

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

BARONESS ELIZABETH KEMÉNY-FUCHS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Sara Callen
Date: May 15, 1986

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EK - Baroness Elizabeth Kémeny Fuchs [interviewee]

SC - Sara Callen [interviewer]

Date: May 15, 1986

Tape one, side one:

SC: This is May the 15th [1986], and I am Sara Callen, who has the pleasure of speaking with Baroness Kemény, who has graciously consented to tell us her story. We will proceed now. Baroness, this is a pleasure indeed, and we are grateful to you for...what you are about to tell us.

EK: Yes, it was a beginning. I had been named as a link from Wallenberg to the government, so I want to tell you everything about it. I married in '42 and then I came to Budapest. And in October '44 the Arrow Cross government came to might, what you call it, and I just, the reason why I made up my mind so very quickly to help all these poor creatures was that I saw a procession going by my windows—very weak ones, shuffling away, children, old ones.¹ So I just asked the police who they were, and they said, “Well, they’re going to work.” And that was something I couldn’t understand at all, so I rang up my husband. I told him everything. It was no propaganda, really, and they were just going to, I don’t know where, but dreadful to look at. So that was the beginning, and you see then Wallenberg came around. I was looking for somebody I could go and help together, you see, and all the while since the government feared something. Well, Wallenberg came. He had an organization, and I was the link to the government. I was the, had the might through my husband. My husband was the Foreign Minister, you see.

SC: How did you meet Wallenberg?

EK: Well, I can’t, I don’t know any more. I think diplomatic, but I can’t remember it, you see. But I met him very, very quickly because he wanted to have some connection with the Foreign Minister because he was a diplomat; so he couldn’t go to the Minister of Interior, of course, no good for him. It just happened to be my husband, you see. And so they all wrote in their books, “It will be a mystery forever how that young woman got on so well with Wallenberg for just after a few days,”—or after a week or something like that— “to help him as much as she could, *or* she has been his mistress. Anyway, she’s just a young married, expecting her first baby, or she has been a Jew and they can’t, they are not a, not a blood [not clear] do it.” These things, you see. So those were not right. The reason was that I saw this poor procession, and Wallenberg came and he explained me a lot about this. So I believed him what he said, you see, because I’d seen something for myself. But that was in the beginning. And then there came a decree out in the newspapers

¹On October 18, 1944, immediately after the Arrow Cross seizure of power, the new Interior Minister, Gabár Vajna, in a radio address, annulled all the protective passes which, at the insistence of Wallenberg, had been issued to Jews by several neutral governments.

and radio that all the protecting passports will be abolished from one moment to the other. You can't...imagine what it meant really, because all these poor Jews would have been just helpless. And Wallenberg got, he got such in a panic. I remember that. He knew exactly what it meant for him and all the other legations, see. So he implored me and my husband to do something, to help if possible, you see. And they have written in the books that I went with my husband to the radio and he made a speech on the radio. That's all...it's not true at all—not as simple as that, you see. There was a conference of the government in the evening, that I knew, and I knew there was something going on. And I just begged my husband to get through with new protective passports. And he was the youngest of the ministers, and he said, "I can't fight against the whole, the other lot. I'm too weak to fight alone." So I mean, I did what I could, and I said I would leave him forever, and so on.² And off he went, very, very angry, and at midnight—see, that's the truth—at midnight the speaker of the radio said that the decision of the government has been—beside other things, you see—had been that there will be allowed 3,000 passports for the Papal Nuncio—he was Angelo Rotta, he was a Durian [?] you see, he was the first—3,000 for the Swedish Minister, Danielsson, and 3,000 for the Consul General Lutz; he was Swiss. So there were now, there were 9,000, could be allowed. But of course...

SC: Protective?

EK: Protective passports, the only thing that protected were the passports, you see, nothing else. Only these pass-, or the... They helped a lot, especially at the beginning, so there were 9,000 allowed, but I mean, how many were issued, I wonder, about 50-60,000, I don't know, a lot, you see. But the main thing was they were allowed again. How many wasn't very interesting. So it started and went on to help these Jews. Now, what else could I tell you? Well, I mean, Wallenberg was very, very, he needed instruction to know if there had been some transporting thing and so on. He couldn't always get it, see, and then I heard from my husband, or he told me, and then some list I got I gave them to him. You see, he was always available by telephone or something like that, and I was available, so we'd meet each other, or I'd send a messenger—or I don't know what, I can't remember, after 40 years, how I did it or he did it—but we had always a very quick connection, because if he knew something about the deportation, my husband didn't know in time, he would ring me up, or my husband up, and then sometimes my husband went there personally—not very often, I say, because he couldn't do this, I mean—or he sent Bogoshi, and Bogoshi was his Cabinet Head, see. And that man Bogoshi even arrested Arrow Cross youths. They were terrible pests, these Arrow Cross youths, you see, because they thought they will be now the master of the streets. So they weren't very easy, and the leader of that Arrow Cross youth was the brother of the Minister of Interior, you see, [Gabár] Vajna... So the Minister of Interior was very mighty. He had policemen, he had gendarmes. And the Arrow Cross,

²On the night of October 28, 1944, under pressure from his wife and Wallenberg, Baron Kemény announced the revocation of Vajna's decree and the restoration of the validity of the protective passes. At his wife's insistence, Kemény remained at the radio station until the announcement was made.

but his brother had, you see? So now, we were talking, let me think here. [tape off then on] Somehow, and I told the police to let go, everybody who wants to come to me, see. I want to have a free, to keep a free house, I'd say. Well, for Wallenberg wasn't needing, was needing for other people who came to me for help, and if I could get a visa somewhere or could get, or, because they want to get over the frontier, because all the frontiers in Hungary were just closed like anything, you see. And when I went away to my mother, I had to, needed a visa in my passport, close as that.

SC: Where did you go?

EK: Oh, afterwards I went to my mother, yes. And...

SC: Where did she live?

EK: And they were, well, in South Tyrol, you see, just...

SC: South.

EK: South of [unclear] in Italy, the North of Italy. So, and it wasn't easy to get over the frontier. Once you got over the frontier, you were a little bit safe, because you went to Austria and then you went to Switzerland—and there you could be somewhere, see? And so lots of people I didn't know at all, were just strangers to me, too, just came with their passport and begged, or their, or somebody else's passport. I didn't know. I never could scrutinized it. I never looked at it. I didn't know the name, nothing, just the passport, you see, that was needed. And they gave it to me and then I came, and then I went to [Edmund] Veessenmayer. He was the German Ambassador, what you call it. He had a legation of about 500 people. They all wanted to come to Hungary. They could live nicely there, you see. And then I took the car of my husband. I took the chauffeur, and with flag, so I got in immediately. And I came to Veessenmayer, and I said, "Well, my dear, actually we have all the, I have got a pile of passports; may I have a visa?" He said, "Oh, yes, of course." He couldn't say no. That was impossible, to say no to me, see. "Oh, yes, of course. I shall send it to your husband's office." And I said, "Oh, no, no, I don't want to send it. I am staying here, and you'll give me now. I'm just waiting for a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes." So I didn't want he would, should scrutinize these papers, you see. I didn't know if they were real or not, so I didn't bother about it. So I got it back with his signature, and so that went on until he got so furious he sent two staff, two men of his staff, to my husband, complaining about me. And my husband asked me, "What are you doing?" Well, I, so I said, "Well, I'm just helping people, that's all." And you know, "All right, go on, go on." He didn't mind too much, see? Well this was a...

SC: He didn't mind, or he didn't...

EK: No, he didn't mind. No, no, he and I, he was a very helpful man. He was the man. If he hadn't helped me, I couldn't have done very much for Wallenberg, I think, see? I was only the, what, I was the First Lady of the government, but still I had no office of my own. I just asked him, and so he did a lot for them, through me. And after that, going out by the radio at midnight, I came home—I must tell you that—I came home two days ago, I think it was, and there were flowers from the bottom to the ceilings. But I had never seen

in my life, flowers, flowers, flowers, like a tree of flowers! And I said, “Who on earth would be sending me that?” That was Wallenberg who sent them to me. Then my husband came. “Oh you, now really, I couldn’t afford.” That was his thing, [Wallenberg’s -ed.] you see he, being a diplomat, he couldn’t have gone on without having the passports, you see. He couldn’t go underground.

SC: He was too visible.

EK: He was a diplomat. He couldn’t do it. I mean, he was, he had to pass as a diplomat. He wasn’t a diplomat really, but he had the state of a diplomat, you see? So he couldn’t go on helping without the permission of the government, some sort of a permission, let’s say, you see.

SC: And you were his link.

EK: And I was the link, you see, and I, well he did a lot. What he did, everybody knows, because there have been written so many books and they are all right. He was very courageous, and it was very pitiful, you see, and he was very human. If he could save somebody, he just saved, I don’t know, a little cat or a fly or something like that. You just take this point of view he had, you see? Very courageous, and very persistent, I must say, because he came very often to my husband, and wrote these long memos to him, all in beautiful French, very nice French. And so my husband got a lot of work from him. Once he said, “Well, you and your friend Wallenberg gave me quite a lot of work!” But you see, he was very intelligent from this point of view. He found out very quickly, let’s say, a weak spot in the head of some adversary. You say adversary?

SC: Adversary.

EK: Adversary, yeah, who is against him, you see.

SC: Adversary.

EK: And that he did, he just crept in and in and in. So that was one of his best qualities. And then he also found a way out, see? And when he...

SC: Until the end.

EK: Yes. And then when he came to the Russians, it must have been the worst of all that he couldn’t help in the, he couldn’t write letters, he couldn’t be heard. And the helplessness must have been dreadful for him, I think. Because he always found a way out. He always somehow saved people in some very peculiar manner, you know? Very peculiar manner, I must say that. And once in the hands of the Russians, you know, that’s finished, you see? He couldn’t, nothing, he couldn’t do anything. I think that must have been the worst of all for him, really, dreadful.

EK: So sad.

SC: So very, very sad. Well, I don’t know if you have seen, oh no, another thing. I don’t know if you have seen that film of [Richard] Chamberlain. Chamberlain, the one...

SC: Yes.

EK: Oh it’s a dreadful film. I mean, the Swedish side is very good. He’s acting very well for Wallenberg, I must say. But the Hungarian side is really awful—beginning

with [President] Horthy—because Horthy wasn't the fat little man, always medals on. He was very good-looking, tall. I mean, really it's too bad for words. And then saying there was a bride, and then me presenting to Eichmann? I mean, and this is so crazy. I never saw Eichmann! I'd never known Eichmann! And I wasn't a bride. I was married already two years, you see? And then all this, even all this weeping. You see weeping?

SC: Yes.

EK: Crying?

SC: Yes.

EK: There wasn't a moment of crying. I mean, I couldn't have fought against all these very hard men with weeping.

SC: That was such a misrepresentation!

EK: No, it is really, a little more character I had. Otherwise I wouldn't have done, I couldn't have done it really. And we, I never wept, really. I couldn't. I mean, you couldn't. You know, it was, that work was very hard. There was the Arrow Cross, there was the government, there were the Germans, there were the S.S. and so on. He had to fight against everybody. You can't do that crying. No, I mean, this is quite impossible. You see? So and then, the end, I was leaving? Now, that's another thing, now they've written in books. They've written in books that the government sent me away. That's not a word true. Nobody could send *me* away against my will, really. But I talked with the professor, my professor, and I had a big operation in July, you see. And I said, "Well, I'm so worn out, I can't any more. I have to have a rest. I just can't." And so he said to me, "You can go to your mother for about three weeks, but do be back because the baby might come." See? So I wrote to...

SC: This was during your pregnancy?

EK: Yes, yes. So I just thought, "Well, now, I have to go to my mother." Now in the film they're saying that I left on, by the train—*alone*! I can't imagine, the war going to an end, my husband would have sent me *alone*? The long, long journey, Austria, then Italy, and so on? I mean, quite crazy. Too bad for words, really. And there was a scene that, some sort of love scene. I'm left by a car, and there are two cars protecting me, you see? And Wallenberg came around and then he, just to say good-bye and so on...what a natural thing, you see? And then I went to my mother. And just three weeks afterwards my baby was born, Christmas '44.

SC: Born in the Tyrol?

EK: Yeah, in Tyrol, yes, yes.

SC: In their home.

EK: And you see, my mother was very, very, how do you say, *glücklich*, happy.

SC: Happy.

EK: Because she didn't want me to go back to Hungary. She was fearing, you see, the politics and so on. And I couldn't leave my little boy because he was very, a very tiny little thing, you see. So I couldn't leave him. So I never came back...

SC: So how long...

EK: I never came back to Hungary. I left the third or fourth of December. I didn't leave the end of November. It was already December, and so I didn't go back. And, if I had gone back I would have told Wallenberg not to be so naive and to believe everything from the Russians. They were Allied forces from America, all right, but still, you know how dictators are just another thing. And he was naive. And that, you see he was very lucky, he got through with everything. He got through with the S.S., and he got through with Horthy somehow. They stopped because Horthy sent about 300,000 Jews over to Germany, but then he could stop it somehow. He was stopped by the King of Sweden. Oh, that's written in all the books. And so he got on with them not badly. And then October came around and Horthy was sent, I mean he had signed for the sake of his son to sign that his successor will be Szalasi. So I mean, it was just a new thing, these Arrow Cross, nobody knew them. So for him it was very difficult and they were very on the right. They were Nazis, you see. So for him, he got through. He got through them too, because my husband and me helped him, you see. So he was so lucky, so I think a little bit he thought he might go on like that forever. And then the Russians came and that was the end. Because they, you know, how it was. Let's stop a little bit. [tape off then on]

Now I'd like to tell you the story how it began really. One day I saw before my window passing by a very, very sad procession—old ones, young ones, children—and just shuffling away, and they were accompanied by gendarmes or soldiers or whatever they were, just going on, hardly going on. And I just went down and asked where they are and they just told me they are going to work. I didn't believe a word, of course, because it was a silly answer. So I rang up my husband and I told him the whole thing and I told him, "It isn't only propaganda what we hear. Here I have seen them with my own eyes." And so I made up my mind to help them as quickly as possible. You see, and then I asked several people to help me, too. They didn't really like it because they feared, like everybody feared everything. And I came across to Wallenberg. He got to know me. I can't remember how, it was diplomatic way or something like that. And he had a wonderful organization to help the Jews and so on. I had to [unclear] to my husband to help him, what he was looking for, because he didn't know the Arrow Cross government at all. And...

SC: Could you spell, which government? Arrow...

EK: Arrow Cross. [tape off then on] So, at the beginning there came the decree out by the newspapers that all the passports, all the protecting passports of the Jews, will be abolished, no use any more, and no help any more for them. So I never saw Wallenberg in that state like that, because he knew it would have been the end of his work being a diplomat. And it would be the end of the, all the [unclear] delegation, you see. So something had to be done. I knew about the conference in the evening of the Cabinet. And when my husband came home from his office, I just implored him to do something to get this protective passport again, to revoke that decree, you see. And...

SC: Did it come out of his office?

EK: No, no, no. It came out from the Interior Ministry.

SC: Interior Ministry.

EK: Yes, not from him. He had nothing to do with that really. And...

SC: And he was...?

EK: He was Foreign Officer, or, Foreign Minister, my husband.

SC: I'm trying to remember the name of the Minister of the Interior.

EK: Vajna.

SC: V-...

EK: V-A-J-N-A, Vajna. Gabor, was his name. And Vajna Ernő was the brother, and he was the head of the Arrow Cross, you see.³ And, well you see the problem. My husband was, he is the youngest Minister, and he can't fight against the whole Cabinet. So he doesn't think he can do something about it. And I just implored him to do it, and at the end I threatened him that I'm leaving him forever, can't come back because it would have been a dreadful thing, you see, he wouldn't have gone through. So he just banged the door off the walls, very, very angry. And I thought my being angry might be...

SC: Make him do something.

EK: Do something. That's it. That's just the right answer, you see? And at midnight, and you see, that's the truth. Wherever the books have been written is all not right. At midnight the speaker of the radio sent the news and said it has been decided 3,000 protective passports for the Duryan [?], and there was the Papal Nuncio, Angelo Rotta, 3,000 for the Minister of the Swedish Delegation, Danielsson, and 3,000 for Consul Lutz of Switzerland. You see there were 9,000, but still they were allowed again how many they were issued, I don't know how many, 30,000, 40,000, something like that. It didn't matter really. It mattered only that it was allowed again to issue protective passports. And that was very, very important. So they could go on saving them, and especially Wallenberg. He issued all these passports, and every way, I mean the passports weren't falsificated and so on; they just wrote down the name, and that was it, you see. You had something in your hand. And that was the important thing, really. [tape off then on] You see, and I started some private helping, too. I didn't, I changed my telephone, and I told the police, staying before my house, to let pass everybody who wants to come to me, so my apartment was crowded very quickly with people who came to me for help, whatever I could. And they asked me for visas, for passports to get over the frontier, probably to go to Switzerland and disappear in Italy or somewhere there, see, because Hungary was getting smaller and smaller, so it was easier to be found there.

SC: What time was this, what month?

EK: Well, that was always in November.

SC: November of...

EK: October-November, you see, just after, yes.

³Ernő Vajna was the Arrow Cross leader entrusted with the defense of Budapest against the Soviets.

SC: And this is '44?

EK: '44. '44. And you see, then I just, they just gave me these passports. Whose they were I don't know. I never asked the name. I never asked if they were all real ones and so on. They just gave me something in my hand. And so I took the car of my husband with his chauffeur, with the flag, and so I went to Veessenmayer—and Veessenmayer was the German Minister or Ambassador, whatever you call it—and stayed in his office, you see. And there I was, and I just asked him for the visas. And he just was very polite, of course. "I can do it." He couldn't say no to me, you see. That was the reason why I came personally. And I said, "No, no, don't send it to me. I'll just wait here now." So he couldn't scrutinize these papers too much, because I didn't know if they were real or not. And then I got them and I went back. And so I did this several times. And then one day he sent two of his staff to my husband complaining about me, that he can't go on because if I come in person, he can't say no. And he can't give the visa. It's quite impossible, and my husband came home in the evening and he said, "Whatever have you done again now?" And so I said, "Well, I did that, and did this, and I took your car." Well, he didn't mind very much. He just let me do it again. And then if Wallenberg, I met, I see, I always knew where to get Wallenberg and he always knew where to get me by the phone, because sometimes some situation was so quickly to be...now looked at or to be done something, he just rang me up and I rang my husband up and sometimes my husband came there personally—against Arrow Cross' views—[unclear], or he sent his Cabinet head, Bogosi. [?] You know, it is B-A-S-O-G-I, Bagosi. I, I, yes.

SC: He was your husband's...?

EK: Cabinet head. I don't know how you can say it, of his staff. He was the...

SC: Administrator.

EK: Administrator, yes. And he arrested the Arrow Cross', you see. He did it, he, all on the name of my husband. My husband never did it, but he did it. Or, you know, there were so, how do you say, situations, to be very, very quick, you see? Otherwise it would have been too late. And that wasn't so very easy either. And then I got sometimes some sort of list of names who had been deported. Do you say deported?

SC: Deported.

EK: Deported. And these lists were very essential, very... And so I sent them to Wallenberg. And he ran off, so they had a list of names, and he could issue passports. He just wrote the name and his signature and that was it. That was the whole purpose, you see. So they were saved. They just called them out, the name, he knew, by list. So he could save them.

SC: And the Nazis went along with your...?

EK: Well, you see...the Germans didn't understand Hungarian. So it was rather more easy for him. When the Arrow Cross gendarmes came with all, deporting people, it was more difficult because they knew, they were Hungarians and they knew everything about [unclear] and so on.

SC: So it became more difficult.

EK: It just, it became more difficult, of course, it did, yes. yes. [tape off then on]
Do the questions, it's very good if you do the questions.

SC: Yes. Yes. Yesterday you said that you thought Wallenberg was a bit naive.

EK: Yes, I'd say.

SC: Was it that he trusted the Russians more than he should have, in your opinion?

EK: Well, you see, now in my opinion he was very lucky. He got through with everybody. He was very persistent, and he always found out some weak spot in the adversary, adverse man, you see? And I know, they, he was very, very clever and he got on with the S.S. He got on with the Germans. And he got on with the Arrow Cross government. So he thought he would just as well get on with the Russians, being Allied of the Americans. I didn't know that he wasn't in the American service really. But he knew it, of course, and they knew that they were Allies, you see? He never would have thought that the Russians would be against everybody. But, of course, you know what he wanted to do after the war was to...construct something, a Wallenberg Committee, according to Wallenberg, some name, and then to help all these poor people to get their property back, and to get their houses back and everything, to order everything, to help.

SC: You knew that was...his intention?

EK: Oh yes, I knew that.

SC: Yes.

EK: I mean, he always did that.

SC: He spoke about that.

EK: He spoke about that, and he was always full of lists here and there, and see, and he thought with the Russian help he could do that, and that was just the opposite thing the Russians wanted. You see, the Russians didn't want at all a man like that, being a neutral diplomat, to stay on in the country they have succeeded, that will be their own, where they wanted to have the Communism, who would like to help all these poor people to get everything back. I mean, they didn't want anybody to look at them, you see? It's not that if somebody knew about them, because Budapest was full of spies. So they knew about Wallenberg's doing, see? So I think this was the main reason he just had to disappear because they knew how his character was, how persistent he was. If you want to do something, to help someone, you just did everything for it. So it wouldn't...

Tape one, side two:

[Long pause before start of tape. May not have recorded beginning] ed.

SC: About...

EK: Yeah, you see...

SC: The warning.

EK: Yes, he told me he had talked with Kol Onto [?]. How he talked, I can't remember, by telephone, or...I don't know. And he told her my name and my address and everything, and she will wear in the soles of her shoes my address and, on this, to protect me after the war, to help me after the war, let's say. So it was so strange this word. I never forgot them, you see? Whoever wears in the soles of the shoes the address. And I mean, that is smart, and I said, "Well, I can help myself," so I did. Well, and it was still, it was only like, that was the only thing he ever said to me, he never, you know, threatened my husband, "If you don't do it, if you don't help, we will [unclear]." He never did that, never. And he never promised me anything. So I think it was, the only thing he ever said was that.

SC: Do you think he was concerned...

EK: And I never asked him for anything, never. It was written in the book that I asked for passports, protecting passports for Arrow Cross friends of mine. My, really! That's too childish, really. I never even asked for one passport. Why should I have done it? They can save themselves if they like it. And I mean, I sent good friends of mine, Jewish friends, to him and rang him up, "Please give a passport and so on." That, of course, I did, see, but it's, the only thing I begged was that. But I never asked for any passport for me.

SC: But this would suggest to you that he was concerned about your well-being and safety.

EK: Oh well, I, yes, I know. Yes, yes, I helped a lot, see, and my husband helped a lot. And so, of course he was concerned. It's, I mean, quite understandable. We got on very nicely, very nice, some sort of friendship. I can't explain it, how it was. It was some sort of a friendship, and some sort of a confidence, you see. And sometimes he was drawn out. We just talked a little bit of news and that was all. I mean, and then, and the rest was always saving, and doing this and that, you see. And of course he was concerned, but I mean, we had thought that he would have the protection much more than me.

SC: So did you leave Budapest before...?

EK: I left, yes, oh yes, I left the third or the fourth of December.

SC: To go down to the south of Tyrol.

EK: Yes. I came to my, I went to my mother, and I never went by train, as it is in the [unclear] film. I never went, of course. I went by car, had my chauffeur and my cook with me. She came with me because I wanted to be back in three weeks, you see. And then I had two protective cars who went with me, so I was not alone. And I wanted to be back but of course then the baby was just born three weeks after. I couldn't any more. It would

have been better if I had been back, perhaps, but we [unclear] anything. But then the baby would have been born somewhere, I don't know where. Perhaps it would have been much worse because he came at...

SC: [unclear] you were at least...

EK: Yeah. I was so tired, I just...

SC: [unclear]

EK: My professor told me, "You have got to go." Because I can't any more. I was just worn out. You see, I had a big operation in July, a very big operation. And then...

SC: During your pregnancy.

EK: Yes, yes, it saved, the professor saved my baby. But still then after this, all these politics things came around, and all these poor people came around. So I just, I couldn't any more, you see? So he told me, "Go down to your Mama and come back in three, I'll allow you to go for three weeks and then you must be back." Because it's written in all the books that the government sent me away, but they *never* did! I think they were very happy when they heard that I am going by myself, but they never could have *sent* me away. I mean, quite impossible, see, the Interior Minister and so on.

Oh yes, that's another thing. One day, two colonels of gendarmes arrived. I told you that yesterday, I think. I know their names still. And they came to my husband, asking him if he, if on earth he knows about my doing behind his back what I'm doing, that I'm helping all this legation, especially Wallenberg, and that I'm helping all these Jews and I don't know what. And then my husband said, "Oh well, of course I know it." So they were rather astonished about that. You know, he understood immediately what they meant, see? The way he sees doing it in the frame of the Red Cross. And you see, the Red Cross is, I didn't know, they said I was the president of... I didn't know it. Nobody told me that, you see. But he knew it. He said, "The Red Cross, she has to do that," and so on. So they went on. "And Szalasi," that was the Prime Minister, "does he know it, about this?" He said, "Of course he knows everything! I told him." He never did, of course. You see, that was off. They always came complaining about me to him. Poor him, I mean, he never told me about the gendarmes. He never did that. I learned this only very much later, because, you know, colonel of the gendarmes were not so very easy to be laughed at, you see. Gendarmes were very much feared, and they just wanted to...twist something against me, you see, that's why. And he was just before me. That was his role. He always tried to help me, people, Jews, Wallenberg, and then Angelo Rotta, for instance, he was Papal Nuncio, and he was a Duryan [?]. And he used to—now he's dead long ago; I saw him after the war in Rome—he used to ring me up nearly every day and say, "*Cara Baronesa*, what can you do? Can you help here and there?" And so on. And he used to go to my husband, too, to the Ministry. You see, he was a priest. He couldn't go around helping Jews in the street. I mean he was too old, too. And so he got 16 free houses for my husband for nothing to hide the Jews. No, not to hide the Jews, to, free house meant that he had the flag before, and they were just more or less, let's say, secure, see? So he could put Jews in it and they could live there,

see, instead of being in camps. And it was much safer. Safer. So he got 16 houses. It was quite nice, and Wallenberg had a lot of free houses, but he bought it. He could buy it, you see. And the Swiss, they had free houses. Free houses were the secure spot for the Jews, you see? Sometimes, I think I heard only at the end, before the Russians just came, the Arrow Cross just came up here and they broke up the houses and they took several and shot them.

SC: Right there?

EK: Well that was the, towards the end, you see.

SC: When they were getting...

EK: It was dreadful. Yes, because the government went and they chaperoned, you see, after I left—I think it was the middle of December; I can't, I don't know that any more. And you see, and then you were only the Arrow Cross, the gendarmes, and then it was getting very worse.

SC: Things were getting very...

EK: Very, very bad.

SC: Disorganized.

EK: Disorganized, yes, very much really. You see, war was drawing to an end.

SC: Yes.

EK: The Russians were just before the doors, the bombs and everything. So...

SC: They were getting desperate.

EK: Now, for instance, my...that was before, my, the brother of my husband, my brother-in-law, he was a royalist, you see? That means he was for the king and so on, so quite a different thing. And he rang me up, "Now dear Lies [sp.?], I don't know what to do because two friends of mine, well, well-known names, disappeared. I don't know where they are. What shall I do?" So my husband said, "My, for God's sake, just get a taxi, get him in our house and he can't move without you in the streets. He's not allowed to move, go alone." You know, that illuminated the situation how it was. Even the brother of the Foreign Minister wasn't so very safe either, see? So I had to go with him every day like a dog, if he wanted to do something. And he lived in our apartment. Then my brother sent him to Denmark, see, as an attaché, financial, because he was a director of a bank. So he knew a lot of that. So off he was. You see, you know that, it's only to say how the situation was, rather dangerous. I, I mean, nothing could happen to me, but to *him*? He told me if he disappears, you know, it takes time to find him, something might happen. Then it's too late. Better he comes. That's bad.

SC: Yes it is.

EK: Right.

SC: When you...

EK: I knew it because it was [unclear]

SC: Surely. When you traveled about, did you have to have a...

EK: Oh, when I traveled home?

SC: No, no, I mean, within the city, did you have guards?

EK: No, no, I didn't want to.

SC: You were free to move around?

EK: Yes, yes. I didn't like to have guards. I mean, I can't remember that somebody was a shadow behind me. No.

SC: Right. But you weren't conscious of...

EK: No.

SC: Any watchful eye.

EK: No, I wasn't conscious. I didn't want to and so on. I only had to go out with my brother-in-law. I was the guard, you see? It wasn't very easy for me. I had so much to *do*, you see? Then I had to receive all these diplomats, and being, giving dinner, and so on. I mean I was worn out, really, often because it was too much at the end. They wanted to eat well. They wanted to drink well, and so on. I just had to, I remember I had to give a very big reception, and I couldn't stand any more. I was so tired afterwards. I had to stand and shake hands for hours on and so on.

SC: And you were pregnant?

EK: Oh yes, because a few, I mean, that was nearly two months after, he was born, the child was born, you see? I was very much, everybody saw it, of course, see? So that's, writing in books that I was the mistress of Wallenberg was very childish, because I was very happily married, and I was expecting my first child. And then they wrote, "She must have been or the minister, the mistress of his, him? Him, you say. [Wallenberg] Or she was Jewish." And see, I was neither nor. I have not a drop of Jewish blood. And I was never the mistress. But they wanted to explain in their books how Wallenberg got so very quickly to get to my, into my confidence, you see. Then that was it. I mean, I wanted to help them, and he helped, you see, so that...

SC: You [unclear]...

EK: [unclear] brang us...together, see? It was really not, it's really easy to complain. I mean, it's very easy to not complain, very easy, now how do you say that? If I want to say something how it was, how do you say that in English? It was very easy. Now, [tape off then on] Now, you see, that's very, an easy explanation how it came. There is no mystery about it, because they all wrote, "It must be a mystery forever how they got together to help each other."

SC: To do this.

EK: To do this, yes.

SC: But you both had the same interests in helping.

EK: Well, yes, he had much bigger, of course; he had a wonderful organization of about 300 people or 400 people. I had nobody. I mean I had not an organization. I couldn't go in the street. I couldn't do things he did, of course. But what I could do was to help his organization to get through, easier, let's say. And he knew every, exactly about everything. I didn't so very much, you see. He heard it from, he had, oh, some sort of spies, let's say,

or he paid people to tell him things, and so on. So he knew nearly everything very much, much more than me. But I knew I could go on, and give it on to him, you see? And I just begged my husband and he always helped.

SC: Did you find that the other women in the government, the wives of the Ministers, were unsympathetic?

EK: No, I wouldn't say they were. I wasn't very much interested in them, really. But you see, I can't explain, they were just fearing about their husbands, or the situation of their husbands losing the Minister, perhaps, I don't know. And they were fearing perhaps the Germans. I don't know, they were just fearing, you see.

SC: But they didn't come out?

EK: No, I, I, it might be that they, of course, it might be they helped some private friends of them. And if you have private friends of yours, who is a Jew, it is just more than naturally, if you like a dog or a cat, somehow, to hide him. There's nothing special, really. Of course it was rather dangerous to hide, and that's true. But still, I mean, that's comprehensible. But they would never involve, being involved to hide, I mean to help masses of them. You know, help them more—not only private friends, you see.

SC: That's right. And...

EK: And private friends was very easy, most, more naturally, let's say, to help. And that they could do and I think they did. But they didn't want to get involved in bigger things. They didn't want at all, you see. I just asked them and they said no.

SC: You did ask them?

EK: Yes, I did, yes.

SC: And they...

EK: Then I was warned about, you know, the German side of the...German Embassy. I knew several ones. "Now don't talk so loud about what you are thinking, because it might be very, very bad for your husband," and so on. I mean, I remember that very well. "Oh, don't!" I said, "I'm not Arrow Cross. I just talk what I like." See, I wasn't fearing at all. Perhaps being an Austrian, not being a Hungarian, from there, helped me a lot, growing up in Italy and, really, I just didn't mind. I didn't mind, but Veessenmayer was complaining about me, and he was the Ambassador of Germany. He was complaining about me. But I didn't mind it. I just told my husband, "Well, I'm going on I think with that." See? What, after all, what could they do with me?

SC: You were visible. You were...

EK: I was visible. Yes. But, I don't know.

SC: Could it be that that was why Wallenberg warned you that if after...

EK: Maybe that's how, yes, of course, no, no, that wasn't the reason. Because when the war would have been to the end, nobody knew when, but it was drawing to an end, you see, Wallenberg just thought, well, it might be something, being the wife of a Nazi Minister might be a little bit dangerous. I don't, no, not dangerous, but see, but just to help. I don't know what he wanted to help really. You know, being in Italy was, was very, when

I came back at home, all the Italian thing, they were very nice with me. They said, "We know you from childhood on. We know how you are. If you have, need some help, just come to us." They knew, of course, that my husband was taken away by the Americans and all. But they were very, very helpful. So they were very nice to me. But this, Wallenberg just, you know, that was just a warning somebody would help you if you need it, in case you need it, after the war.

SC: You said yesterday that the man who arrested your husband was an American.

EK: Oh no. Oh, yes, arrested, yes.

SC: Yes.

EK: But who gave him up was a Hungarian, you see.

SC: Hungarian.

EK: Who denounced him.

SC: Denounced him. I see.

EK: That was very bad I must say. You know, they were the Americans, and they came in the morning at about 6:00 with MG [she means MP?], two soldiers, and two officers, and they just away.

SC: You had been in contact with him up until then, with your husband?

EK: No, he came to me. He was living with me in Milan, you see.

SC: Oh he came...

EK: He came to me through the Brenner [Pass] somehow. And he came to me, and there he was, you see? And I begged him, we went to town every day. And I begged him to go to Rome, and you see to go to Rome meant only with the Red Cross, because there were no trains, no trucks, and so on. Rome was very far away, you see. And I had good communications with the Red Cross. So he said, "Well, I can help you to get there, and once you are in Rome you are more or less safe, see, somehow." And you know, his answer was always, "Why should I?" And then, "I have not done anything. I just helped people." And that was true, see? He couldn't believe that he could be arrested, you see? So he just remained. And then some Hungarians, so on, knew about, and gave him, denounced him, and they came in the morning, and then it was written in the American newspaper, "The Foreign Minister, Hungarian Foreign Minister, was caught amongst Nazi heads." And you know, and the Nazi head was me, the baby, my sister-in-law, another baby and my brother. Well, that's history. It's too bad for words, really.

SC: And so...

EK: So there he was. And he couldn't, they just took him. And I didn't know where he was, you see. So I went around to the Red Cross, and here and there, and Swiss people and so on, to ask them if they knew where my husband had [gone]. They didn't tell anything. He just disappeared off the world. And then, well, if I can tell you that story, I went down to Parma. In Parma there was a big camp. And they said that all diplomatic people were there, are in Parma at the camp. So I went to the camp, staying with friends of mine, telling friends of mine, and I brought money and suit, you know, garment and

everything there. And after the third time I came, there was a colonel. He let me, he wanted to talk with me. So I was a little bit afraid, let's say, what is going to happen now with me because I didn't know. And you know what he said? "On the honor of my officers—and my officers are nice, really—your husband is not here. Whatever he brought was stolen." So I got back to Milan, and I got a telegram that my husband is at Terni [?], you see. That's near Rome, a very big camp. So I managed to go down to Rome with the train. There were no windows, no doors, no nothing, just like that. And somebody helped me to go out because it was an hour-and-a-half from Rome. And there I found my husband, you see. And there he was, till the end of October, I think. And then I went to the Vatican and to the Pope, and he wrote a personal letter to Keschta [phonetic spelling] for my husband. And so, but it didn't work out, because they thought the Vatican is half Nazi, too. They weren't really, but still, I mean, but this is after the war, you see. And so he was brought by Americans to Paris. There he was asked to serve somebody. I can't tell the whole story. I think they were the Russians. And he said he can't, "I can't betray my fatherland. I am, I just lived against the Communists and I just fought against them, I can't do that." And so they brought him back to Budapest. And there they began the trial.⁴ This was about in November, you see? And at the trial he and another Minister of Agriculture, his name was [Fidél] Pálffy, a very well-known Hungarian name, and these two were not tried guilty. You say that, "tried guilty"?

SC: Not found guilty.

EK: Not found...not individual found guilty, you see? So they wrote for mercy, both, and it was rejected, for collective guilt, you see. It's a dreadful word. It was. So they had to die. And he, it was the 19th March '46. It was very, very sad...

SC: That was a sad day for you.

EK: Because, I mean, some English General came to me one day, and he said, "If we had known now, if we had known before what we know now about your husband, we would never have delivered him." But, you see, that was all too late. See? But they could have scrutinized a little better, really, not saying, I mean collective guilt is such a dreadful thing. It's so unjust, really it's too unjust for words, like that. Because even if it hadn't been my husband, Foreign Minister, or somebody else, the Jews would have died 20,000 to 30,000 more, I mean, no protective passport. It would have been much worse for the Jews. He was the only hook, see, you can hang something on. See? And therefore, really, I mean, collective guilt is too bad a word.

SC: So you were left a young widow.

EK: Oh, yes, I was, with a little boy. I had my mother, you see. I found my mother, and I was living with my mother afterwards. I had to go to work, of course, because I lost

⁴The trial of Kemény and seven others including Sz<lasi began on February 5, 1946 and ended with their conviction and death sentence on March 1; Count Pálffy's trial was separate from Kemény's: it began on December 12, 1945 and ended on December 15. What the two had in common, however, was that they were the only two aristocrats among the defendants.

everything in Hungary—my things, and my husband's things. I had just nothing. If I hadn't found my mother, I don't know what I would have done. Having a little boy isn't so easy, you see. You have to get on somehow. Well, now [tape off then on] about that.

SC: What do you think about the feeling, or the story, of Wallenberg? Is he a prisoner in the Soviet Union? Is he alive today?

EK: Well, that he has been a prisoner for so many years, and everybody knows. If he's he still alive? I don't know. But I heard from somebody that came from Siberia, back from Siberia, and he told me, "If he hadn't been condemned to hard work, you see, then there is a big hope to be alive, because Russians don't do an end to a prisoner. Once you are in prison forever, you are just forgotten somewhere in some corner. They don't do anything against you, just let them live." So he might have got it over. But of course I don't know. I don't think he has been there for hard work. I don't think so. Because after all, one never heard about him, only heard about him being in Lubyanka or in other cells, or in other prisons, so on, but never in prison in Siberia, where you have to work in woods, and so very hard work. So...

SC: How old would he be now?

EK: Now? He would be, now let me see. He would be 74 the 4th of August. See? But what I find really, as long as Gromyko lives, I don't know. I don't know if there will be any hope, as long as he lives, you see. Because he wouldn't lose his face. He wouldn't like to lose his face, Gromyko.

SC: [unclear] Gromyko is the one who is responsible to...

EK: And he, yes...no, he's not responsible at all. But he just said, on his honor, that he died in '47 with heart disease and so on, and they went on saying that for years long. So to say that he's still alive, and they would give him back or something like that, would be really losing the face, you see?

SC: Yes.

EK: And it's really, and it's strong enough to go on. They got a submarine, I think about two years ago.

SC: Yes, I remember that. And...

EK: With the whole crew. And instead of asking the Russian government, "What about Raoul Wallenberg? Is he still alive? Can we get him back?" and so on, we just offered this submarine for him, like they all offer in spies, to exchange and so on. They didn't do anything. They didn't even ask to know the truth about him. Because they must know it. They know it, of course. I mean...

SC: Can you understand why?

EK: No, I can't. I can't. And you see, the folk went down in Stockholm. I only heard about Swedish people were just crying for Wallenberg. They just want him back. Now what did they do? They really just gave back for nothing the submarine, for nothing. See, now there's been a very big change of spies in Berlin, and chance he couldn't get out. That was the offer of spies here and now, they're over there.

SC: Yes.

EK: You give a lot to them and they give you a little back. Let's say, a lot of spies for one Wallenberg, or let's say so many for one Wallenberg.

SC: Fair exchange in my opinion.

EK: Sure. But they didn't even ask! That's it. Now it's incredible. I can't understand...a thing like that. You see, when they are out of perhaps a nation 300 years was the last war for Sweden. Then they were the ruler of Europe. They're full of things, they're full of, I don't know what, and now they got lazy a little bit in their good living and so on. I don't know, I don't, I can't explain really. But you can't explain a thing like that. With a submarine like that, I mean, with crew and captain and everything, and you give it back for nothing. That's not a bargain, what, what is it? Not understandable, really. But you see what I find, if he's just alive or not, he should remain a very bright example for us to help other people. You see?

SC: Yes.

EK: That we should really follow. For instance, there are some poor people in Poland and in Romania and in Afghanistan, and all these refugees coming around. So one should help them without looking race, or region, or color, or...whatever it is, really. Because...

SC: For humanitarian...

EK: Humanitarian. That's...

SC: Spirit.

EK: Yes. You see because the humanitarian spirit really is getting less and less, smaller and smaller, the flame of it. Can you say that?

SC: Yes, yes.

EK: See? And we are just selfish. People are getting more and more selfish. They're looking more to, around to help family, that's all, and earning a lot of money.

SC: Not very admirable.

EK: No, not at all, and times are getting so where I can't understand why it's getting worse and worse. I don't, I can't understand it. There are people, they are getting hard, so very hard. And that's the thing he never was; he was very soft-minded. I mean he wanted to help a little nothing, see? He wouldn't have minded to run down and up and telephone just to help a little nobody, see? Just to help, see? And people are not helping very much now.

SC: And it seems so sad that good intentions can't help him now.

EK: That's it. You see, what could help him would only be a very, very high person, I mean, like Reagan or so, because, Mitterrand, right? I told you that. I didn't know...

SC: No, I would...

EK: Mitterrand, he is the French President, and he was in Moscow now, I think a month ago or something like that. And somehow they found some Fren-, he could save

three, or was it four French who have been in prison for about thirty, forty years. Good French. He got them. He offered spies and so he could take them back. Very clever, Mitterrand. He got them back. I heard in Munich, somebody told me that. And you see, if it was a very high-ranked man, but it must be very high—not a Swedish one because they have no courage—just to make a bargain, to offer this and that and so on, and then give him back to us. Being Americans is decent now, and they have the right to do it, to ask, to ask them, or at least to know the truth what's about.

SC: One or the other.

EK: One or the other. Of course, if you are a prisoner, after forty-two years you are a broken man, somehow.

Baroness Elizabeth Kemény-Fuchs

For most of World War II, the Hungarian government of President Miklós Horthy, though allied with the Nazis, refused to turn over its Jewish citizens to the. But in March 1944, the virtual occupation of Hungary by the Germans resulted in deportation to Auschwitz over the next four months of over 437,000 Jews, with the major exception of some 200,000 in Budapest. In July 1944, Horthy stopped deportations. In the same month, Raul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest as third secretary to the Swedish Legation, and quickly developed a campaign to rescue the surviving Jews with protective passes and housing in "Swedish Houses." At its height his organization included 355 employees, 40 physicians, two hospitals and a soup kitchen. Meanwhile, in October 1944, a rabidly antisemitic government under Ferenc Székely, composed primarily of Hungarian fascists, known as the Arrow Cross, took power from Horthy. Wallenberg's activities expanded accordingly, eventually offering real or forged protective passes to over 10,000 Jews. During the Soviet siege of Budapest (December 24-January 18), his efforts attained heroic proportions: in addition to saving Jews from Arrow Cross gangs, he struggled to feed tens of thousands of Jews in the ghetto and protected buildings. In January 1945, two days after the liberation of Budapest, Wallenberg vanished, apparently into the hands of the Soviet secret police.

Baroness Elizabeth Kemény-Fuchs was the Austrian born wife, Jewish by birth [she denies being born Jewish in the interview] , of Baron Gábor Kemény, who was Foreign Minister in the fascist Székely government, the last prior to the Nazi defeat; Baron Kemény was hanged in 1946. For accounts of the Baroness's collaboration with Wallenberg, see: Harvey Rosenfeld, Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue (Buffalo, N.Y., 1982), pp. 54, 60; John Bierman, Righteous Gentile: The Story of Raoul Wallenberg, Missing Hero of the Holocaust (New York, 1981), pp. 77-79; and Per Anger, With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest (New York, 1981), pp. 71, 92.

Notes provided by Dr. M. Steinlauf