

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SARAH ELIAS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Harriet Richman
Date:	February 3, 1983

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SE - Sarah Elias¹ [interviewee]

HR - Harriet Richman [interviewer]

Date: February 3, 1983

Tape one, side one:

HR: This is an interview with Mrs. Sarah Elias and Harriet Richman being taped on February 3, 1983. Mrs. Elias, will you please tell me where you were born and a little bit about your family, your mother, your father, your brothers and sisters and the little town, what it was like before the war.

SE: I was born in Czechoslovakia, a little town called Bochkuv [also Velký Bočkov]. I was born in 1921. I went to school and I finished school. We was nine children, eight sisters and one son. My father worked in a factory from wood. They made houses and all kinds of, you know, to put up a house. He was a hard worker. He had to work. The women not used to work then, but we had a lot of, how do you say, *Felder, Felder* [Ger.: fields]. How do you say this? We had our potatoes and beans.

HR: You had a little farm, or a little vegetable patch.

SE: Yeah, yeah, a little farm, yeah, we had everything there -- chicken and goose and *katchkes* [Yiddish: ducks] and everything there.

HR: You lived outside of the village, did you?

SE: Yeah, we lived outside and everybody there in that village, everybody had their own things.

HR: Their own vegetables and their own little chickens.

SE: Everything, everything.

HR: Was there a large Jewish population?

SE: Yeah, it was enough Jews there, I don't know exactly how much, I was occupied...

HR: You had a *shul* [Yiddish: synagogue]?

SE: Yeah, a *shul*, a *shoykhet* [Yiddish: ritual slaughterer], a *rebbe* [Yiddish: rabbi], a [unclear], a *shames* [Heb: synagogue sexton]; we had all this and my father helped out in the *shul*. He was a -- how do you say that -- he was a *malotch* [phonetic] and he was a -- I don't know how to say that. So he helped with the *shul*, a lot of things, you know, and he worked very hard to bring up the nine children, you know. We worked on the farm with the mother, we helped her out and the mother was, you know, top profession and we tried to make a living. We all went to school, and we all wanted to have our profession, and I was 18 when I finished high school and this was 1939, and the Hungarians took over Czechoslovakia.

HR: Tell me, before that happened, was there much antisemitism in your town?

¹nee Perl.

SE: Oh, yeah.

HR: Did you experience any?

SE: I experienced. I experienced.

HR: In which way?

SE: When we went in Czechoslovakia school, if we used to say something to the teacher, she told us all the time, "Shut up", and when the Czechoslovakian children used to say something, she used to laugh and used to be polite. So we felt it all the way and we couldn't go in the *Russische* [Ger.: Russian] school. They not accepted Jewish children at all. So we had to go to the Czechesha school and it was very far away, but we used to go. We had no other choice, no busses like there are here to go on the busses. So we had a hard time, but we wanted to be somebody; our parents wanted us to be somebody. And we had to finish school, you know.

HR: Did you live in an all Jewish neighborhood? Were your neighbors Jewish? Or did you have some Christian neighbors?

SE: Yeah, yes, we had Christians too, but not so close. The Jewish was closer than the Christians.

HR: Was it a ghetto? It was not a ghetto.

SE: Not a ghetto, no.

HR: But you had mostly Jewish people living...

SE: Yeah, around us, yeah.

HR: Did the Christian neighbors near your home-- did you have any antisemitism in that respect?

SE: No, no.

HR: Mostly school.

SE: Not too much, not too much, no. They was not too close to us and we had nothing with them. And also the Christian children we had nothing with them, you know. So we just kept around the Jewish children, and we went all over with the Jewish children. We kept just with the Jewish children all the time.

HR: What was it like in that little village? Did you celebrate the *yomtovim* [Heb.: holidays], and did you...

SE: Oh, yes, and the Torah. They used to come to my house, used to *leyn* [Yiddish: read] the Torah in our house. The *shul* was not far from us, but you know so many people, it was a nice community for Jewish, you know. When *meer leyn* [Yiddish: we read] the Torah, *m'kenish leyn* [Yiddish: we can't read] all together in one place. We used to take a Torah over to our house. We lived close. And used to *leyn* the Torah. And after *leyning* the Torah, after everything in the *shul* they used to come to our house. We used to have *Kiddush* [Yiddish: blessings for wine]. We used to eat. We used to drink. My father is from a big family, also. Yes. So we used to...

HR: What about the holiday *Pesach* [Passover]? Was it big?

SE: Oh, *Pesach*, everybody was by us, you know, *seder* night, and everybody and Daddy -- he enjoyed us very much and we used to sing with him together. *Shala Sheudas* [Yiddish: third meal on Shabbat afternoon] together, you know, *Shabbos* [Yiddish: Sabbath] afternoon, you know.

HR: What was *Shabbat* [Heb.: Sabbath] like for you?

SE: Oh, yes.

HR: What was Friday night?

SE: Oh, Friday night. Daddy was home all the time and he never started to eat until everybody was around the table. Nine children, 11 people around the table. You know, what this mean?

HR: Sure, did you start with *Sholom Aleichem* [traditional Sabbath hymn], or how did you used to...

SE: Oh, everything, Daddy he used to -- yeah, we used to sing with him. We used to sing, everything he used to say, after him, we used to sing after him. People used to go in the street and the window was open, everybody was stopping to hear the Elias *shvesters* [Yiddish: sisters] *zmires* [Yiddish: Sabbath songs], oh yes, everybody used to stop there and we, you know, we was very Jewish then, you know. My mother with a *sheytl* [Yiddish: wig traditionally worn by Orthodox Ashkenazic Jewish women after marriage], you know.

HR: Did you go to *shul*, or just the men?

SE: Jewish *shul*? No.

HR: You didn't go to *shul*?

SE: No.

HR: Your father would get up and go to *shul* on *Shabbat*?

SE: Yeah, yeah.

HR: But not the women?

SE: No, no, just the mother used to go, yeah, but we children -- not my brother; he was little boy, he had to go with them. But the girls, they're not been to school like the girls be in the *shul* now, you know.

HR: And what your -- you would have a big dinner and after your father came from *shul* on *Shabbat*.

SE: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We had *cholent* [traditional Sabbath afternoon meal]; we had *kigel* [Yiddish: pudding of noodles or potatoes], we had fish, we had chopped liver, we had soup, you know. All the things, you know, and we used to sing *zmires* [Yiddish: songs], and drink, *machen Kiddush*, and everything was beautiful, yes.

HR: And Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

SE: Oh, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. His sisters and brothers lived far away from us, and when they went to *shul*, they had to come with the children and leave them in our house. They was not near the *shul*, you know? And we used to watch the children, and they used to go to the *shul*. They used to go home with the children the

next day again, you know *b'nacht* [Yiddish: at night]. And in the morning, the same thing.

HR: What was *Sukkot* [Heb.: holiday of the booths] like? Did you make a *sukkah* [Heb.: booth]?

SE: Oh, yes. *Sukkah*, sure. When you come into the house, was a beautiful, big terrace and the terrace had two windows you can open and there on the top we used to put the corn things, you know. And all kind of green stuff, you know. And we used to put apples and oranges and pears and candy things up, you know. With all kinds of color, you know, to hang in the *sukkah*, you know. And we used to fix the top very nice, all kinds of colors. And there we used to be in and we had men come [unclear], the *shames*, you know, from the *shul*, come and with the *esrog* [Yiddish: citron]. And every morning, before we couldn't eat before he came to do *esrog* with everybody. So we had *bentsh esrog* and then we had breakfast.

HR: In the *sukkah*, in the *sukkah*, all the meals in the *sukkah*.

SE: Of course, every meal in the *sukkah*. And you know, the mother, you know, rest in peace, she used to prepare everything, wow, wow, wow. So many people used to eat in our house. Big families, used to come to the *shul*. They had to stop at our house.

HR: So the *challah* was...

SE: Oh the *challah*, she used to bake by herself, and the cakes by herself and the bread by herself, everything, everything.

HR: So they were happy days, happy days.

SE: Happy days, yes.

HR: And then what happened?

SE: Down in 1939 when the Hungary came, the Hungarians came in, you know, so what could we do? We could not do nothing, just do what they tell us to do. But we just finished school and we wanted to have our profession. So they --we 15 girls, we took together and we gonna to go to Budapest. They told us if we buy our ticket for 15 *pengfa* -- then was *pengfa* Hungarian money -- we can stay there two weeks and come back with the same place. But, you know, we girls wanted to have our profession and we all looked around what we can do. We was sitting outside there and we had an apartment in Budapest; it was a big house, a big terrace, you know. If you went there you could see everybody who was sitting outside. In the other side, I don't know who they was, but two mens come to us and we girls was sitting outside in the summer, hot, you know. We was sitting there and one of them asked me if I would go with him for a date. I said to him, no, I cannot speak Hungarian. I couldn't speak one word Hungarian, just Jewish, Czechish and *Russiche*, you know. So I said to him, we are 15 girls. If you can take 15 girls with you, we can go. He said "15 girls!" I said, I'm sorry, this is it. I don't know the man and who knows who he is, you know, I'm not going to go with a stranger, just like this for a date. So we go outside. And how many boys -- I cannot remember -- four

or six. So we went all together. We went out a little, you know, to look around. Then he started to ask us questions: from where we come and what we doing here. And I told him we are 15 girls here and we just finished school and we wanted to become something. We want to have a profession. Of all the [unclear], and then we was nothing. And he knows what's going to happen will happen. So he said, "All right, we will see the next day what we can do." And he was a lawyer. He was a lawyer. So one girl wanted to be a dressmaker. The other girl wanted to be a hat maker. The other wanted to be, I don't know, everybody wanted to be somebody and I said I wanted to be a nurse. So he took us to a Jewish organization there in Budapest. This is an organization, they place people for jobs, you know, and things like this. So everybody was looking for a place, if you're going to learn the profession, they should stay there and eat there and sleep there and learn the profession, you know. So a lot of them find places and a lot of them not. When I told him I want to be a nurse, he took me away to another place, called Buda, Buda, you know, out of town, a beautiful vacation place, you know. There was a Jewish sanitorium and the organization, when I went there in the office, I find also a cousin there. And he knew the whole family. And he said to the lawyer, and he give them a piece of paper, and he said, go to that sanitorium there and there and put her there. I went there and it was an orthodox sanitorium. Rabbis with big beards and a *masgiach* [Yiddish: kosher supervisor] in the kitchen, very orthodox, and here I cannot speak one word Hungarian. We never spoke Hungarian. The parents knew, but they never learned us, you see. So...

HR: Did they speak any Yiddish there, those Rabbis?

SE: They spoke German, Yiddish or German, broken German, you know, but we understood each other. So I took the job, quick. I grabbed the job, you know. They give me place to live there and to eat and to drink and to learn to be a nurse. In the meantime I cleaned between patients. I helped to feed them, or to wash them, you know, things like this -- to dress them, went to walk them, when to put them in the wheel chair, you know. So in there I was staying two years or three years. 1940 I went there, I was there till '43. In '44 the Germans took away this sanitorium. I went to another hospital in Yarish Moya [phonetic] hospital, another Jewish hospital. But this was not so orthodox like the other sanitorium. So when we went there, we worked there and then the Germans took over that hospital, too. So, but the Jewish must have, they must give them another place. Not far away, the Jews opened a hospital, first help, first aid, you know. And the hospital all the time took me over from another place. This was a high school. They took over and opened up a hospital. So we was there. I was working there and this was very bad time, very bad time. They started the people to take away, and a lot of people we tried to hide. They came a lot, girls and boys, they used to run away from Poland and Czechoslovakia and the Hungarian Jews. They tried to help them, to hide them, and to save them you know, somehow. And was the Swiss organization. They used to make papers, you know, and to give for somebody. And I used to work there nursing. The Germans used to come and used to make a *gantze berkerenish*

[Yiddish: big upset], look around we not hiding somebody. But we was hiding under the beds. Or we was hiding people with the dead people they putting away in that room, you know. They never went to look there. We tried to hide them, to save how much we can and we had a lot of people, there was places, the Russians took over. And they used to bring from there birth certificates, Christian birth certificates and they used to sell it and we used to buy it off and we used to give to our girls. Our girls was easy to hide.

HR: These were Jews from Poland escaping from Poland?

SE: A lot of them, a lot of them, yes. And a lot of them they took not by trains and they took not by wagons, you know. They used to walk them. They used to walk day and night.

HR: To the camps?

SE: To Germany.

HR: To the camps, or to the labor camps?

SE: A lot of them fell and died, you know. So what happened after that. They took us all away in camps, in hard labor. I had two sisters with me, three sisters with me. One sister was after an appendix operation. And she was weak, you know, to work. She wanted to go home. I begged her not to. She went and they captured her. She wrote me, she's captured, she's there and there. The other two sisters, I said to myself, I'm not going to let them go. What's going to be with me is going to be with them. I'm going to keep them with me. But one sister, she had met a man, a boy, you know. He was a boy then. The mother was Jewish and the father was German. But they had a Jewish heart and they liked my sister. He want to marry her, he's going to marry her. He loved my sister. But they took us away to hard labor and they brought us back to Budapest, again.

HR: Now, wait. Where did they -- they took you?

SE: From Budapest they took us. I don't remember where they took us to work.

HR: To a camp.

SE: In a camp -- hard labor.

HR: And in the morning they took you and in the evening they brought you back?

SE: In camp, in camp. They took us all in a camp.

HR: And you stayed in that camp.

SE: Stayed in that camp. Not too long.

HR: I see.

SE: They, you know, the Russians came and they pushed us further away from the Russians, you know. One place to the other. I came back and I had my two sisters with me.

HR: You got out of the camp?

SE: No, no, they bring us, brought us back to Budapest and we stopped in a big station where trains are. We stopped there. At dawn they decided they not going to

put us on the train, they going to take us to Berlin. From Budapest we walked 120 kilometers, I don't know how much this is in miles, you know. In the night we was resting and outside.

HR: How many people were involved?

SE: Oh, my goodness...

HR: Hundreds?

SE: Hundreds, hundreds. They was fell in the street dying, you know. In the street. If somebody couldn't work [walk], they just killed them and they left them there, you know. Night we used to -- this was in the summer, in 1944...

HR: So you're walking from Budapest to Germany?

SE: Yes, to Germany.

HR: And you walked all day or through the night?

SE: All day, and the night we used to rest. But what they did...

HR: And nobody dropped on the road?

SE: Not just this, when we stopped in by the train station, when they brought us back from the camp to the train station, they left us after free and we had a ghetto in this house.

HR: What is this? When you came back from the camp...

SE: Wait a minute, before I went, when we was in the school we had a hospital. Our house was a ghetto house. A lot of people in the ghetto they had to have a passport to go out. You couldn't go out when you want. And that and that time you could go out shopping and that and that time you have to be back.

HR: Now did you live in this ghetto?

SE: I lived in that ghetto.

HR: What -- do you know the name of that ghetto?

SE: [speaking to her husband] *Vu dus gevezen?* [Yiddish: where was it?]

Husband: Where?

SE: In Budapest, but *dus geveen nisht* in Dagusto [phonetic] [Yiddish: this was not in Dagusto], Vishela Nutzo [phonetic], Vishela Nutzo, yeah, near our high school.

HR: Was the name of the ghetto?

SE: Ghetto, yeah.

HR: And you had to stay in the ghetto?

SE: In the ghetto, but I worked at nursing. I had a German nursing license. I can go out in the street. I can go to work and I can go shopping and I can come back from work, you know and go, you know...

HR: In and out of the ghetto.

SE: Yeah, in the meantime, if it was somewhere, you know, first aid, you know, was the bombs was falling the Germans the Russians, you know. So we used to go out with the Red Cross car, you know, to save and to take into the hospital, things like

this. So I was more free, but the two sisters was all the time with me. I took them in the hospital. One worked in the kitchen, one cleaned, cleaned the floors, just to keep them with me. Then they took us to, to the camp again all together. But one sister -- I give them mine passport to go, you know, and she find a German and she started to work by the German.

HR: In his house?

SE: In his house. She was like a maid there. She just spoke Yiddish, not Hungarian. She went to work for a German. He had a wife and children. She went to work for a German. "All right," I said. And mine brother-in-law, his brother left, you know, he said he would take care of that. But before everything, when we went to the 120 mile [kilometer] when they took us, you know, to Berlin, you know, in year, this cold year. We stopped there and we was hiding there. Yes, we was hiding there. How we was hiding there.

HR: From whom were you hiding?

SE: From the Germans!

HR: But the Germans were taking you.

SE: The Germans was taking us and two men they was fire extinguishers and like they walked us to Berlin, you know. We was all the time behind. I'm a daughter and sister. And we was behind. And the two mens came after us. And they said to me, you want to come with us? I said to myself, "Why not?" What's the difference where I die?

HR: Now who were these two men? They were German men?

SE: Strangers.

HR: But they were German?

SE: No, no, Hungarians. One was a gypsy. He worked also in the fire extinguish house. And the other man had another. And the two men took us out an they took what we had, the clothes --

HR: In other words, they took you away from the line.

SE: They took us away from the line. They asked us if we want to go with them.

HR: Because you kept hanging in the back of the line.

SE: Yes. And they just like this came to us and they ask us if we wanted to go with them. I said to myself, why not? All right, we go. What's the difference where you going to die? So he took us, yeah. Then we went out of the line and they took, you know, we had clothes in something behind, you know, on our back. And they said they're going to take it on their back and we're going to go with them. They, if they capture us, they're going to think, you know, that we are the wives, and they're going, you know, they maybe forced labor they taking somewhere, the Hungarian. They let me go with the two men and the sister, they took away. Was a big wagon...

HR: Your sister, your sister they took away.

SE: They took her away.

HR: Which sister was this?

SE: The younger than I am.

HR: Because you had two sisters.

SE: One was a maid already in Budapest.

HR: Left stayed with the Germans and was still working in that German house.

SE: Yes, that's right.

HR: So you had one sister left with you.

SE: With me, yes.

HR: And they took your sister.

SE: And they had a big wagon. They captured a lot of, you know, left over. And they captured and put them in a wagon. And she left without clothes and they told her to go in the wagon. I said to the two men, "Oh no." I said "I cannot let her go." I said "I must go after her." They said to me, look, let us not go with Summerdale, let us go in Strahle² Street and we're going to come out back in Summerdale. And then he will take a bike from somebody and run after her after the one to bring her back.

HR: In other words, he was going to go around the block, sort of like.

SE: Yeah, yeah. What happened, we went around the block and my sister sneaked off in the wagon and she went straight with Summerdale and we maked out and we find each other again.

HR: Oh, my.

SE: We're again together. So we all four go together and we go to his mother. Our old mother was in an old hall, all around around you know closed up. He said "Here you go, stay in the meantime with the [unclear]." And the mother, you know, his mother, she was afraid. He said, "No, no, Mother." He said, "They're not Jewish girls. Our train came. They're running away from the Russians. They're going to the Germans and the train stopped and they went out to buy food and the train left and the two children left but the train and I couldn't left them there to stay." And here they're capturing so many people. Here they captured us. And the two men come and they say, "Sarah and Peppy, we must do something, they're capturing a lot of people they're hiding away." So what happened, we had nothing with us. We left there everything and we went back with the train to Budapest to my sister's boyfriend. And he had a barbershop. Germans were there. Coming and going. But we know lunchtime he closes.

HR: So you could have been picked up on the street, anything.

SE: Of course, but...

HR: You had no papers, you had nothing.

SE: We had nothing with us, no clothes, no nothing. So what happened, we went to his store, and he just wanted to close the, here we are, both of us. He said, "Oh

²Mrs. Elias appears to be referring to Strahle Street and Summerdale Avenue in the neighborhood she resided in in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

my goodness, oh my goodness, Germans are coming here to shave, what are we going to do.” I have a lot of *goyishe* [Yiddish: non-Jew] friend, you know me, we will see what we can do. We are talking, all three of us there in the store and somebody knocking on the door. He’s ripping off the door. They know each other, you know, they was Communist or something, I don’t know. So he left them in and he said to me, “I have three birth certificates for so much money. Do you want to buy them?” And he said, “But who are going to give it?” He said, “You must do be a lot of Jews we can find we can give it.”

HR: And you’re standing right there?

SE: Standing, was not standing with foot inside but he put us in a little room where he cleaned off the things what he used to shave the people.

HR: Oh, yes.

SE: There we was in. We couldn’t even breathe. He bought all the three and he give after that he give one my sister when she was working with the Germans, a birth certificate, and we had to learn everything, how the mother and where you was born, and hocus-pocus.

HR: But now you couldn’t speak Hungarian.

SE: No, no, not one word. Nothing. We even, not just this, when we bought the papers, the Christian papers, we had to learn how to be a Christian. Yes, so when he took the papers, he said to us, now, all right, we have already papers, you stay there behind the curtain. I’m going out for lunch. We will bring lunch. We will eat lunch and we will see what we can do. And we learned, you know, how to pray.

HR: Who taught you this?

SE: A priest, a priest.

HR: He brought in a priest?

SE: Yeah, we did everything. We are *shiksas* [Yiddish: non-Jewish girls].

HR: How long did it take you to learn this?

SE: Oh, you know, with children, you know, I had a better head then than I have today. You see? So now we have the papers. Here we cannot stay by him either. We go back where we was captured with the two men.

HR: You went back to...

SE: Back there. You see, in Budapest, maybe somebody going to recognize my work there in nursing so many places. You see. So we went back, the sister which, rest in peace, died in Budapest. She was with an old lady. The other men, the gypsy what I told you, he had a friend, a shoemaker, he had a sick wife and two children. She had a mother, lived on a farm. So we was there and in the meantime he knows, before the bombs, you know, came the Russians, you know, pushed the Germans back to Germany. And they was not too far away. The Germans pushed back twice Russian soldiers, you know, and but they came back, came back. So what happened, the

shoemaker, you know, took the wife and the children with me to her mother, somewhere, you know out of the country. And we was there and then after the war we came back.

HR: How long were you there, on this farm, you mean.

SE: In, not too long, not too long. But, before we, you know, she went first before I went, you know, and we had an apartment and they give Jewish furnitures and Jewish clothes, you know. And we wear what we can, you know.

HR: You mean they gave furniture and clothes that used to belong to Jews.

SE: To the Jews, because we had the Christian papers.

HR: Right, so they gave them to you? How did you get along without speaking, though?

SE: I spoke already a little bit Hungarian, then, you know. And then with the papers together we was captured.

HR: You were captured.

SE: Captured. One man's wife was a son of a gun and she had trouble with her husband and I don't know how she find out or what or who told her. You know they all was coming [unclear]. They used to come and go and bring us food and bring us there they would give clothes and they would give to heating the house coals, you know, and they had to give furnitures, and we should go and take, you know, and things like this, you know. So and she told us where we live. She didn't know our names.

HR: She told the authorities where you were living, hiding.

SE: But she don't know our names. They came to the house and we was the only strangers there in the house. I and my sister. You know, the old lady was so afraid we had to take an apartment. And here they knew we're not Jewish but you know we tried here to stay there to stay. We had everywhere our little place. They took us in the office of the Germans and they started to beating us until now I feel the fist here, until now. They was beating, and the two men they brought.

HR: The gypsy man...

SE: And the other man. And we talked it over, all four of us. They came *mit* [Yidish: with] on a train we ran away from the Russians. And the train was staying there in year, in that place, in year, in this cold year.

HR: And this you're speaking already in Hungarian? You're talking to him.

SE: Yes, yes. And the man, you know, we talked it over with the two men, mine and the sister, because the train, it was really a train was there. And the train was staying. People went off to buy food. And the train left and we left over. There are the papers. And they tried everything they couldn't help us. They couldn't take out from us, nothing. We did talk it over and the decision was, the sister was not my sister.

[Tape one, side one ended]

Tape one, side two:

SE: According to the papers we was not sisters but we looked alike [unclear]. But I think the man who said we were, he must have been a Jew, too. And the other said, "Oh sometimes happens people look alike, you know." And so not helped, they let us free, they let the men go. And they left us free and they told us everyday at that time we must come to show up, they want to see us, you know, from the way. Can you imagine, the two men came and they went free. They don't know that we gonna be free. Then they came to our house to see if we are free, too. And then they wanted to run away, they was afraid, you know, this we gonna say something and they gonna capture them or kill them, that they're hiding two Jews. And I told them, don't go nowhere and the other men too, don't go nowhere, just stay here. If you're gonna run away, damn it, it's trouble. They're going to see something is wrong. We just sticked around, all four of us, like talked it over and this was it. We went to the store, we shopped, you know, and when they give something, and then I was afraid to go to work there in nursing, so I worked for a couple. A young couple she had a little sister with her, and the husband was not a husband, he was a Jew, too.

HR: Did you know?

SE: Everyday, no, everyday he went hunting. He brought a goose, he brought all kinds, you know, he hunted, he shot down something, he brought and it was not what to eat, so they ate there. And I used to eat there, too. And then I used to go bring up coal to heat the house, you know. Once he came after me and he said to me, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "Are you crazy?" I did not know he's Jewish. And I'm not going to tell him I'm Jewish. Then he started to tell me he's Jewish and I said, "Please, you leave me alone. I don't know nothing about Jewish and leave me alone." What could I do else?

HR: But he told you, I'm Jewish?

SE: And I was afraid to trust him.

HR: Sure.

SE: How can you trust him?

HR: Of course.

SE: You cannot trust him. You are not sure who he is. Maybe he's just a spy, Gestapo, something, you know. They live together and they slept together. Everything, you know, like man and wife and then everything finish. He was Jewish and I was Jewish.

HR: The lady, too, was Jewish?

SE: No. She was a *goiysha* [Yiddish: non-Jew].

HR: But the boy...

SE: And the little sister, too. But I don't think the little sister knew something. Maybe it was his daughter or maybe he lived with her, I have no idea.

HR: But the man was Jewish.

SE: The man was...

HR: How did you find out?

SE: When everything was done, then we find out that he's Jewish. But before everything, so, and then the Russians came in.

HR: You're talking about after the war?

SE: The Russia, the Russia came in in that place. But we find a boy from our home town. From our home town. He said, "What're you doing here? I said, "What the Germans brought us," I said, "and somebody took us out from the line and we tried, you know, to be alive." Then he said, "You want to give to somebody a reward, you know, they save your life, and things like this." And you know that the shoemaker that I was with his wife. I took care of her with the two children. When he finds that we're Jewish, I thought he was going to burn up. I said, "You want to be killed, huh? I can do it, here's my friend," I said, "from the home town. You want to be killed, I said, you have but to say something about the Jews, I brought you clothes in the house, I brought you coal in the house, I brought you food in your house, and now you cannot stand a Jew?" This what I told him. He couldn't believe that we are Jewish and we was in his house. Can you believe that? So, but, we had not too much trouble. We worked hard.

HR: Did you have to go to church because everybody knew that everyone goes to church.

SE: I tell you the truth. We knew everything.

HR: From the church, you mean.

SE: In the office, when the Germans took us in, they tried to ask us pray things and we knew everything. We told them everything. I told them I'm not going to church everyday. I have to work. And the *balabosta geht* [Yiddish: housewife goes] to the church. Sometime she takes me with her and sometimes not. You know, they told me once, that the women should take me in the church, see how I'm praying. I did all hocus-pocus.

HR: You did it?

SE: Of course. I have not other choice. And then after the war, the hometown boy told us, "Pack yourself together and go away from here. The Germans pushed us already twice back. They don't let them go into Germany." And we went to mine sister's boyfriend, you know. We went there. And then we took an apartment.

HR: This was in Budapest?

SE: Budapest. There was already Russian, you know, no more Germans.

HR: What year is this now, 1945?

SE: In 1945. And we came to Budapest and then I was very sick. I had typhus. I went back to work in the hospital and we had a lot of people from Germany came home and they was, excuse me, with lice. And I started to work in their sink and a lot of them came home from the *lagers* [concentration camps], you know, we had to, you know, take care of them and look like I -- something must have bite me. A lice or

something, you know, and I catch typhus. Was a lot of sick people like this. I was very sick, I couldn't eat, but the professor from the hospital where I used to work, you know before, they took over again, and he loved me very much and he told me, "Sarah, what you want to eat, what you want to drink?" One thing I wanted was cold milk. And I was with high temperature was very -- a lot of them even died from typhus. So for money you could not buy nothing. People wanted clothes; people wanted things; people had nothing, you know. So the professor, he loved me and he gived away clothes from himself and he went and brought me a lot. It took a big vase basin with ice cubes and he kept it there in bottles of milk, I should drink the milk. And then they said they cannot keep me in that hospital, they have a special hospital for sick people like that. But the crisis went a little bit better and they took more from this hospital and put me there. When they brought me there they said, "Why did they bring her here? She looks much better than the patients what we have here." But they have to leave me there. They took away everything from me what I have, you know. They burned everything up and I was there separate in a corner in a bed. The other patients, a lot of patients, everyday, you could see people dying in there. But God wanted to be me, to have me alive. I pulled through that, too. And then we want to go home and if see somebody's home, so we went home. We came home to find -- yet, when I went home in the train, I find one of my brother-in-law, the oldest brother-in-law. So we went home with again. The wife, you know, was killed in Germany, with a son. Everybody was killed who they took. He was also there in camp and he looked awful, you know. And we came home, [unclear], we came home and we find Daddy.

HR: You found your father in your house.

SE: My father. We find already the sister who worked by the Germans. We find mine brother. He was injured in Germany.

HR: He escaped the camp³. He didn't escape, he survived the camp.

SE: He survived the camp and Daddy survived the camp.

HR: Oh yes, your father, too. But your mother died in the camp.

SE: My mother and three sisters, five, four sisters and five grandchildren, they all died in Germany, in Auschwitz⁴.

HR: But your father survived.

SE: My father survived, and my brother came home.

HR: Was your father and your brother living in your house? Were they back in the house?

SE: And the sister, yes.

³Sarah's brother, Josef Perl survived Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Gross-Rosen, Bolkenhain (a subcamp of Gross-Rosen), Hirschberg and Buchenwald. His testimony can be found at the website <http://www.josefperl.com/josefs-story/>. There is also an interesting article about him here <http://45aid.org/064/>.

⁴Auschwitz is in Poland. Mrs. Elias probably means at the hands of the Germans.

HR: You found them right in your house.

SE: The house was occupied, was occupied, but when they came home the *goyim* [Yiddish: non-Jews] went out the house.

HR: And gave it back.

SE: And gave it back. No questions asked. It was very nice *goyim* around us. Was not too bad, you know. So we was there. He was the only older man in that town that came home. Everybody who came back from the concentration camp, they was in our house. We had two rooms and the kitchen and the terrace, you know, closed up, you know. And everybody came into our place, our house place.

HR: All the survivors.

SE: All the survivors. And here my father he wants someone to marry me. I'm almost 22-4 years old he wants to get -- I said, "Look, Daddy, I always loved a baker. I always liked fresh bread and my life is I want to eat fresh bread in my life." I said I met a baker and I know the baker and I love him. We know each other for four years.

HR: But where did you see each other again when you came back? If he was already in this other town?

SE: My father started to making *gescheften* [Yiddish: business]. He couldn't go to the job where he used to work. The Russians took away everything. So he went and he bought tobacco leaves.

HR: What?

SE: Tobacco leaves.

HR: Oh, tobacco leaves.

SE: Yes. And with this they made big business then.

HR: Sure.

SE: So I said to my daddy. I go with you. And I went with him. But he had to stay there three days. The leaves was too wet. You know, he not going to make enough money if you buy it wet. Yeah? So he had to stay there three days. In the meantime, I'm talking there with the dairyman and the woman where he going to stay. A boy came. You know, they see a strange girl, the boys run in right away. So they came and they started to talk. And I said to them, you know Victor Elias? Just like that. He said, "Yes, he lives not far from here." I said, "All right, are you going there?" He said, "Yes." I go with him. I go with him. He said, "Yeah, he's there and there already." So I slept over. I couldn't go on that day back and I tell Daddy, "If you stay here longer and that boy says, "He's going there too; he has some business to do with his sister. They going with the one, and I go with them." And he took me to my husband -- not husband, to my boyfriend. I have arrived there, there is Victor Elias. Has already a bakery, has there already an apartment, has the store. And here, my father is going to wait for me. I just came to see him. He don't want to let me go. Tell you why. You see, when he was in hard labor and I was still working, I give them money, I give them food. He had a home in my house. What I was eating, he was eating. He was not coming alone, either.

He came with a soldier. He couldn't go out alone. He had to go out with a soldier, Hungarian soldier. I give them to eat, too. And when he was in hard labor, I had money, I used to go and visit him, I used to take him food there, I used to take him clothes there.

HR: This is where? Where?

SE: In Budapest.

HR: In Budapest.

SE: In Hungary.

HR: Oh, I see.

SE: There I met him.

HR: That's the first place you met.

SE: There was the first. So we kept in contact all the time. He had the two sisters, had a brother what he came back, he survived in Germany, you know. The two sisters if they would do what I did, they would be alive too today, but they wanted to go home to the parents. You see? The brother was around me. I give them money and food, you know. I tried to help anybody. I worked in the hospital. It was easier for me to have food to give to somebody and sometime you have patients after two operations. They cannot eat, they want drink a lemon, or little tea, you know. I used to take the food to help somebody else. They was hungry, you know. So when I came to, to visit them, 1945, he said "I'm not going to let you go. I'm gonna marry you." I said, "Are you kidding? I have my father, and my brother and my sister home." He said, "I don't have nobody either." And he not let me go and he make the engagement party in their house. And then I went home. And I told this for my father, on the way to Budapest for my clothes. And then I came back and I told Daddy, "Then and then, will be the wedding, Come." He came with the sister and my brother. He made the wedding alone; he not let my father do nothing. He said, you know, I deserved it. I helped him when he was, you know, need it. Now he want to help me. My father wanted to give him money. He said, "No, I don't want it." He did a beautiful wedding. Two weddings. The first two weddings in 1945, was ours and somebody else's in the same day.

HR: Was it in a synagogue?

SE: No, we had a *chuppah* [Heb.: canopy under which a bride and groom stand during the wedding ceremony] in our house, you know. And then we went in a restaurant, we ordered the food. And everybody was eating and drinking and crying all night long.

HR: Was it, did you have a rabbi that was...

SE: A *shoykhet* [Yiddish: ritual slaughterer].

HR: Oh.

SE: Yeah. We just married from a *shoykhet*, you know, not on a *chazzan* [Heb.: cantor]. We not married city hall, either. No.

HR: That's all right; it's a good Jewish wedding.

SE: And then and then, like my husband said, we left Romania, also. I was pregnant, seven months, and we went to Czechoslovakia. And he worked there and I not work. I had my baby. And then he had his own bakery and I worked in the store and I had a maid and we had helpers, you know. They loved us very much. And when the Communist started to make [unclear], you know, [unclear] you had to come together, play with kids, you know, to gossip with each other and the next day you find out they took them to Siberia and they took them to Siberia and they took them here and they took them there, you know. We saw it's getting trouble, you know. And then we find out a group is going to Israel. We signed up, too. We couldn't take nothing, no furnitures, no things like this, you know. Not even if we had three blankets, four blankets, you couldn't take just three.

HR: That's it.

SE: That's it. So I had there a sister what she also survived. She's in Israel now. I give to her, you know, things which she had not. I give her and we went to Prague and from Prague we went to Italy and from Italy we went to Israel. In Israel I started to work right away in nursing in camp, in *lager* of big camp. [unclear] And I worked there in nursing, the child went in *gan yeladim* [Heb.: literally, garden of children], you know, kindergarten. He was sick all the time. Somebody had to work. So he was sick. He was in the hospital in and out, in and out, and I had to work, you know. And then the professor, he tells me, "Maybe he's sick. We going to see to it you should get a house, somewhere. Maybe the camp here makes him sick." He said, "Where would you like to live?" I said to him, "I'm a nurse, I would like a place where I can work somewhere, you know, close by. I have children, you know, a child." And so he said, "Ramat Gan, Ramat Gan. They make new houses. Ramat Gan [unclear, Mrs Elias mentions of neighborhoods], you know all kind of *shikhunim* [Heb.: neighborhoods]. So this was not easy. They wanted to give us here, they wanted to give us there, we thought maybe he would work in the bakery; maybe it will be better there and there. I could have anywhere I wanted. The professor said he wanted to help me; he should get out of here, in the camp. You know? It was not too bad in the camp, either, where I was working in nursing, you know. I had a little room just for the family. [Unclear], I was the hope *shvester*, [Yiddish: nurse] you know, like a hope out of sheep and I was of the whole camp the big nurse, you know. So they tried, they not kept me in the *feldt* [Yiddish: field] outside, you know, to live, they kept me in a little room there. So then we took in, near Ramat Gan, a *shikhun*, you know, a house, a room and a kitchen, not a [unclear] but [unclear], like a bathroom, like a shower, a shower and a sink and, excuse me, a toilet. We had a place for [unclear], but we couldn't put it in, even if you wanted, it was so small, but it was all right for us. And I worked in Ramat Gan in nursing, and there I find out this *mattiyah elnique* [Heb.: small, local medical center] in Ramat Gan, like the city hall, will open up medical centers there where I live. And also, the *Histadrut* opens up too. You see, the *Histadrut* [Heb.: General Federation of Laborers] for the working

people and the *mattiyah elnique* is for the poor people. When I find I was already pregnant with the second. And I not told them I'm pregnant when I took the job. I wanted to have the job near the house where I'm living. So I was pregnant and then they find out but I said, "Don't worry, I will work." And they open the *mattiyah* there, the medical center when I took over there. And I carried on the medical center. Then I had my son also, you know. Then they took away my husband in 1956.

HR: In the war.

SE: Yeah, and then it was the operating and the kidney stone, they took out. It was not easy with three children, but we was happy. We had a home. We are with Jews. We tried the best, you know. It was, it was, I liked it there. But he was sick and the temperature in three places they took the temperature. The temperature, after they took out already the stone. And then they said, the kidney must come out. Now who want to take out the kidney. We know, and the brother and the twins, maybe the doctors felt this and maybe this and maybe this. If you're sick if you're sick. If somebody tells you the kidney must come out, the kidney must come out. So Dr. Klaus and Dr. Liuce and Dr. Schneibert. You know what the doctor told me in Jefferson hospital? I should take a lawyer and sue them they let them go so far. One week, if I would have let him go, he would be dead. I had to give him blood; my brother-in-law give them blood. I was 72 hours with him in the hospital. The doctor, when he came in the morning to visit him said, "Take a mirror and look at you, how you look. You look worse than he." I give blood. I not ate all day, I not ate all night. 72 hours, not to eat? You know what this mean? Nobody even thought to bring me a sandwich. Not his brother and not him [unclear]. And they not even thought or go to look if the children have what to eat in the house. We went through hell here, too. We couldn't speak English. And he's sick in and out of the hospital, what we gonna do? So I find my daughter went to Northeast High School in school. She was at the [unclear] in Israel. And the Israeli children have a separate school here in the northeast. They teach them English. And my daughter met there Israeli children. And one girl told her mother and the mother came to visit us and her daughter had the tonsils and the polyps out in Tel Aviv in Israel where my second daughter had the polyp and the tonsils out. But I was a nurse; I could stay with my daughter. And if you had a few more children and not going to take care of them, you worked. I'm a nurse. The child and the mother came to pick her up. She said, "You know, Mom, that nurse took care of me all night. I was very sick. I was bleeding." She was spitting up, you know. And I was running for ice, I was running for ice cream. And I called the nurses, you know. I'm not a person who's just going to take care of my children, the hell with those. We're here in one room. And the child called for the mother. And the mother, you know, started to come to us and we was talking and I forgot all about them. I had to started to work, I cannot speak English, my husband is sick, what we gonna do with [unclear]. She said, "You know what, we are working in a factory." Her husband is sewing clothes and things like this. And she is working there,

you know, something you know. We have torn pants, some open buttons, things like this. She said come with me in the office, maybe they need another helper. Maybe you can start to work there after. So I went -- I am not ashamed to make money. Why should I be ashamed? I started to work there and I was so fast they loved me. When the factory went slow, then they kept me there, too. I was not a union member yet. Union member workers started to carry on, "How this I'm not a union member and why they keep me in?" And the boss said "You are getting twice how much she makes. Sure I'm going to keep her. You can collect, go collect. Then we gonna open them again." All right, I started to work and according to them if I'm not a union member, I don't have to pay dues. And I started to work then and then and I'm making a dollar and a quarter an hour. And if I'm getting a check then and then I know for how many days I have to get my check and I look at my check, somehow not clear. And the foreman said to me, come there near the woman, what she took me into work, we was working near each other. And he comes with the check and he said to me, "Sign this. I have to take it back in the office." I said, "What? I should sign." Like this, you know. I couldn't even tell him what I want. I, you know, I signed it and give it. I said, "Oh no." I said, "You go in the office and fix it, no good. This was no good. Go in the office. I knew already to tell him. Go in the office and fix it. Then come back, then I will think about what to do." And the woman said to me, "How can you talk to him?" I said, "What do you mean? The check is not good. And if I'm going to sign, he will take out the money [unclear], what I'm going to do then? Oh, she said, "How can you be so smart?" I said, "Are you a dummy? If you go sign the check, he can take out your money! And you're going to go out with nothing." What I did, I went then in the office and he was the foreman, and I just started there to work. And I started to cry, in Jewish and I was talking to the manager, to the owner. I said to him, "First of all, I started to work then and then. I'm not a union person; you don't take out dues yet. I worked so many days, the check is not right. To me belongs more than this and then he tells me to sign the check and give it to him, is this right?" He tells me with the foreman together, stay here, he called in the union, and he started to tell the union member what he wanted to do with me. And they fired the foreman and they kept me, the worker. I'm working for that, I need the money for my three children and my sick husband. And then they closed out the factory and they went to Reed Street, 26 Reed Street. I said, "Oh, no. I'm a nurse." I said, "I came here to learn English." A few of them read more, you know, with people together, I picked up. My husband took a newspaper and he said, "There and there is an office and they're looking for nurses." Then I? I could not even speak; I can hardly speak a few words. So I went in their office, with mine papers. You know, I finished nursing in Hungary. I worked in Israel for 10 years, I transferred them in English, I went and paid special to transfer [unclear], went in the office and there is a lot of other, you know, girls looking for work. They took in a few girls. They took me in too. I had no time to sit down; they called me in, already. And they no, no, no, no, I was there before, why you

don't call me? The office man said, "You just sit, I will call you, too." And he tells me he finds a Jewish nursing home, Crown Nursing Home, on Broad Street. He has a nursing home; it is a Jewish place, Polish people, and they're looking for nurses. They give me the address and he showed me where to go to the bus and go there with Broad and Snyder, go over there, and ask the people where is Crown Nursing Home. From Broad and Snyder, not far there on the corner is Crown Nursing Home. I came to Crown Nursing Home. He speak Hebrew, he speak Polish, he speak Russian, he speak Yiddish, and then *schoen in de heim* [Yiddish: already in the home], you know, so we started to talk and I tell him we talk everything. The salary is \$180 a month. I said "\$180", I said, "No, I said, I can do anything you want, but \$180." I come home and tell my husband and here I would have to travel with three buses, which means one hour going and one hour back, and eight-hour work, ten hours a day, six days a week, I had to work. I tell this my husband and he calls up, he said, not for a \$180 I don't want her -- I don't want her to work. So he gives me a \$20 more, he wanted to see what I know and then if I'm going to be a good worker, he will give me more. All right, I have no other choice, I must go to work. You have to get food on the table, you must pay rent. I took the job and after six months it was Christmas, they give me \$25 bonus. And they give me more. So I was charge nurse on the second floor of 45 patients. And I took care there, and I worked there for six years and then we had a strike, a union strike. I couldn't picket, I could not work -- he's sick he's in and out of the hospital, so I went on Old York Road, there in a nursing home. So I worked there for six months and here Crown Nursing Home calls me back. I said, "Look, after a year, after six months I'm getting vacation. Here, I'm getting more than you used to give me. Closer for me than to you. If you give me more, I come back." He give me everything I ask, everything. He give me the vacation after six months, you know; he give me more money. You know, he could trust me because I was a Jewish girl, you know, and they loved me. And then my husband opened the bakery. After he lost the kidney, he couldn't work so hard by the boss. He took a bakery, it's going to be easier for him to take a helper if the business is going to get better, you know. It will be all right. I helped him there with three children, but it just couldn't work out. Antisemitism was big. The Jewish people used to wear crosses on their neck. The children, people was afraid to say they're Jewish. We close for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we closed the store, and they said to me the next day, we don't know you're Jewish, we don't know you're Jewish. And I saw the business dropping. The children don't want to go to school. They come over, she said, my dead body, you can take to school. Next year my son, eight years old, he will run away from the house. And he had friends and the Christians used to come to our store and they used to tell him, you know, my child, if he had friend, used to run for a cookie. Used to give them too our doughnuts. He wanted to have friends. And then he took away the friends from the other child. The parents used to come to us because my son take away the friends from his son. I said, "I pay taxes. He not going to let them go there, I pay taxes.

My children are going to go where they want. You have one thing; you don't have to let them in your house. This is all but another way, you better watch out yourself." This what I told him. He thought, you know, he going to hurt my son. I warned them before. And we saw antisemitism there very bad. Business was dropping, how hard we are trying, you know.

[Interview ended.]