

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	223

Interviewee Surname:	Marie
Forename:	Badacsonyi
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	27 December 1937
Interviewee POB:	Szeged, Hungary

Date of Interview:	16 May 2018
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 25 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV223
NAME: Marie Badacsonyi
DATE: 16th May 2018
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 16th of May 2018. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Marie Badacsonyi and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

What is your name please?

It's Maria Badacsonyi.

And when were you born?

On the 27th of December 1937.

And where?

In Szeged, in Hungary.

Thank you very much Marie, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background please?

It was a sort of lower middle-class intellectual family. My father a lawyer, my mother a chemist. They- they got married while she was still studying. And he hasn't been able to practise very long because of the Jewish Law. He wasn't able to use his lawyer's degree. He actually worked as a mechanic mending watches, at the time when it was not possible for Jewish men to use their degrees. But it was a very comfortable life. And we- my grandparents had money and they had a shop, a business.

What sort of shop?

They were selling materials to the surrounding peasants. And they were doing quite well. And they were mixing with people who also were quite comfortable. There was quite a large Jewish community in Szeged.

So, was your mother from Szeged?

[0:01:56]

My mother was born in Croatia in Vinkovci, because my grandfather was an engineer, a civil engineer on the trains, building tracks. And he worked there until there was a- he was a- taking part in some communist activities. And he was dismissed from his post. And that's when my grandmother got into the driving seat [half laughing], so to speak, and established this business. And- and then they really started to work there.

And that's when they settled, in Szeged?

Yes.

So, when did they come to Szeged?

I don't know. It was after my mother was born. She was quite young. A couple of years old. So, it was around 1915 or '14, something like that.

And your mother said...?

No, it must have been- when was this Hungarian communist? There was a- a kind of uprising, kind of communist- I'm not sure of the year, but it was then that- then they had to get some other form of, of - money.

[0:03:13]

Yeah.

And then they started to do the business.

And your mother studied chemistry?

Yes.

But where did she study?

In Szeged, in the university. And she has got a degree in chemistry.

And where did your parents meet or how did they meet, do you know?

I don't know. They were moving in the same circles. In a young, Hungarian Jewish- they- there is the Tisza - that's the, that's the river - going through Szeged, and they- they were both swimmers and they were both rowing on the, on the river. And they were going to the baths on- on the river and I'm sure that they met socially-

Yes.

- through other friends. But I don't know.

So, what are you, your first memories of Szeged, or what are your first memories of anything?

[0:04:26]

Oh, I remember going on my little bicycle, which had no air in- in the wheels. It was very bumpy on the cobbles. I was going with my parents to the river. I used to love swimming there and I don't know if I actually knew how to swim but, playing in the sand and in the water and- it was a very comfortable, happy existence, until my father was taken away. And then it suddenly became very serious.

Yeah. How old were you then?

In '42. I was four, five years old.

And do you remember your father from before- before he was taken away?

I don't remember him at all, but I- I have been told a lot about him and it feels as if I know, that he loved music. He played piano. He was- he was, how do you call it? With swords. He was-

Fencing.

Fencing. He was a very good fencer. In Hungary, in Szeged, the fencing was very good in the country. So, he was part of that team, until it was not allowed anymore for Jews to do this sort of thing. But I think it was just very nice. We had a lovely house. My grandparents had an apartment in the house and my parents another apartment in the house. With a beautiful garden with lovely fruit trees and- and a big sandpit for me.

[0:06:10]

Where was it or what was the address? Do you remember?

Yes. Yes, I do. It was Fodor utca *hat*. That's number six Fodor Street. It was a house that my grandparents owned. And in fact, they owned one or two other properties as well.

In Szeged?

In Szeged.

So, you had an apartment in there?

In that-

And they also lived there?

They- yes.

And what did it look like? Can you describe it for us?

It had one story. And it had three or four other apartments in it. And I just- it was just like any other house.

With a courtyard in the middle?

It was a- a reasonably sized garden, yes. And there were cherry trees. I remember the big cherry trees and grape- there was a, a gazebo with the grapes growing round the gazebo to shut out the sun. And a table and chairs underneath and- and I used to play there.

And were there any other children there?

There must have been children. I looked at old photos, and I see little children of my age and I don't know who they are. So, they must have been the children of friends. But I don't know who is who at all. I don't remember.

[0:07:46]

So, was it mostly the grandparents? Were there any- did your mother have other siblings?

Oh, my mother had no siblings. And they just- they must have been friends of theirs that they mixed with. They had lots of friends. But that all stopped.

So, they had a very social life.

Very social life yes.

Sporty?

Yes. My- my father's father- I don't know anything about that family but he owned one of the cinemas in Szeged. And he was a rather a naughty man who did some drinking and playing cards. And because of that, the other side of the family did not socialise. The two, two sides of the family did not socialise with each other. But unfortunately, I don't know anything about them. But my father did have a brother and a sister. And they left Hungary because of the Jewish problem.

And what happened to them?

The sister went to live in Paris. And I don't know any- any more about it. She had a son, who went to Israel after the war and was in the Army and was in a very high position. And I tried to find him. I did everything- I only knew his name. And at the end of my searches, they put me in touch with a gentleman with that name who was very nice, but wasn't-

Wasn't him?

[0:09:39]

He wasn't him. So- and the brother died. So, there is nothing left from that side that I know. I- I was so hopeful that I can pick up some- something about this cousin.

When were you looking for him? When was that?

Oh, a lot of years ago. At least twenty-five years ago. And then when I couldn't get anywhere then I gave up.

Maybe you could try it again now with the computer and digital maybe more information is available maybe.

But all I know is his name.

Yeah.

And that didn't lead me anywhere.

Yeah. No. And then you said your father was taken away. Do you remember that or is that also...?

No.

No.

No. Lots of things I think I remember but I don't. Because I only remember because I was told. And then he wasn't there.

So how did your life change after your father was taken away?

[0:10:55]

Well, for a while it didn't change much because my grandparents were keeping us. My mother wasn't working. Until they have- they- I don't know this, but we were- we had to wear the yellow star and that was a difficulty. And then, soon after that, we were taken to the ghetto in Szeged.

Do you remember the date? Do you remember when that was?

I [inaudible] think that I was- I think it was in '44.

Yeah.

Beginning of '44? And we didn't stay there very long.

So, the star you remember that-? Do you remember that?

I don't remember wearing it. I just know that we had to.

Yes, but at that point you were not in school? You didn't go to school?

No, I was- I wasn't till that age yet.

Yes.

And-

And then you had to go to the ghetto, which was not in the area where you lived?

It was in Szeged.

Yes.

It- it was in the brickworks. It was a- a factory where they gathered up all the Jewish families. And from there they have taken us by train. Now, I remember the train very well because that was the most awful thing. These terrible places where we were shut in, lots and lots of people, with nothing to drink, nothing to eat and have to go to the loo in the corner. And it's funny that I don't remember anything else, what I remember. And whenever I see trains on television, I have this terrible feeling about it, the claustrophobia. And my mother was trying to protect me and- and have a little space around me because I was screaming. I remember that, that I hated this so much.

[0:12:58]

So, who was on that transport of your family?

It was my grandparents. My mother, and- and a sister of my grandmother who was actually living with us.

Right.

Well, she was living with my grandparents in the same apartment and- and I was living with my mother. But my father wasn't there anymore.

So the five of you...

Yes,

...went on that transport.

And I think that's also interesting to mention, because several trains were- gone from Szeged and they all went to Auschwitz and all these terrible places of extermination. But some, there was some mix-up with our train, and by mistake our train went- well, I thought it went to Strasbourg but it went to Strasshof to this distribution centre. There- I think it was a mix-up. We were supposed to go to Auschwitz but we didn't, and that saved our life. Because most of the people, all the Jews in Szeged they were- they were all exterminated except the people on our train. That's as much as I know.

But that train...

It was-

...did not go to Auschwitz.

Yeah.

And was it, do you- how long were you in the ghetto for roughly before the-?

[0:14:25]

For about a month...

Right.

... at the most

And do- you have no memories of that time?

No.

But the train ride must have been very traumatic.

That was- that I remember. I don't know why. That was very traumatic.

And all- you were all together in that...

Yes.

...the wagon, or?

Yes. Yes.

And do you remember the soldiers, or do you remember the... Were you afraid? Was the- or what was the...?

I- just know that they were very rough, and they were pushing more and more people into this carriage. And they- they were just awful.

And how long was the journey? Do you...?

That I don't know, but I think it must have been quite long, because we were very thirsty and had nothing to drink.

Yeah.

And there was this terrible smell, because people had to go to the toilet. I remember that. That's funny that-

Yeah, well it must have been very-

[0:15:30]

That's basically all I remember, until we arrived.

Yes. And what happened then?

Well, I- I think I personally was quite protected because my- all the members of my family had to work. But they- they allowed somebody just to look after the- the young children. And so, I didn't really have any feeling of hardship, apart from not being able to eat all the things I wanted to eat. Being hungry all the time. But I don't think- I don't think we stayed in this Strasshof- Strasshof place at all very long. But where we did stay for several months was the next place of destination, in Unter Themenau [now Postorná, Czech Republic]. And I- I remember my grandmother was working in the kitchen. And every so often, she stole a carrot for me. Because we had the same- it was called *Dörrgemüse* [dried vegetables]. It was a kind of soup-

What was it called?

Dörrgemüse. It was a- a- it was a- a soup made of swedes which I absolutely hated, with a very small slice of bread. And that was our daily ration. And my grandmother every so often managed to have half a potato or a carrot and- and I had that. And the rest of the family didn't. And that was the best time when I could have that, because the food was so awful. And the grand- my grandfather had to work in the brick factory.

It was a brick factory?

It was a brick factory, yes.

Unter Themenau Ziegeln?

He had to work in the brick factory and my mother had to do some chemical work. I don't know what, which was perhaps a little bit easier for her.

And was it only Hungarian Jews there?

I- I don't know.

The people you met. The other...?

[0:17:48]

I don't know. But I also know that my mother- [half laughs] she had a manicure set. And she was doing manicuring her- her other people in the camp. And they gave a little bit of their- their stew, vegetable stew. A little bit extra for her, for doing the nails of these people. These are silly things that I remember. Not the- not the serious things. But that was-

But it helped her. It helped.

And also, that they- they- I was doing- playing with the- making things- what is it? I can't remember the word when they- no, I can't remember.

Explain it, explain it.

When you- you make... What do you make the bricks from?

Clay?

Clay. We were playing with the soft clay and us children, we were allowed to make things from it. That was-

So again, there were other children there?

There were lots of other children there, and- and they were teaching us to- our own people. They- one or two women were allowed to look after us, and teach us. We were allowed to read- to- to learn to read and to write and to play with this clay. So, it wasn't as bad as some other factories. And places. Apart from the starvation.

Yeah. And do you know- you said that only one or two trains went from- from Szeged to- on that route-

Yes.

And did your mother tell you at all why? Was it a coincidence that you were on that transport, or was there any-do you see what I mean?

[0:19:56]

I think- I think this train was meant to go to Auschwitz, but there was some money- there was some money paid by some very rich people, Jews, to- to- to send this as 'a' train not to Auschwitz but to this place. And there was a mix-up. And by mistake they sent our train and not the one where the money was paid. This-

Aha. These are- these are part of the negotiations with Eichmann-

Yes.

-at that point?

Yes, that's- that's how I understood. That it wasn't meant to go there, but we were very lucky. And I remember how we slept. It was rows of beds and-

This is in Unter Themenau?

Yes, there were two rows and there was straw. And they moved the straw and there were bugs. You could see these bedbugs. Big, big things, moving about. In the straw. And they had to look at our hair, because it was full of ... fleas – that one does get. So, these were not the pleasant side of- of- these- I remember things like that and a lot of itch. And- but I think basically, this was still a better place than some of the people went through in these horrendous other camps.

Yeah – yeah. And you were kept busy. You had something to do. I mean, you were taught you said?

Yes, we children, we certainly had a better time than some other children where they were just taken and killed.

Yes. And how did your mother and the grandparents cope with this situation?

[0:21:50]

Well, my- I think they were quite strong in character, and they dealt with it as- as it happened. They just dealt with it. Particularly, my grandmother was an absolutely strong person. And she was trying to look after the family there and everywhere else before and after the war. Because my grandfather was a- rather shocked and disappointed after he- he lost his job. And everything that was decided was decided by my grandmother. And my mother was also terribly upset because my father was taken away and she was in shock for a long time.

So, at that point did you know what had happened to him? Were you...?

No.

No. You just- he was taken away to a forced labour camp.

Yes.

And-

And then taken to Russia.

And did you know that at the-?

No.

No.

No. We didn't know any- I didn't know anything. And then we had to leave this camp because I think the Russians were advancing. So, their- the- the Austrians or Germans, I don't know who were looking after the camp, were moving us all the time to- towards Theresienstadt. And I remember walking quite a lot. And it was winter and cold. And I remember walking through woods and there were planes coming and dropping bombs. And I remember that we had to lie down. And my mother put her head over my head. And she said, "If we have to die, then we have to die together." That's another little thing that I remember.

Yes, you were saying that your mother's head was next to yours.

[0:23:53]

Yes, in- in- on this journey through some woods and there were bombs dropping around us. And it must have been the Allies who were- well, attacking the, the opposite- the German troops who were transporting us. They probably didn't know that we were there but they were just bombing the area.

And you were saying it was walking and taking trains as well, or...?

I don't know how else we went, but I just remember this particular time. I don't know how we- we must have been in trains. We must have been evacuated at that point from the trains if- because they knew that there were some attacks coming. But all I know is that finally we got to Theresienstadt.

But on the way, you were somewhere else?

We went to Frein. That was another village where there was a camp. I don't think we stayed there very long. It must have been just weeks. And then they advanced. They- the- the Russians advanced and we had to carry on further. We ended up in Theresienstadt, and we didn't stay there very long either - maybe a month - which was fortunate for us, because they were doing dreadful things there. And the only thing I remember is my grandfather was working in some gas chambers where they were putting clothes in that used to belong to

people. Not people but the clothes they were wearing. That's where he was working, but I don't remember what-

In Theresienstadt?

In Theresienstadt.

So, what do you remember?

[0:25:46]

Nothing. I- I just really- Nothing, there. We were not so organised by then. Everything was- we didn't know how long we are staying, where we are going, what's going to happen to us.

But were you still together?

We were still, all five of us, together.

So, they didn't separate you?

No, no. All the time until we came back, yes.

That's an interesting fact. And they all managed to walk, and do-

Yes.

-all this walking?

Yes.

So, they must have been in relatively good health.

Reasonably, yes. There were no real problems. We were very thin, because we were very, we had very little food. That was the main problem. And- and the parents and the grown-ups had

to work in various factories. But basically, I think that we were not that badly treated. Well, that was badly enough, but not compared to other people.

Yeah.

But I- I remember the Russians coming into Theresienstadt. I remember that very clearly, because we were standing in the street. And by that time I think the Germans must have fled. And they were coming in trucks. And they were throwing off the trucks pieces of chocolate and pieces of bread. And all the things we haven't seen - in years.

Yes.

[0:27:17]

And we were absolutely over the moon, grabbing what we could. And they said that we were free to do what we wanted and that was unbelievable. I found my- my grandfather has a certificate from the authorities that he actually been in Theresienstadt, and they were organising his return to his place of origin.

Yeah?

And then I remember being on the train going back, by train, to Hungary. And I had measles on the train. I remember that.

Aha?

And the Russians were on this train. And they emptied the, the compartment for my family. They were good.

Because of the measles?

Because of the measles. They were giving us the whole compartment, and they were feeding us with various goodies that we haven't seen for a long time.

One thing I didn't ask you, what about clothes when you were in- in Austria? Did you have to wear a uniform, or could you wear your own clothes, or-?

I don't know anything about that.

Do you remember what you were wearing?

I don't think that we were wearing uniform.

No.

I think I would know that.

So, you were in your own clothes?

Whatever we had, yes. But we- we didn't go with anything. So, you know, we didn't- they didn't allow us to- to carry anything. We just had what we were wearing, I think. With very little else. I don't think that we had any uniform.

[0:29:00]

And when you were going back, was the hope to find your father?

Yes.

Yeah.

I think, at some point, some people who were with him came back and- and told my mother that he died. Because they witnessed it. That's the only thing that we knew. And then he- he had an official... certificate of death. But it said on it that it was "assumed" that he was killed.

In 1944?

It was '44.

Yeah.

Yes. Near- near the end of the war really, in a way. It was such a shame that it had to happen.

And for your mother then after the war, did she want to go back to Szeged or what was her...?

Well, everybody went back to Szeged. But then it was decided that she had to earn some money because my- my grandparents' business folded. And so, my mother went to Budapest on her own, and my grandparents brought me up. Until 1952 I was living with my grandparents, who had a little bit of business from the apartment but not- they- the peasants used to come up and buy some cloth from my grandmother and that was one way of supporting us.

So, did they move back? Did you move back into that building, into the apartment?

We- we- yes, the house was taken away. The apartment where my mother lived was taken away. And the- the apartment where my grandmother and grandfather lived, I moved in there. And half of that was taken away and some other people were moved in. So, there were only two rooms and a kitchen and- was left for us. And half the bathroom. Because the other people who were in the same apartment had to use the same bathroom. The same toilet. That was how it was in those days. That was, by that time, the communist arrangements.

[0:31:39]

Yes. And was- how did your grandparents- were they affected? How were they viewed then by the Communists?

Well, not very well. But by that time, they- they were older. They didn't take part in anything. They didn't have any jobs. I remember my grandmother used to sell this cloth to the peasants and she used to get some butter and chickens and various things. Then she used to get on the train, on her own with these things, go up to Budapest. And that was before the

Communist times. This was straight after the war. She used to sell all the food and all the... meat and then buy some cloth in Budapest, and take it back home to us and sell it to the peasants. So, it was a kind of bartering rather than- and meanwhile, my mother was trying to find her place in life without my father and looking for a position.

Yes?

Which she found in Budapest, in a factory. A chemical factory. So, she had to earn some money that way.

Yeah?

And I- I went to see her in school holidays. But only- and, and she tried to come and visit me but really, we were not together a lot until 1952.

And was that something you accepted or was it...?

[0:33:30]

Yes, because my grandparents were like parents to me. They really, really were very close and very loving. And- but the Jewry in Szeged were more or less wiped- wiped out, because of all the trains going to these other places. And the ones who were on our train either moved to the capital like my mother, to find work. Or, there were just very few left. So, there was no social life. Not with the Jewish community. Not within the Jewish community. All my friends were just the local children in school.

Yes.

And there was no religious instruction for me. My mother didn't want that. She wanted to forget everything that happened. And my-

That's what you said, she-

Yes. And my grandparents accepted this and went along with it.

Because of the- her- the war experience, or...?

Because- because of what happened to us, and what happened to my father.

But I mean, she didn't want to talk about it?

[0:34:45]

No. She- she didn't tell me anything, really. And I didn't ask. Somehow, I wasn't at that age. I wasn't interested. I was just playing with my friends who were not Jewish.

But did – you knew you were Jewish?

I did know it but that didn't mean anything to me.

It's something we didn't discuss yet. How Jewish were your- was your family, pre-war?

They were- they were assimilated but they were- they knew and they kept Jewish company, but they were not frum, as such.

Did they ever to go the synagogue or-?

They did on- on the High holidays.

Do you remember going to the synagogue or...?

I do remember sometimes my grandfather was regularly going. He was the- the only one and he sometimes took me to this very beautiful synagogue. Szeged had the best- the most beautiful synagogue in that part of- of the country. And it still, now, is very beautiful; it's restored. But there are very few Jewish people in Szeged. And, but-

So, after the war that stopped and they...?

[0:36:10]

It has. And then when the Communist regime came, then it stopped completely. And then the synagogue was also not in use at all because it was- it needed restoration, which was done much later.

And did the other people know you were Jewish by your name or the-?

Oh, yes.

Yes?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And one thing I do remember is that before they took us to the ghetto, my grandparents put jewellery and various items of money- we had a cellar. And- and my grandfather put it in the wall, in the cellar. And when, when we came back everything was taken, because they knew that we must have had some things hidden away. And- and they were looking for these things. So nothing was left.

Yeah.

But we- it was well known that we were a Jewish family.

Yeah. So, did you experience any anti-Semitism as such, or...?

I haven't experienced it at all, not after the war.

Yeah. And in your school, in your primary school, were there any other Jewish children?

[0:37:35]

No. I- I- funnily enough, I was the only one in that little school where I went until I was fourteen. But when I got to my senior school, then all my friends were Jewish girls. And it- in a funny way, unknown to me, I was looking for that kind of company. And that's where I felt

comfortable. And that's where I- I found that I was in the right place. But that was subconscious.

Yeah.

It wasn't because I was taught, or it was suggested to me in any way.

Yeah. So how did you adapt then when you moved to Budapest and moved in with your mother - afterwards?

Well, my mother got married again, to a very, very good man who came back from Mauthausen, which was another of these horrible concentration camps. And he was a very good step-father to me. They got married in- in I think just before '52, and that's when they moved into an apartment where there was a room for me. And that's when we have become a family again. But there was no religion at all in our life.

[0:39:10]

No.

And...

But you were happy to be there?

I was very happy to be with them and I liked him very much and he- he was really a good father- step-father to me. And when my children were born, here, they all- they all looked at him as if he was my father.

Yeah.

They were- he was the grandfather. And he was ten years older than my mother, so he passed away a long time ago.

And then tell us something about your time at the Gymnasium, and your circles and what life was like.

There were four or five- this was a girls' school. And there were four or five friends of mine, they were all Jewish girls. And they all became doctors. And my mother wanted me to become a doctor. And I thought, well, I am not going to do what everybody else is doing. That's why I went and- I went to the- had a place in the university to study chemistry. I thought, well, she has been a chemist, perhaps I should do the same. And I think those were quite happy years for me, because we had no financial troubles. But it- there was a lot of restrictions. Like, they had to go and listen to these communist lectures and- and anybody who was not from a- a very poor background, didn't get into good places. I don't know how I managed to get a place in- in the university. I think I must have been very lucky. And- but the school was good. And the education was good. And I didn't question anything - until the uprising. And, the reason for me to- to leave Hungary was basically the restriction of not being allowed to travel, or- or to- to do things. It was just basically a restricted life. But not one where I had needs - monetary needs. We- we were okay, just about.

[0:41:56]

And was it your decision or- what did your grandparents, or mother- what did they...?

By that time grandparents were not in- my grandfather died, and my grandmother lived on her own in Szeged. The- the sister died. So, she had no influence anymore. But my mother felt that I will have a better life if I leave. She hated basically, all the things that happened and- and the Hungarians were very much like the Germans, very anti-Semitic. And my mother felt that all along. And she felt that I am- I will have a better place out of it.

But she didn't want to go?

Pardon?

She didn't want to go?

[0:42:38]

She didn't want to go because she didn't want to leave my grandmother who was on her own and wasn't in good health. And that was the one reason why they didn't come with me. But she organised this - party of people. Well, not organised, but heard of the party of people who were going. And she suggested that I join them.

When was that?

Around Christmas time in '56. And that's when we walked across. It was a very bad winter. I remember walking in the snow, with a little bag.

So before we get there- so, you also felt it was the time for you to leave?

Yes, yes. I listened to what she said. And I thought so myself.

Despite the fact that you just started to study, so to speak?

Yes, well, I- I didn't get on very well with my studies. But that was just one of those things; it was a very hard course. And it was very much the beginning. It might have become easier as one goes along, but it was- I've only been in there for- for maybe six weeks, or five weeks - something like that. When- when the Revolution started, and it- all- all education stopped for a while.

[0:44:02]

Yes. And then your mother said she found this group?

Yes.

And?

And I joined them and I- I came out of Hungary.

So where did you meet the others, or where-what...?

Well, she had a colleague, whose daughter was in the group. And I don't know exactly how, but we were introduced. And this girl was a little bit older than me. I was eighteen. And she took me under her wing. And we- we ended up- we went first to Sopron, which is a- a border town in Hungary. And there was a guide waiting for us. And this guide walked with us to the border. Didn't come across. And she said, "Well, that's the way. Now you- you are on your own. And you walk." And we did. It was - pretty frightening. But we didn't meet any border guards. And we ended up in a village, in Austria. It was on a Sunday, lunchtime. And there was this big family just sitting down to lunch, peasant family. And they invited the group. I don't know how many of us, eight or nine. And we all joined them for lunch. They were lovely- very lovely people. And then they put us on the train to Vienna. And we ended up in Vienna trying to find a Jewish organisation that would help us who, who came from Hungary.

Yes?

[0:46:04]

And we stayed in Vienna for a few weeks. And various people went to various places. And this girl who was looking after me went to Australia. We lost touch. Because we weren't really friends. It was just-

Yes. And did you have an idea which- where you wanted to go from Vienna, or...?

I wanted to go to England. Because in Hungary I studied English. And I thought that that might be helpful for me. And I also knew some German, because I studied German in school. But I didn't want to stay in Austria. I wanted to- and- and it so happened that there was this English lady who wanted to do some charitable work, and- and went to the Jewish organisation where I was supported from.

Which is? Which organisation?

The Joint, it was called The Joint. It was some Jewish organisation.

The Joint Distribution Committee, isn't it?

Something like that.

Yeah-

They were helping me financially.

And when you arrived you had nothing?

I had nothing. And this- they introduced me to this lady - with two friends. Well, not friends. I didn't know the other two girls. But she- she said that she would bring three girls to England.

[0:47:33]

And did you meet her in Vienna?

I met her in Vienna. She went-

She came to Vienna?

Oh, yes. And she- she- she came to Vienna. And this was all organised in Vienna. Then she went home. And we were transported from Vienna to England. We went by train and by boat and she waited for us in Dover and got us off the boat and away from the other people who were going to some camp in England. And from then on, it was all organised privately from her and her friends, who lived in Purley, in- or Croydon, that area of...

And what was her motivation, or what was her background to-?

I think she just had some funds- some- she- she said of herself that she was a poet. But basically, she didn't have a job. She was doing charity work a lot. She- it's funny to say this but she was looking after animals - and Jews. She had a- a goose and a parrot and a- and a Jewish girl. But she- she was a very strange person. But I must say that she was very good to

me, and supported me financially until I managed to get a- a council grant like all other English people got. And I lived in her house in Montpelier Road in- in Purley.

[0:49:27]

And what were your first impressions, arriving in England?

Well, everything was very strange. She- she had some aunts who lived in an enormous house, with a maid. And it was the sort of life that I've never seen before. They were driving these- these two old ladies were driving cars - on either side of the road. Because in those days, you didn't have to have a driving licence. Not if you were driving for so many years. And they were also very supportive to- of me and my two- these two sisters, they became my very good friends. Because for years, in England, we stayed together.

Yeah.

And we- we were the only support for each other.

And did you have any contact to any other Jewish organisations or anything at that time?

No. No.

No.

No. Only- only these very good English ladies. And... And then the state support.

And you arrived- and did you go to school? What...?

Yes, I- I tried to go to technical college to repeat my matriculation, but because of the difficulties of language, I failed. And then I had another year in a school- in a grammar school, which was run by nuns, of all places and people. Who also knew that I was Jewish and did not make any distinction. Did not force any religion on me. But I actually managed to get my A-levels at the end of that school year in the sixth form. And then I had a place. I got a place. Again, this- I must tell you this. This English lady, she walked me into the dean's

office and said that, “You must do something for these Hungarian Jews. You have to have her in your School of Pharmacy.” And he said, “Well, I tell you what, if she gets her A-levels this summer, I will give her a place. She doesn't have to go through all the normal...” ways, how- how English people from schools get their places. So, I- I was privileged in that way through her funny ways. But I did get my results. So, it wasn't entirely just through her. And then I got my grant. And I, I- I did do this Bachelor of Pharmacy course, which was part of the University College.

[0:52:37]

Why did you switch from chemistry now to pharmacy? Or, what...?

I thought that was more easily attainable. And- and I liked the idea of not being a- an engineer, but rather just a chemist.

Yes- yes. And at that time, did you- obviously you couldn't go back to Hungary?

No, not- not for about – oh, I don't know - six, seven years.

Yeah. So, could you communicate to your mother?

Yes. We wrote letters all- every week. I had loads and loads of letters and so did she but they're not existing anymore. But we did know of each other.

And did you feel homesick or did you manage...?

No, I have never been. I am- I was very sad that I wasn't with them. But I established a happy existence in England. First- first, because I had the support of this charitable company. And then meeting my husband and- and funnily enough, getting into a, a- a very Jewish number of friends, a group of friends which-

Hungarian?

Hungarian. Yes, that all happened afterwards - through him.

So how did you meet?

[0:54:10]

He- he was friendly with one of the girlfriends, the three of us. They went- they were working as waitress and waiter in Cliftonville, because they needed some money in the summer. And my friend Vera was a waitress where he was a waiter. And through her, we got introduced to each other. And- eventually that's how it sort of happened. But my two friends, the girls- but they- they studied first in London, they got degrees. But then they got married and both the husband went to the States where they got jobs.

Right.

So, they moved. And I got a job after I graduated here.

What job? What did you get?

I worked for Boots as a pharmacy manager for a short time. Then I worked for- now what was the order of things? I worked for Boots first, until my first child was born. And then I got a job in Wigmore Street; I worked for John Bell & Croyden. It was a- a funny arrangement. I worked for four days from nine in the morning till ten at night. And I had a- a friend looking after Kati. But then I had four days off completely. So, I could be with her. So- four days on, four days off. And because my husband's job wasn't nine-to-five, it was music, he could also help looking after her. So that worked for us for quite a while. Until the next child was coming along, and then I had to give up this arrangement. And for a while, I was working as a relief manager for Boots, for just odd days, because I- I needed to look after the children.

Yes.

[0:56:51]

And that we shared with my husband, whose job was easily not interfering with looking after children.

Yes.

And then when they got older, then I- I started working in a hospital, which was the Mount Vernon Hospital in Northwood. Because by that time we lived in Pinner, which was a- the area easily reachable. And then in- started- I started just part-time working when the children were in school, which was very easily done. And as they got older, I- I increased my hours and ended up being the manager of the dispensary, full-time, when the children were growing up. And I worked in this hospital for twenty-five years. But now I retired. And I've been in- well, I retired from that job, and I still do locum jobs, sometimes in the Clementine Churchill Hospital. Sometimes- I went back- there was a- a unit called the Baxter's Unit in the grounds of the Mount Vernon Hospital. They were reconstituting chemotherapy chemicals – drugs. And I was working there part-time, but this was only in my retirement because I didn't want to completely give up. Until we moved to our present address. That was twelve years ago, and I completely gave up working.

But you enjoyed being a pharmacist?

I did. I'm glad I changed-

Yeah?

- for that profession. It- it was very good work to do and it was very good to bring up children, because I could work as well as looking after the children and bringing up. So, it was possible that way to carry on.

And what sort of education did you want to give to your children in terms of their identity?

[0:59:13]

Well, I didn't know anything about private education. So, they went off- Kati went to the local school. But in a funny way, she found it very difficult to settle in, and she was - left behind. And in that time, we decided that- this was- the classes were too big, and this was not for her. So, we moved her to a private school in Northwood. And gradually she- she picked

up and she found her place. And we realised that it was very important in her particular case to have the extra support. We didn't know what she should do, eventually in life, but we knew that we had to support the children sufficiently to- to get wherever they wanted to go.

And did you talk about your past at all to your children?

No. And now that they are grown up, they are very cross with us. And both of them say that we must tell them everything that happened, because- or what happened to me, because I didn't ask any questions. So, they keep asking the questions. And they say that what is- with this interview, they- they are very keen on looking at it and hearing- hearing what I have said.

Aha – yes.

As it happens, our daughter married a- a- a Jewish man with very strong Jewish feeling, and they are bringing up their children accordingly. And because of that, we are also finding our way back into the faith more. Interestingly, due to Paul, really. And- but Andrew married a Jewish girl, but they don't live according to any of the- Jewish laws. But in a funny way, their friends are Jewish. Lots of- that's where they find themselves more comfortable. And there is quite a good friendship between the two families, which I'm very- very glad about.

And do you have many grandchildren?

[1:02:02]

I do. Yes. We have got six grandchildren, on- on my daughter's side, and my son has got three. So that keeps me busy. Or at least it used to, when they were little. But now that they are growing up, they don't need so much from us. We just enjoy having them.

Yeah. And the grandchildren, were they interested in your past at all?

No, that was no question mentioned there. My oldest granddaughter, when I was looking after him - her, sorry - she was only maybe three or four and she said, "Mama, are you Jewish?" And I said, "Well, if I wasn't, then you wouldn't be either." [Laughs]

Yeah.

So basically, they- they- they haven't asked any questions – of our past.

And do you find for you it has changed your relationship to your past? I mean...?

Yes, I- I- I wish I was belonging to- to the community more. And I wish I knew more. And I- I wish I had asked more questions. But it's too late. Unfortunately.

So tell us, when did you see your mother again, then? Did you go...? When did you start going back to Hungary or...?

I think it- it was about six, seven years after I left. She came here that- she came before, with her husband.

Yes?

[1:03:53]

They came before I was married. It was in six- 1960, I think. Or it must have been '60 – '61. That was the first time they were allowed out. And then after that, we went most years. When we had the children, then we took the children. And, and also, when I was working - that was before Andrew was born - Kati actually spent summer holidays couple of months in Hungary on her own, with my parents, because they- she loved it with them. They were so good with her. She- she learned to speak Hungarian. And the problem was actually when- when she was three and she went to nursery school, she didn't speak English, because we spoke Hungarian to her and the grandparents did. And she had a terribly traumatic time in school, in- in nursery school, so we decided that this cannot go on. And we started to speak English with her and with each other.

Right.

And with Andrew, who has- hasn't had any Hungarian until he was in his teens. And he said, "Well, why are you not teaching me? Why- what's happening?" And he picked it up from the grandparents. So, in a sort of way, he can, but he- not very good.

But to Kati you spoke Hungarian?

Then- it he beginning. She, she has actually taken an O-level in Hungarian. She's quite good. But we speak with each other in English, and with the children and the grandchildren. So, English is the first language now for us.

Yeah.

And even with our Hungarian friends quite often, we just speak English because-

Yeah.

But-

But do you feel... so close to Hungarian- to the language, to...?

[1:06:10]

No. No. We- we don't. We- we- we just go as tourists go. Because it's a very pretty place, and we don't have much contact with other Hungarians now that the family is not there anymore.

Yeah. Have you been back to Szeged? Did you go to Szeged?

I went back, because I wanted to show George where I come from. And I went to the cemetery, because my grandparents both are in the cemetery in Szeged. And that's the only time. I went back- or, I went back with friends once because they were giving a concert in the- in the Hungarian Jewish shul. I don't know if you know the name, George Pauk, violinist? He was giving a concert there and...

Yeah.

...we were in Budapest. So, we went with them to Szeged. And again, I went to the cemetery.

And how do you feel when you go there to Szeged? How?

I feel quite nostalgic. Because- not because of the place or because of Hungary but because of my grandparents. And Andrew wants to go. He's desperate to go to see where I come from. And he, he- he says that we must have a holiday there. But it hasn't been organised yet. Kati has been, with my parents.

And is it still the same, with the river and do people still swim there?

Yes, yes. Yes. Yes. Kati- Kati went with my mother to the place. But my grandmother died before she ever went to Hungary, so she hasn't seen her great-grandmother. That's about it, I think.

[1:08:12]

And for you, what is your- the most important part of your, let's say, Hungarian Jewish heritage, or...?

Well, only that I have been looked after so lovingly by this Jewish family. But apart from that, there isn't much that- that brings me back there. Nothing left. It's gone.

Yeah. You feel nostalgic for your family.

For my family only. And nothing else. I go- I go on holiday to Hungary as I go to Austria, or I go to France or Italy or Spain.

But you do go there?

I do. I do. And my father-in-law lived there for quite a while. So we visited him.

Yeah.

And his sister. But unfortunately, no- nobody is there anymore. So, when we- when we used to go regularly we used to go to visit family.

Yeah. Yeah.

But that stopped when my mother died. When my mother was ill, I went five, six times a year. By that time, I wasn't working and I- I- I went quite often because it was quite difficult to look after her there. She lived until the age of ninety-six. So that was- and she was very frail. And needed a lot of organisation - until she passed away. And then I didn't go for a while. Because there was no- no reason. And then we started to go as tourists.

Yeah. And how would you describe yourself today in terms of your own identity?

Well, I'm- I'm very, quite happy and proud about the fact that we- I found a way back to being Jewish. And all these horrible things that happened to- to us, as a race. And I say to Mr. Hitler, that you didn't succeed. And look at my family. I have got nine grandchildren. So you, you couldn't do what you wanted. That's how I feel and I'm quite proud of that.

[1:11:00]

And when did you become British?

Oh, I don't remember the year, but as soon as it was possible, we have taken a British citizenship.

And was that important for you?

Very important. I feel more British than Hungarian. In fact, I don't feel Hungarian. I just am. But I feel consciously British.

And where's your home? Where would you think?

Oh, my home is here, with my family. I've got such a big family now. And I'm feeling very comfortable here. And I haven't felt any anti-Semitism here. I- I understand there is. But I personally never felt it. I- in one of my jobs in Boots, I went there is a relief manager and introduced myself to the staff there. And there was an Irish Catholic cleaner lady. And she said, "And what is your religion, dear?" And I said, "I'm Jewish." And she said, "Oh, well, never mind." [laughs] So that's how I was treated. Not hated, but just accepted.

And how do you think your experiences impacted on your life, your early childhood experiences?

[1:12:40]

Well, probably not very much, because I was pushing out of my mind everything that was bad. I just never wanted to think about it - until very much later, when these horrible episodes come up. When I watch a film, and I realise that I was in it. But basically, I was doing what my- what my mother did, just- just not remembering anything. And I never wanted to go on- we went on a holiday with friends. And they went to the camp in Dachau with my husband. And I just wouldn't go. I just never wanted to see any of it. And, and Paul and Kati want to go to Krakow. And I never wanted to see Auschwitz. Those horrible things I just want to put out of my mind, as if it never happened. That's how I can cope with it.

Yeah. And your mother the same?

She was.

Did it come back to her when she was older, or she...?

She just never wanted to-

Never think about it.

- have anything to do with it. Because she was so hurt. Especially with the loss of my father. She was very hurt...I think that's all I can say, really.

So that you put it out of your mind until it comes up.

Yes.

If it's triggered by- a film or-

Yes – by a conversation.

Or this conversation. Yeah.

[1:14:33]

But we- we started to- to go- we got invitations and we started to go to the Holocaust Day celebrations. And we went the last couple of years. And I was so touched by the various accounts that I heard people remembering and speaking. And I'm so pleased that it is happening. Because it shouldn't be forgotten. It's a bad way of dealing with it, my way. It should- should not have been like that. It- I can't change it. But I'm very pleased that it- it is remembered by all the other people who had these terrible times.

Where have you gone to? The Yom HaShoah or the Holocaust Day?

On Holocaust Day there- there was this- we went up to London to- what is the address? It was a big organised event or for Holocaust Day. I can't remember the-

In Westminster maybe?

Sorry?

In Westminster?

Yes. In Westminster. That's where we went. But I just don't know the date – the exact-

No, it doesn't matter. But you were happy to be there?

Yeah- oh, yes. We went to- on two occasions. And if- and we will be invited now every year.

So, did you- how did they know that you are a survivor?

Because our friends who were invited, they could take two people. And they said, would we like to go? And we said yes. And we have given our addresses and now we get invited as well.

[1:16:29]

I mean, do you see yourself as a survivor?

Yes. I am. Very much so. And all these stories that we heard, was just horrendous. And that's how I know how lucky I was. Because what other people went through were much worse.

But it's interesting. You never tried to find out for yourself more in detail -

It was just how it is.

- what happened. Yeah.

Yes. I think that was the influence of my mother who really - blocked out everything.

Yeah. But she also managed to protect you in the experience.

Yes. She was-

When you were all together.

Yes. Yes. She tried.

So that's- was her way of protecting you. In that sense. Is there anything I haven't asked you which you think is important?

I don't think so. I think we went through most of the things that were important.

Is there any message you have for anyone who might watch this interview – in years to come?

[1:17:52]

Well, I hope that my children are learn-learning something from it because-

They wanted to- [both laughs]

- they have wanted to know so much. And, and anything I haven't said I'm sure they will ask out of- outside this interview.

I mean, maybe one question is, you know, do you think it is good to talk about it? Or is it as valid not to talk about it? I mean-

I think it is good to talk about it. And I wish - now, looking back - that I had done more talking. And, and- and mainly: I had done more asking, rather than talking. Because maybe I would be able to say much more of all the things that happened to me, but I don't know.

I mean, do you find - because you have so many Hungarian Jewish friends - that this topic comes up now at all?

It does. Now it does.

More than before?

Oh, much more, absolutely much more. Because the- the whole crowd of friends, they are all Hungarian and Jewish, well, most of them.

So, everyone had some experience?

Yes. Yes. And they are very different from each of us. Because most of them have not-different from my story.

No, because it's very-in your generation, there wouldn't be that many, you know, child survivors.

No, no, absolutely. Yes. We were the younger ones. In year five or six.

Yeah.

Not much longer. You will not be able to listen to these stories for very much longer unfortunately - because there get less and less of us. Yeah. I- I just remembered this now. I had a- my stepfather had a niece who was in Auschwitz. And she has been experimented on, medically. And I remember knowing her. She came back to Szeged. She- she came back from Auschwitz alive. And she had terrible health problems. She- she had put on weight so much she could hardly move out of a chair, because of all these hormones that they plied her with. And she died quite young. She wasn't a happy person at all. Well, I have never asked her any questions, but I knew her. And afterwards I realised why she was so unwell. To- all my stepfather's family, everybody was killed. It was quite a big family and I don't know who- that was the only - man.

But you said that your mother applied for compensation-

Yes.

- from the Germans. And that's why she had to write down-

Yes.

So, in a way- if she hadn't written down those-

I wouldn't know where I was. No.

Did she manage to receive some - compensation?

She said to me that I am entitled to ask for some compensation.

Yes. You are.

[End of interview]

[1:21:29]

[1:21:32]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Photo 1

Right. Well, these are- this is my own family photo that I have. My grandmother is sitting in the front on the left- hand side of the picture, with my grandfather behind her. And in the middle in the front are her parents, my great-grandparents, and the rest of the picture is her- my grandmother's sisters and brothers. And the picture was taken in Budapest. I don't know the exact dates, but I think it must have been the early 30s - 1930s.

Photo 2

This is my mother and myself, many years ago, in- in happier times.

When, roughly?

It must have been 1940, taken in Szeged.

Photo 3

My father, this picture taken in Szeged around 1940, before he was taken away from us.

Photo 4

That's just an old picture of mine. Taken when I was maybe three, three or four years old on my favourite bicycle. Taken in Szeged in our garden.

Photo 5

This is- this is Miss Price, a very charitable lady who came to Vienna, picked me up and brought me to England. I think this was taken in Purley, about 1957, '58.

Photo 6

This is my mother's picture, taken in Budapest in the early 1960s.

Photo 7

My- my mother got married a second time. This is my stepfather and her, again, I think it's in the 1960s in Budapest.

His name?

His name was Jenő Engelsmann.

Photo 8

A picture of my future husband and myself, before we got married. This has been probably 1960. It must have been somewhere in London. It could even have been in Purley. It- it- in Purley, in Elizabeth's house.

Photo 9

This is our wedding photograph, signing the register in the Hampstead Registry Office in '61 - 1961.

Photo 10

This is a picture of our family, my husband and two children, the children Kati and Andrew. I think this was taken on one of our holidays, around 1972.

Photo 11

This was taken on my husband's 80th birthday, in 2015. With all the family, my two children, their partners and all nine grandchildren. This was taken in London, in Highgate.

Document 1

This is a certificate for my grandfather given by the authorities in Theresienstadt after the release of us, from there. And that was in forty- 1945.

Marie thank you again for sharing-

Thank you!

- your story and your photographs with us.

I am very grateful for all this. I wish I could remember more.

You did very well. Thank you.

[End of photographs and documents]

[1:25:46]