? What a story!

EC: I don't know. So this is what saved them. But what came after that they told me about, I would not have been able to survive it. I mean, the Russian liberation was a horrendous experience that you must have heard accounts of.

NL: Excuse me, could I interrupt for just a moment, because I want to get back to Sweden, and then we'll come back to this story, if you're not too tired, Eva. In Sweden were you under the care of the Red Cross?

EC: Yes.

NL: Under the care of the Red Cross were you in a special institution? I guess a hospital first?

EC: I happened to have had an injury, a consequence of malnutrition, so they took me to a special hospital, even a quarantine, when they first cleaned us up and separated us according to our conditions, and I have a disability that resulted from that. I was in a special unit. And they took a documentation on this effect in my mouth, in my palate of my mouth. And you know, there were some people with facial, who got, not infections, there, but actually deteriorations, rotting of the tissues or lips; they had to have cosmetic surgery done, and that's how I was in a special unit. And then they took me to *Malmö*, to a hospital where I was recovering, and then from *Malmö*, I was taken into an area that was Swedish owned property. I understand it was royal property, the King's property. It was something similar to what a resort would be like here.

NL: Convalescent home?

EC: Well, it was, I guess you could call it that, but we were already healthy.

NL: You were able to take care of yourselves?

EC: It was primitive surroundings. They were like log, wooden houses, buildings, barrack-type buildings, with individual cottages, and no central heating. We were given the wood to heat our units and to maintain our own...

NL: They gave you food, of course?

EC: Yes, we had a common dining room, we had, a director of the camp, and health facilities set up. It was a very healthy environment. It was phenomenal.

NL: Were there all Jewish residents there?

EC: Yeah, we were all Jewish residents. We were all survivors.

NL: Were there several hundred people, do you think?

EC: Oh, absolutely, and they had several of these camps set up, and we were separated by nationalities and by sex, by gender. And it was a phenomenal experience.

NL: Good care?

EC: Super, and humane care.

NL: And humane.

EC: Yes. Super.

NL: And your experience of the Swedes must have been very positive and humane?

EC: Oh yeah, absolutely. And we had created a communal environment there. I learned how to ski there; I made some contact with the Swedes that were interested. I was in a hospital there also later on for surgery, because as a result of the condition that I suffered, when I recovered, when I was recuperating, my tissues had grown together, and I couldn't open my mouth. So, I was in the hospital, and I made the acquaintance of a Swedish family. We had formed a Hungarian entertaining troop, a dancing troop. We had a former ballet dancer from the Hungarian Opera Company, the Budapest Opera Company, and she choreographed the numbers, and I love to dance. And we made up our own costumes, and the curator of our group, of our camp, a woman, her name was Norquist, no that was the family, Norquist. I forgot her name. She had a very Swedish name. She was chaperoning us, and the others were different performances throughout good will tours, and we were really greeted like ambassadors. That--had banquets; we were performing; I mean it was the highlight of my whole, I mean, it was a fantastic experience there, and then the family that I made the acquaintance of there, I stayed with them, and they were manufacturing sporting attire, and they gave me an outfit for skiing.

NL: So you learned to ski.

EC: And I learned how to ski. Of course, I never became an expert, but some of them have been excellent skiers, because we were in an area up in the mountains.

NL: What a juxtaposition to your other experiences!

EC: Yes, and the children were going to school on skis. And so, it was that kind of an area. It was between two lakes, *Lokabrunn* is where I was. And we went to *Karlskoga*, and we went to, what was the other town, I don't remember. But it was really a very interesting...

NL: And wholesome life after such agony.

EC: And they gave us an allowance, a monetary allowance.

NL: This was from the government, do you think, or from the Red Cross?

EC: I don't know. Maybe the Jewish community and the Red Cross, and international agency, I don't know. I have no idea.

NL: See, I had never heard of this special recovery and rehabilitation program in Sweden. So you see, that's also a very, very important segment.

EC: You know, in that respect I'd say that if I can just disconnect myself from having been a victim, which I don't consider myself, because there are victims, from one circumstance or another. I just consider it to be having been born in an era that you couldn't escape from. And if you turn these experiences into a valuable learning experience, I think you can build on it and will really become stronger.

NL: Some survivors are able; of course, many are not. They are too crippled, too traumatized.

EC: Emotionally, I understand a lot...

NL: And physically, too. So you were in Sweden then for about a year?

EC: Yes, I was in Sweden for a year. And I contacted my relatives in the United States. I remembered their address.

NL: Oh my! The same family that refused you?

EC: I was like, I'm somewhat changed now, but I was close with my mother because my mother was angry at her sister, and she said, "If we survive, I don't want to have any part of her. I don't want to." She wrote letters to the extent of her saying that she held her responsible if anything happened to us.

NL: Just judgement, I think.

EC: And I said to my mother, "She's your sister." So, I had to learn...

NL: But you had remembered her address.

EC: I remembered her, I contacted them, and they didn't want to bring me over.

NL: Even after the war?

EC: They didn't tell me. They were stalling. I found out when I came here that she was worried, because she heard so much about the girls who were liberated, that they had become whores, and she didn't want to take something like that on her responsibility. That was my aunt, who just died recently, without me really being in touch with her, because consequently I severed relationships with them.

NL: How did you get here then?

EC: They brought me over.

NL: They did bring you over?

EC: Yes, I was persistent. I told you, if I make up my mind to do something, I would do it somehow. I convinced her that I wanted her to bring me over. What happened was, that I contacted her just at a time when I was scheduled to board the vessel, and I got a letter from my parents that they were alive, and that they got my letter, and so I was able to communicate with them, and that I was on my way over to the States, but if they wished, I'd go home. And so they decided that I should come here.

NL: I was going to ask if you had thought about going back home.

EC: They decided I should come here because they wanted to leave.

NL: They couldn't get out by that point.

EC: They went through a lot before they got out, because with this new government, and I wasn't a citizen yet, and my aunt's efforts really weren't all that helpful,

and they couldn't get their visas and when they got their visas, they couldn't get their passports, and so consequently what they ended up doing was they sold all their belongings, and they hired a guide, and they decided to go in on their own, and they left the country in the night, during the night, and they got to the border under horrendous circumstances, and they passed on to Austria. And they were in Austria at the displaced persons camp. Oh, my parents went through a lot.

NL: Oh, my! what courage they showed, Eva, what courage!

EC: Well, they didn't want to leave for a while, because they were still hoping for my brother to come home. Because one of my brother's comrades came back, and they had a rendezvous. He gave this comrade the address of my parents, and he came to visit my parents, so my brother never returned. So my brother must have either had fallen victim to the Russians who captured the Jews on the way home, and took them out to Siberia, or he might have been killed on the way home in a battle.

NL: You don't know?

EC: But he lived up until the end.

NL: You do know that. Is there any possibility that he's still alive?

EC: No.

NL: You know he died?

EC: He must have. If he's not in Russia, I mean, where else could he be? We had people, as it turned out, my friends are still in Hungary. I went back 37 years later and I found them. So we would have known, because there was one particular friend who was very close to my brother, and he would have known if he came back.

NL: But you never received any documentation?

EC: No.

NL: And your parents stayed in Hungary until...

EC: Until they figured that he wasn't coming back. And then they left.

NL: They left in what, the early '50s or so?

EC: I came over here in '46, so they must have left about '48, '49.

NL: And they had a very rough time under the Russians?

EC: They had a difficult time because they didn't want to join the Party, because they really wanted to come here, and they didn't want to jeopardize their opportunity to come here. And they did have difficult times. I must say though, when I was taking piano lessons, when I was like 14, I had a *Bösendorfer* grand piano, and after the war, and my brother had a very fine violin, and after the war, the first thing my father did was get a beautiful piano for me, and two magnificent violins for my brother.

NL: Hoping he would come back. So they came, and joined you, were you in New York?

EC: No, I came to Philadelphia; my relatives were in Philadelphia, and my parents were in Austria, my father was working for the United States Government there, in a development where they were building the housing for the troops, for the occupational

troops there. And he was working in his field. He was a supervisor. And he had a good deal over there. They didn't tell anybody they were Jewish. My father never wanted anybody to know that he was Jewish after the war. And it was a little conflict between him and my mother, but my mother gave in. But they couldn't get into the States.

NL: Couldn't get into the States.

EC: No. So they had an opportunity to go to Canada, and they went to Canada. And they were in Toronto for two years before they came here. And my father became a citizen when they came here.

NL: Only then were they able to come in.

EC: Yes. This was after I got married, because I got married the year after I became a citizen, and then, my son Gary was born a year later, and my parents came when Gary was about six months old.

NL: What a saga! Is there any message you would want to leave for the younger generation? You've already indicated--some perceptions, anything else?

EC: I told you that I went back to Hungary after 37 years, and I discovered my friends, the same friends that I was members with at the youth organization in the synagogue. And I had felt that this very dear friend of mine, who was captured in Auschwitz, she's alive, in fact I'm corresponding with her, and another, I mean, all my close friends, we were just a group of us, and I was very disturbed, but I understand, that, she had been going to Jewish *Gymnasium* [secondary school], she was given a more, they were more Jewish oriented than I was, her family was. She has become a Communist. Her children are not Jewish at all. They weren't circumcised. I had spoken to her, I was very upset, and she understood how upset I was, and it wasn't easy for her to make this decision. But she had made this conscious decision because she felt that she couldn't accomplish anything by remaining a Jew. And she really doesn't believe that we should have this kind of division.

NL: She married a non-Jewish man?

EC: No, her husband was Jewish. Her husband was from the group that we were going together. He's also a friend of mine. I went to religious classes with her husband.

NL: Does he feel similarly?

EC: Even more so. Her grandchildren don't even know that she is Jewish, and some very upsetting things came out of this. I pointed out to her that even if she made a choice for herself, I don't think it's right for her to forget the ill effects that it might have on this generation, if she's completely ignoring it.

NL: Not to have shared any of her past with the children?

EC: No. But a very interesting thing is evolving in Hungary as a result of the forty-year anniversary. There have been books, and I would love to get hold of one. One of them I started reading was written by a non-Jew. And very interesting concepts of how this thing has evolved in Hungary, and they do not want this to repeat itself.

NL: So they're warnings, and there's an effort to really write the history as it happened, not a distorted history of what was taking place.

EC: There are people who are standing vigil.

NL: There is a viable Jewish community in Hungary, of what-200,000, 300,000 live still there?

EC: It's confusing, because they are not practicing Jews, very few practicing Jews, and the synagogues are not able to keep themselves.

NL: Under Communism, it is very hard.

EC: Yes. So this is what they tell them that they can't. But they don't get any government support under the Hungarian regime.

NL: But you get many advantages if you join the Party, or if you come along and are fellow travelers.

EC: Not in Hungary. In Hungary it isn't like it is in Russia. No. Hungary is pretty free of these discriminations, at least what I got from my friend.

NL: I understand that Hungary is one of the freest of the Communist nations of Eastern Europe. But your friend had just gone to the extreme. She may be sorry someday, Eva.

EC: Well, she joined the Communist party, and she said that what she wanted was to help build the country, and they all physically got involved in the government, and help build the country to what I should be.

NL: But doesn't she feel there is a great deal of Communist-inspired antisemitism?

EC: No, there is no Communist-inspired antisemitism. There is antisemitism. It's not Communist inspired. It's antisemitism.

NL: Doesn't know what's happening in the Soviet Union?

EC: I didn't discuss that with her. What's happening in the Soviet Union is not happening in Hungary. The two things are separate. You have to separate them, because they are two different governments, even though they are allies. It's like we have allies in Germany, we have allies in Israel, but we still have a different kind of thing going on here than there.

NL: It's certainly interesting that she has this complete estrangement from Jewishness. These commemorative services though, in Hungary will undoubtedly force her to think back over what has happened.

EC: Nobody has to force this.

NL: In her own consciousness. Don't you think that will trigger something?

EC: We've been discussing it in the letters, and both of us are very much in concert in how we feel. She and I are so much the same, philosophically.

NL: But you didn't want to disown the past?

EC: Well, my circumstances have evolved differently. I didn't want to take part in rebuilding the country, and trying to help the country overcome that kind of

discrimination, and to perpetuate it. All I'm trying to do is build the country without, freeing the country from this strong sense of prejudice.

NL: So you agree with her then?

EC: I think in her particular circumstance, I think she did what she consciously projected would be an out-growth of her efforts.

NL: Suppose one of her grandchildren finds out that his or her grandmother was Jewish, which is bound to happen?

EC: It's not supposed to make any difference, but this is what upsets me. That her husband was telling me, and I was very offended by it. But as a humorous little incident, that her grandchild heard somebody was saying something, you know, making a slur about Jews, like kids do, like a verse type of thing. And she was repeating it. She came home with it. And then my girlfriend told her she was Jewish.

NL: Oh, she did! And did the child have a lot of...

EC: No, she was surprised, I mean, children repeat things. They don't know what they're saying or why they're saying it. She told her, and I said, "You see, that's what I'm talking about." I said, "You ought to have a little more awareness instilled, because even if you spill out your life, you are responsible for what is going to happen later." So she agreed with me. I made a very strong impression on her then. I said, "You're responsible, because you can't erase it."

NL: Would you have any other words to American Jewish youth, or American youth, in light of your experiences?

EC: The only thing I can elaborate on is that I don't think we are a superior race. I think our circumstances have made us more aware that we have to perform, and we have to be good enough, and better in some circumstances, in order to survive. We have to prove ourselves because the world is against us, but we're no better than the others. I don't like that attitude. I think that attitude also creates hostility. I think we are inviting hostility a lot of time. I think we have to learn that all people on this earth are really brothers, and if they're not going to accept that, they're doomed. That's all I can say.

NL: Thank you very much.

EC: You're welcome.