

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Magda Mezei Lapidus
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Magda Mezei Lapidus, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on August 23, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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MAGDA MEZEI LAPIDUS

August 23, 1990

Q: Magda, we're going to begin our interview, so I'll start by asking you your name.

A: My name is Magda Lapidus. My maiden...maiden name is Mezei, M-E-Z-E-I.

Q: Fine. Magda, where were you born?

A: I was born in Budapest. Shall I say the date? 18th of July 1923.

Q: Good. Could you tell us a little about your family at that time in the early years of your life.

A: Of my childhood?

Q: Yes.

A: Well...uh...I can tell you very nice things. My childhood in my early, early years...uh...probably the best years in my life because there was no problem. My father was...uh... a director in...at...at a very nice textile company which...textile company which everybody knew in Budapest, _____Goldberg was the name. He was working there from younger age, and gradually working himself up so he had a very comfortable, nice, pleasant life. My mother never worked. She was a homemaker. And my father who was working everyday and I had...I had a little sister who I never knew. Her name was Clara. She...That was the firstborn to my mother. She died when she was a child...a baby, an infant, 8, 7...7 weeks old. And then after came my little brother, John, who is Hungarian _____ and they called him _____ and he was 16 months older than I am. He was born in 1922, March 14th. And then I came. Magda. And very many years after came my little brother, George, who was born in 1936, April 15. So we were the children. Of course, George doesn't remember my early childhood because I was a young girl. I was 12 years old when he was born. We had a...a very.. How shall I say it? A very comfortable, not luxurious life...I can't say that...but we had a very lovely home. As a matter of fact, I visited in 1977 first time Hungary after I left...from Hungary with my mother and brother. We left in 46, so we went back in 1971. That was how many years, 30 some years after...31 years after. And we went back to the same place where I was born because I was born in that house. And so was my little brother. My little brother, John...my younger, brother George was born already in a hospital. But I was terribly upset. So upset that I didn't even take my mother in...with her we had a little rental car that time. We went specifically on my mother's request to go back to Hungary. She wanted to see the old country once more, so we went in 77. And we went to that house, and it was unfriendly, dark and not clean so we didn't go inside at all. When...when I went inside is when I went with my husband, Norman. In 1986 I think or 85 we went to Budapest. I wanted to show him. We came from Israel at that time. He has a brother in Israel. So we went and I said to my husband, "I'd really like to go back to the

house there. To the building. It was an apartment. It was not a private home. And it's lovely street. It's a very well known street in Budapest. It's called _____. And nowadays when we went there with my husband, there are some embassy or delegations in that area, in that street. So we lived in that street and _____ was another street, corner. And so when I went there it seemed the same in a way again, but I opened the main door and inside it was filthy, and the main entrance to our apartment was either walled in or changed so I couldn't go into the apartment. It was so disappointing for me and I was so sad that I told my husband, "Let's go. It's no use to look for something." But in my time, it was a very beautiful apartment. It had four bedrooms and I think had two bathrooms and had a little maid...for the maid. We had a permanent woman who lived with us for many, many years and then later on changed to other one who also lived with us for many, many years. And...uh...we had...and I described this...not in this paper what I left but I made a tape on this actually at home in Los Angeles and I lived there really remember. I remember the curtains were all with strawberry velvet and in the summertime my mother took it off and changed it for a summer curtains that the sun shouldn't eat it up. And we had a little music room. One of the rooms was kind of a music room because my mother played the piano beautifully and my father played the harp, which is very unusual that the man plays the harp, but he played the harp. Everybody else in the family, including me, not anymore, including me, we ...we sang. We loved to sing. My mother had a very pretty voice. My father had a lovely baritone, so we used to play in that music room and friends of my father came and they sang so we had very lovely memories on the holidays. Hanukkah or Yom Kippur or Pasah, and even Christmas I have to say. We had a wonderful event even on Christmas time. You know, Hungary was a very Catholic country. Everybody had Christmas trees and all this, so everybody was even holiday feeling in that time, winter. And we had...I remember my...the bedroom... my mother's and father's bedroom was...was in that time, probably was personal when they got married, was light pink and had all lace and so, the children...my brother and myself, we were in one room, never separated. I don't remember when we were separated. And then later my...my brother, my little brother was born and...uh...he...I don't know whether he was in a separate room. I don't remember that. But it was a lovely home. We had...in the house was...all the heating were with fire ovens. I don't know what they stoves or ovens. I don't know how they call it. Beautiful. Each room had a different color. One was brown. The other one was pink. So we liked to sit around there. And so the regular life was very peaceful. My father worked, and we went to...later on school. I remember only the years from my own life when I went to primary school. And interesting enough I remember that my late brother when to the same primary school a year before I did, and my brother, George, much later...it was already almost war time, he went to that same primary school which was called Princess Julienne. It was a Dutch Reform private school. The Dutch Reform Church private school in Hungary, and it still it exists because I took my husband and showed him and said, "Look, how small it looks and..." It was beautiful in my time because it was well kept. Now it wasn't anymore...the ground well kept. So I went there to see so after I attended that school and my brother, my late brother, after 4 years...we had 4 years primary school, he went to a so-called gymnasium in Hungary. They were not called high schools. _ or gymnasium. He went to a gymnasium which was very near where we lived. __, it's called. This is an old famous Hungarian patriot's name, and he went there and he got his Bachelors Degree there after 8

years. And I went from that...from the primary school, I went to the Jewish leitsiam, which is...the street still exists. I don't think that the school existed in Albiana Street. Maybe it is. I didn't look for that one. What I was looking for and surprisingly I didn't find when I went back to Hungary...I went for...after 4 years in that school, I went for a year or so...a year to a Catholic school. And then from...from the Jewish school...the Catholic school, and on the end I ended in the Commercial Academy of Budapest, which is a very beautiful and very important school. And I went there for 2 years. Actually, I have at home...in back in Arizona, my primary school report cards of 4 years and I found some of the report cards from the Jewish leitsiam, high school, so-called high school. I didn't find anything from the commercial academy. But as a...as a history, I learned that the Commercial Academy but as a...as a history I learned at the Commercial Academy to write typewriter and geography and mathematics and subjects, accounting and things which was connected to the...uh...Commercial Academy. And I didn't find the Academy at all, and I told my husband that I really have to go back and look for that. Why don't I? So I attended that. So the school years, if I can say that to you...the primary school and the high school were beautiful. The primary years, of course, were the best. I remember all the little gifts we have gotten. I was a very good student in primary school and my late brother, we were always being Jewish students in a...in a Protestant, because Dutch Reform was...mostly, they were Protestant. It's a reform school, and even we...the Jewish children, we had special religion class everyday in the morning, the Jewish students...the few of them. And we were allowed to go to their church where they sing all the beautiful psalms, you know, the Protestant Psalms. And we learned that. And that gave us a very good relationship with the other students. Unfortunately, I have never ever met anybody when I went back to Budapest in 77, anybody at all from my school years. Probably was a Gentile Christian children went other ways. The Jewish probably were all most killed, because I didn't see anybody. So in our life, I speak about, you know, 23, and I got to school when I was 5 and a half, 20 years, 29, 30, 32, and all the way up to...I would say...I remember the date on 1938, that my father was at the table sitting at lunch time. He came home every day for lunch, and he came every evening home and...and the good years he had even a car. And I know it was a Fiat. And we...we didn't travel on that much I know, but when we went to Lake Balaton for the summer season for the 4 weeks, we traveled on this car. So...but that doesn't mean that we were wealthy, just because he was in this position in this textile company which was the largest in Budapest, he could afford it I suppose or they gave it to him. I don't know whether it was his or the company, but we had the car. And...uh...I just don't know...that day I remember very clearly...I remember that for years, that my father opened the newspaper at lunchtime. We were very quiet at lunch. We were not supposed to...not because he was strict. He was not as strict...my mother was stricter to us than my father. I never even been spanked or anything my father ever in my life. Never! I didn't put this in the paper, but I come to my mind, the only time I remember that my father was...became angry with me. One day when I was a child and he said, "You have to go with me today and with _____, to Grandma," his mother who passed away before the war _____. And I don't know...I didn't want to go. I said, "No, Father or No, Daddy. I don't go. I don't want to go to the..." And he came to me and shook my shoulder and said, "Yes, you go." And that was the only violent thing from my father toward me. My mother, who I adored and all our lives, my younger brother...I think he was a

fantastic son and unusual son too because he cared for my mother in last years of her life. And my mother, if I said something fresh which we were not supposed to...I remember once that I fought with my older brother. My...my younger brother wasn't alive. We fought or something. And I beat my brother, Yanshi with from anger. And my mother...my brother went to complain to my mother and my mother said, "What did you do?" And I said, "Well, he said something or he didn't want to do something. I beat him. And I said you shouldn't do that. You will be punished. And you will be punished now if you continue this." And I was so upset about the punishment, I told my mother, "If you punish me Mother, I commit suicide." A word from a young child. And my mother gave me, "Why did you say that?" And I got it on my mouth. And I cried terribly. And my mother said, "You have to go into the corner, with your back turn around. And I just hysterically cried. Pardon me. And I remember that because _____ I cried, cried and then she came to me and embraced me and said, "Okay. No, more." And that was the end of that.

Q: You were saying that your father came home one day and.

A: And my father came home one day and I remember that he opened the newspaper and he says, "My God, the Germans occupied Vienna." And that was in 1938. So, 1938...I was born in 23, so I remember that...at the paper he said that. And that...that from that day on, really times in a way changed. Not much, but in a way, because first of all we lived still in that...in that building where I was born, but I don't know if in 1940 or 41, his salary decreased and something happened in the company. He didn't have the car needless to say...anything like that. And in 1941, in Hungary...I remember that very clearly because I was not such a young little girl. I remember in 1941, they began to take away...the Hungarians, the Jewish men. Certain young men, certain age. They had to go to labor camp. 1941 or 1942 they began to concentrate these people in labor camps. Young men and so I remember that...that time already, we had to move out from the apartment. We moved in another place called which is forget me street. And I been back on that street. We seen the apartment with my younger brother and with my mother, and that part is very nice, still very pretty. Not too far from our original home, but not that near, maybe a mile and a half or so, walking distance. And we went there because I suppose my father couldn't afford the big house. We didn't have a maid then there anymore. Our maid who we loved very much went back to her village on that time. I remember that well. And so we moved to this apartment which is much smaller. Was very pretty too because I remember that my mother could put her famous curtains and the lace covers. No piano in that apartment. I don't know whether they just sold it probably. No piano, but her own furniture. She had very beautiful...the living room furniture was _____ wood. I remember that. That was with us. So we had a nice home there too. And from that home, we were then later on taken to the David Star house. I remember that we had to leave that. But the...the town changed because they were frightening times. Hungary I think entered already in the war as part of the (clearing throat) Nazi Germany. 1942 I suppose. I am confused with the dates, which you said is not so important for me. But I know that in 1942 men were taken away to labor camps. In 1943, that I know positively...1943 my brother was taken also. It was taken...in that particular time the Hungarian government issued some decrees that certain age, young Jewish men has to go in

that...in that district and whichever district we lived, and so my brother had to go and left in 1943. I seen him once more because in the...in the labor camps...so-called labor camps, because _____ and that's the exact translation, _____ is labor and tava is a camp, so it was a labor camp, where they did...I don't know what work. I don't remember. Probably... I don't know what they did. Anyhow, we weren't supposed to visit him, but we had cards for him, post cards which I have along with me. And...uh...my brother...uh... we were...we could visit my brother once. They advised us we come down to Mohacs is the city where we went. It's south from Budapest. And we went on a boat with my mother. My father didn't come along. I don't know what reason. That was in 1943. And we visited my brother on...we went on...by boat, on the Danube River boat, with my mother. And other families were on this boat visiting this part...particular camp. Probably, it was advertised or was called up on the people on this labor camp people relatives can come. I don't know why they done this because when we got there late evening, they were terrible to us. The Hungarian guards, they were the so called national guards which in Hungary called Chander, and these were in special uniform and a hard like a ___ hat with a feather on them...I don't know what can...it's...it's a bird it was. It was a very special uniform. They were very frightening people to me even in...in peace time, but they were very rude and they were very bad and they pushed us and so we were very frightened and they hustled some people in a little room there and I...we didn't go to the camp. And just where we had to wait for my brother, and my brother came and we seen my brother. He was not in a bad shape as I remember his face. He was thinner that time, but he could get packages from my mother and my father for helping through, and that was the last time I seen my brother. My father and my brother has another story, of course which is later on...my father, in 43, was still with us all the time. And then came...when the Germans came in 1944, I think 19th of March, was when the Germans entered through the Austrian-Hungarian border to Hungary, and immediately was a horrible evening because we know this was the end of us. Why we didn't go away from Hungary, I have no idea because I had a cousin, my late father's late brother who died also before the war, who immigrated to Argentina. So I don't know why it didn't come ever to my father's mind to leave and as a matter of fact, it didn't because we were brought up...my...my brother, my late brother, and myself on a very patriotic way. We were Hungarian. We were Jewish, but we were at same...same time Hungarian, so we didn't follow...we didn't have this hatred against Hungarians, because we were Hungarian. We sang the Hungarian national anthem with the children and we were...my...my late brother was in the boy scouts and went out on the camp just like here in the U.S., so we weren't...we weren't educated to..to hate Gentiles. That's not true. We were educated to love everybody. Just keep our religion as much as we can and respect our books and our past, but we were never in hatred, so when the Germans came and since I remember that was terrible times to other parts of Europe. 1944, it was...the Germans were occupying half Europe, and the Hungarians were fighting with the Germans...not even fighting, it was already a withdrawal. I think it was...the offensive, the Russian offensive was already a long time on. My father said, "This is the end. This will be the end if the...if the Germans come in." Because we knew that a lot of Hungarians were very anti-Semitic and we were all...couldn't lead the life as we really wanted to...the peaceful, kind, sweet life. We were always frightened about something. When the Germans came in, not very long time after that, they occupied, of course, Budapest, Hungary. They were these decrees given out

to us...to the Jewish people that everybody should leave the house, and they had to be in an assigned building, and that's how we went from that particular place from _____ to this street which was called _____ King Street. It was not on the...near, but it was again the same district. I don't know whether you know that Budapest had 12, I think, different districts. So Budapest was much smaller in a way that time than now....Greater Budapest _____. So it was a little bit smaller city and these districts were all, I think, in the Seven districts, if I remember correctly. And so we were ordered from the house where we were living to go to this David Star house, and we couldn't take anything. We really didn't take anything. Really. It was order given just to...necessary belongings. All the furniture, everything stayed back which we have never found, needless to say, even after the Russian came in. Everything was stolen. Everything was taken. I only remember things like...like my mother gave out some Persian rugs to some Christian friends because we had...my father was 4 years...in the first World War, he was decorated. He had a shot in his leg and his back. Never suffered of it, but I know that he showed that. This was...he was in Shamisho, I remember...this was a big event in first war, first of all. And he had friends from first World War. His pals or his buddies as we call it, and he kept up with them and he went to military meetings like the people do, so he had Christian friends. We had very many Christian friends through my father and...uh...what happened when we went...when we were ordered to go out from this _____ street building to the other one... Well, we couldn't take anything along. I remember that. Only clothing. And I remember that my mother put things in a big basket. You know, the old fashioned baskets which you carry. And that was all what we have taken to the other house. But I remember that my mother gave out some jewelry which she had, necklace and something from her aunt. I don't remember exactly which...which it was because I was _____. I think her diamond earrings were sold already. Because I know that it was sold because the little container where her earrings were...she had, I still have. And how I got it back that's a long story. That comes later, but I know that...that the basket was filled up with winter clothing and some pots and pans which she needed maybe to cook. Anyhow on that particular time, this was in 44, frightening things happened. As you know, in 1944 March to mid July I suppose or maybe before, all the Hungarian Jews were deported from the provincial area. There were no Hungarian Jews alive unless some could escape or could hide or had fake documents or what not, but all the rest of the Hungarian-Jewish population was deported to Auschwitz. All of them. And...uh...I have to make a comment here, which I put in my paper, which is always in my mind that I have very good friend in San Diego who was in Auschwitz and is a Czech girl from Prague. And she mentioned to me when I...I...I met her and she became friend of mine in Venezuela. I lived in Venezuela 12 years. And she always told of me of her times from Auschwitz and we interchanged ideas. She was liberated in Bergen-Belsen by the way. She said, "You know, the Hungarian Jews were amazing. Because the Hungarian Jews were brought in by the train to Auschwitz on X days in June or July, and these people had their own clothing where they came...those that survived the transportation because, as you know, many of them died unfortunately in the transport. And as they arrived, they were separated, men and women, all the survivors and they were taken on the same day to the gas chamber. So many Hungarian Jews, according to her, and I know this from history, in a way, they were spared to Auschwitz and all the others. They were gassed on the same day. So this was very important for me to hear, because the Budapest

Jews were the last fortress in a way as we call it. And the rest we hear...we heard rumors. We heard the news, but we really didn't know exactly, because you really never knew exactly what happened. I didn't have a radio or my father had no radio at that time to hear any foreign news. Anyhow, my father...

Q: Magda, before you go into that, could you come back.

A: Yes, I can.

Q: To the house that you were moved into, the Star of David House.

A: Yal. The Star of David house.

Q: And...and tell us a little bit about what you did at that time.

A: Well,..uh...the Star of David House was the house that my father separated from us because when we went to the Star of David House and again, as you say, I don't remember exactly the date, but it must have been June or July when the Budapest Jews were already...you know, in Budapest, they had the Jewish Council who were discussing with Eichmann what to do with the Budapest Jews. That I remember historically that it happened. But my father went into hiding. And that particular time, his friends who were my friends and my late mother's friends...they offered him to stay with them and give him false documentation. So my father didn't live with us in that house because as far as I remember, I was the oldest, and my mother and my brother and my father said, "You would be taking care of my mother, your Mum and your brother. Whatever happens. I will be outside. Whatever I can help, I will help. If I can bring food, I will help food. If I can take you out, I will take you out, but at least I will be outside." This was a decision between my mother and father, and I know that he left and he went to live with these people whose name I know, of course. Steven _____, the family. Uh...

Q: And yourself. How did you...

A: Me. I was the one who was the man of the house. Let's put it this way. And I was a very strong, young girl I think because I said we will have to survive this because my brother, my older brother who I loved terribly, wasn't with us and I said to my mother, "I want to be with my brother." Because I grew up with him. My little brother, of course, was a baby brother we loved. But I went with my brother in the same school. I was a little bit Tom boyish in my life because I was always surrounded with these boys of his schools. My..His friends were my pals, so I was pretty strong little girl I'd say. I went to all...in my childhood, all the child illnesses basically, with my brother together, so I thought that, "Yes, we will do it." So I was the mover. I was doing...when we went to the David Star...this was a house which was not emptied by the tenants. The tenants...they lived in the...in the building stayed there, but some Jewish people from other building like we were...other streets, were put into this building. So I took my husband also to that building which is now beautifully re...redone actually. In that

time, it was a three-floor building and we were just coming in and we were assigned...uh...because the Consier in that building stayed on, was a woman, Christian woman. Very nice person, who was apparently appointed by either the Hungarian government or whoever that she...she should order where these people that coming to the building should live. So she assigned us, my mother and my brother to that floor, to the second floor in that apartment, which was a very large apartment, but I think we were at least 30-35 people in that apartment. So we were cramped together also in...in a place where nobody could bring their own furniture. But people they lived in there were their furniture, and we had only this basket with our winter clothing, what not, and some pillows. I remember that some pillows were stuffed in the basket. So...

Q: What was life like for you.

A: Life was like that. You know the government allowed that one or two people in certain hours of the day went still with these David Star houses, which was not the ghetto, could go out into the street with the David Star. We were all marked of course with the yellow star. We all had. My father, not. My father was...sometimes we didn't even see my father 3, 4 days. When he appeared suddenly during the hour when people...when we could move, he came into the building and he told...told us, "Don't go out on Tuesday or Wednesday because I will be coming when you are supposed to go out. So the building...the door was open. And also the Consiers...this woman whose name was Anna actually, she was quite nice to the people in the building. She was not a bad person. So my mother could come time to time to the building and bring us bread or bacon which was a no, no, but still whatever he could bring. Some food. Hot food, I don't remember that he brought. But in that time, in the building is gas...was gas, and all the _____ was a siege city because already bomb...bombing. The American bombing was there already at that time, but still gas was coming. So people they had any kind of material which you could obtain down in the streets and the shops. street is a street which I went to, walking with my husband, which is a street connecting major avenues, kind of.

Q: Magda, before you get into that, could you come back to the time that you were in that house, in the Star of David House. How long were you there before you moved out into...

A: Well, this was sometimes in June. Basically, I think it was June. And from there they took us to the ghetto. I didn't go directly to the Spanish house.

Q: Tell us about getting to the ghetto? Who took you there and how did they take you there?

A: Well, they were not taking us. They were ordering us. There was no taking. That was a time in...by that time I had the Spanish...I had the...I had the Spanish Shutzpass, I think.

Q: How did you get that?

A: Oh, the Shutzpass is another story. But let me tell you about my father because that...that is

conflict...conflicting with the Shutzpass. My father came back. This was June and July, and we still could go out from the David House to shop if we had some money. We still could cook something on the stove, if we had one. We were in a horrible, frightening condition needless to say, because we heard that the Hungarian Nazis are coming to the buildings and getting off people from the buildings for a different marches to take them away wherever they wanted to take to deport them. Needless to say, Auschwitz. We didn't know that exactly where is Auschwitz. And my father was coming back time to time but not too frequent. And what happened, on one day I went out on the street because I was again the eldest...to the street where I can find some friends or contact because we needed food. We were very little food. We had no meat or no milk or nothing like that. You know, we had flour Nothing really or sometimes, some little bread. So we changed with people, or we had friends we could go to some friends and say, "Could you give me something because I'm in this house. I have to go back." So some friends helped sometime. One day I went out from the building and on the street _____ I met a professor of mine from the Commercial Academy who was also a Jewish man and was much elderly than I am, probably I'm _____. He must have been that time 55. And we...as he recognized me, I recognized him and I said...he seen that I have a David Star and he had a David Star and I said, "Where do you live?" And a little conversation occurred, and he said, "You know there is a way out from this David Houses, David Star Houses, because he warned me and he said, "I am warning you that this house is endangered because they are setting up the ghetto in Budapest and on the _____. In that area _____. I remembered even the certain names of those streets. And he said, "You are endangered and we are endangered." I don't know where he was. I don't remember. He was not in the building. He says, "But there are some countries they're helping the Jewish people to get into protected houses. The Swedish and Swiss I knew about more or less, but I had no contact with these people and I didn't know where to go any how, so I just skipped that idea totally that I should go to these homes, the ligation. I just didn't...maybe I didn't even know where they were. But he said to me that you know the Spanish Ligation is also giving out passes and I...as of today, I don't remember where the Spanish Ligation was by the way. I have to ask Perlasca, Mr. Perlasca, where was it because I don't remember. But he said, "I'm going there. Would you come along?" And this was in an hour or two period when we were allowed to leave so we went together. And I said, "Yes, I want to have that because I might rescue my family." And he took me in and I remember the Ligation, there were a lot of people already there. I don't know how and I don't know when we got into...with him ...into the Ligation. It was in...not in _____ what is it called? Uh...I don't remember the name in English. It was a forerom kind of. And as soon as we got there, Havier was attached to me or attached to us or attached _____. Anyway, I met Havier.

Q: Havier was whom?

A: Havier was this young Spanish man who on that point I didn't know who he was. Havier talked to me. I didn't speak a word Spanish that time, needless to say. I spoke German perfectly. I grew up with German, simultaneously with Hungarian, and I tried to talk to him in German and he spoke to me and he asked who I am and I told my name is Magda Mezei, Magda and I have still my brother, little brother and I told my little story in two words

and...uh...by that time, my father was taken by the way. My father...and I...this was a period of end of October or beginning of November. I don't remember exactly the time, but it was in October because my father wasn't with us anymore. My father was taken from our building because he came back one night. One terrible night he came back to stay with us, brought food and the next morning...in the morning, the Hungarians came and round up the men and young women and we were round up...my father and myself together. We left together and my mother and brother in that building. And they took us in a long march and suddenly, the Hungarians separated the men from the women and I never seen my father on that day on. I only know that I marched with the Hungarian...with the women, Jewish women from the whole King street all the way in the alley was called Fosua and I went back by at my old school...my Julienne was there, and looked at it, and I went...passed by and they took us out, far away this march, picked up hundreds and hundreds of women. And they picked us up and took us in a big, I call it a lodge, but it wasn't a lodge. A big empty area outside of...kind of outskirts of Budapest. And there where I was. My father I never seen again. I know what happened more or less is my father, later I found this out, after the war, but my story...a long story what happened to me, but we go back. How we come...come to the Spanish...uh...Legation. So this professor of...I came back from his horrible march. I rescued myself. How...I...it's a different story.

Q: Why don't you tell us?

A: Okay, I'll tell you how. We went...this was very early morning. And this march began, sometimes at 4 o'clock, 5 o'clock in darkness and when...when these Hungarian Nazis came to the building and the...the...the way as they do it was a very regular way. They stand...the Hungarian...they had the autocrats. They didn't have swastika. They had black uniforms with this autocrats. They went...they were armed. They went in the middle of the house. The house...the European houses, as you know, had outside you could see downstairs to the...to the courtyard. This house was like that, so anybody who came out from the apartment was a...some could look downstairs, every apartment. So they...they stood in the middle of the court yard and were there...what is it called? with their microphone, not microphone.

Q:

A: Yal. What they do like it and the police and they call it. They called out all men from a certain age, and all women for and that age should come down to the court yard. So everybody was frightened. Nobody could hide away. There was no way where to hide. So the age limit, what they directed, they came down. And there was my father. On that night he came, and my father had to go. And there was I in that age limit, so we went together. We said goodbye to my Mom and to my brother because we really didn't think that we would be never coming back or we never see each other. You know, people were naive. They didn't know this. So I...I get a little bag from my mother with some clothing, something in it. And my father, I don't recall that he had anything. My father had only a warm coat because I'm sure it was sometimes in October, because he had already a kind of a winter coat with a velvet collar on it, and a hat. And so we went together hand in hand, but on this march, out of

the building...everybody out of it, hustled, hustled, hustled fast, were already a column on the street. We were not the only one. They picked up on all the... _ street had a fairly large Jewish population. That's true. So they took everybody from these homes which was set up to the street. And we marched and marched and we went by at the school and we didn't see and we didn't talk much because we didn't know what happened. And suddenly, they stopped the column and they separated the men and the women. So I said goodbye to my father, not even goodbye, it was kind of going away from me and I was in the middle of the other column and we were marching, marching, marching to this big area in Hungary. I think, if I remember well, it was in Zuglo, Z-U-G-L-O, which is kind of on outskirts...outside of the main city. And they marched, marched, marched. They hustled, you know, these...these aristocratic people. They shouted, "Well, Move," you know, very harshly.

Nobody...everybody...mostly young people I see...young person like I am, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, I didn't see hardly in that column at all. And they took us to this (clearing throat) to this empty...empty grass lot, but it wasn't a lot really because there were hundreds. (clearing throat) There must be thousands. I don't know to me it looked incredible amount of people. And all day, and it was from morning until late afternoon, we couldn't do anything. We couldn't...we didn't have food. We didn't have water. We didn't have toilets. If somebody had to go, we had to make it to secretly that they should finish up they had to finish because these guards were not that many, but they were around. They were walking. And I was...the lot was kind of...to me looked square, ____ square, I seen the people. And I was somehow on the edge of the square corner, kind of, and on this column. And I always pushed myself also to the side, because I had a feeling that I have to get away from here because if I don't get away from here I will not see my mother and brother. And interestingly enough, this edge where I was standing with others, hundreds, had a big ditch, a big ditch. It was the end of this lot, kind of. A regular ditch, which was like bush, bushes and green stuff, but dry stuff, and I didn't do anything on that whole day except freezing and thinking how will I get away and when. And I did that exactly on one moment when the guard was looking up. I just jumped. Nobody wanted to do this, but I couldn't do anything else. I jumped and rolled into this ditch. I just rolled into it and crawled on the ditch toward the other end where...the ditch was long. It wasn't a ditch...after the ditch were far away homes, but not a lot. They were already building. Like this would be the ditch. I was standing here and this ditch was a long ditch, and here were already houses of this area. Here...and part of empty with hundreds and hundreds of Jewish people. I ripped my star off. I left right there _____ and crawled, crawled, crawled, until I seen a street crossing of the ditch because then the ditch goes under the water goes, so I had to get up. There was not a soul. I just got up. It was dark because in the late afternoon, it was probably, I suppose, it was dark. All...all dark. It was getting dark, but you know, Budapest has a tough curfew because Budapest was a bomb city at that time. It was bombing and dark. So it was really dark and I don't know how. Today, as you told me, and as I went back to Budapest and I didn't find that area and I was looking. As a matter of fact, I was accommodated...in 1977 when I went back with my mother and brother, we went by the _____ we rented an apartment, you know, to stay in Budapest. And they...they gave us an apartment in Zuglo and I said to my mother all the time, "This is the area where I was somehow here." But I never recognized it. It was all built in. And the next day from Zuglo, we left because I told my mother I can't...we can't stay here. I was very

upset. I found it very dirty.

Q: You got back?

A: In 77 yes. So I got back to this...uh...to the street and I ran. And there was not a soul on the streets of Budapest. And I don't even know how today exactly how I found King street. I know more or less, you know, I remembered naturally where my high school was, the Jewish gymnasium which is in that direction from...when I attended my high school I went from the old apartment where I was born to a certain area where I get...took the tram...tram and go to my high school. So I remembered very well that area and where I was. Now in this ditch area, I thought I knew exactly which is north and south which area I have to go. So I followed my instinct and I got...and this was far away. I have to tell you, this is really far from Zuglo where we were...the David Star must have been. I am sure. 50 miles. I don't know. I am judging because I really don't know. And I was on the street, on King Street because I remember that I went by my little school again in the dark. It's an alley where my ___ was a beautiful old chestnut trees really. And it was already...leaves were already not on in October. They were already fall. Cold.

Q: You walked back to this street?

A: I walked back to the street and suddenly it was dark. Suddenly, I heard that somebody is also walking, coming toward me and somebody shouted, "Halt," in German. And I froze, because if "Halt," says it must be a German...some...a full German soldier. And good enough, he put the flashlight...I wrote this in my paper because I had it so clearly in my mind. He put the flashlight on my face. There were three of them, three German officers. I don't think they were SS because I'd remember that. And they said, "_____" "What are you doing here? "Do you speak German?" "Yes" _____ And I said to him, "I'm going to visit my grandmother, _____". She is crank I told him and she's sick, and I just...I'm sorry that I go that late, but I have to look for her. And they said, "No. Go. Go. Get. Get." And they let me go. And you can imagine that I'm a Jewish girl, a young girl. I had very long hair that time, and these Germans, they could kill me right there. _ Or they can take me to the Hungarians. And they let me go. And I go to that building and the building was...this David Star building was always closed. Was curfew time, always had to go...and I rang the bell and Anna came, the Consier. "How come they let you back?" I said, "Just let me in." And that's how I survived that. And I survived another time. My father was, of course, gone, but I survived another time because not very long after that, they again came to look for the young...not young, for the women. And Anna, Anna, this woman, Anna, came said, "I have to hide you," and took me down to her little room. The Consiergere had...her apartment, a little room, you know, as in Europe they sit there to watch who comes and goes. Not that she was sitting there. But she said, "I take you." And she pushed me into that room, into the cabinet where she had a red fox coat. I remember that clearly because who had a red fox coat that time? Only maybe she was stolen that from somebody or somebody gave it to her because she was not wealthy. And put me behind that stole and I was there for hours in that little cabinet until she came. "Now you can get out." I was amongst the very few young people, if I remember,

young women in that building they ever survived. At least to my eyes. There were women like my mother. My mother was born in 1898 and this ___ she was not a young girl. Those women were around. Even elderly women were in the building. I remember one, a very old woman who came with us to the ghetto, was at that time 80. She died. She never survived because in the ghetto very many people died.

Q: Magda, before you get there, you have to get to the ghetto.

A: Yes. That's very nearby anymore. Yes.

q: You are still in the Star of David House. Uh... You had managed to escape.

A: But I had...I had in my hand and by that particular time I should stress. I remember that very clearly because Havier...going back, then I went to the ghetto. Havier...to Havier, _____ I got the Shutzpass, because Havier said to me in the first meeting that I have to go back and next day when I can get out from the house, I have to bring the photograph. And I have that Shutzpass. My brother will bring it on the 6th. We will give it the memorial. On that...on that time, we had the pass in our hand. My father was...

Q: Before you go to that...

A: And then came an order...then came an order. Then on that particular time came an other that every David Star house, every, all of them. That means ____, King Street, or wherever they may be because I don't know where they all were around. They all have to move to the ghetto, without exception. So when...and they have to line up on this and this day. I don't remember the date. Maybe Perlasca will remember, maybe somebody else. We were lined up before the building. Everybody of the Jewish people lined up, and the ghetto from King street where the ghetto behind it _____. I would say...I...I don't. I am thinking now in miles any more, so in miles would be maybe 2 miles because you know the streets are not as long as I think, in Fifth Avenue, so _____ went to the main boulevard and from boulevard to where the left was, all Jewish section any how, more or less.

Q: Before we go on..

A: That's where we put in the ghetto.

Q: How did you get to the ghetto?

A: How we got to the ghetto? We were walked there, and they pushed in anywhere they could...the Hungarian Nazis. There were...there were no Germans there around, only Hungarian. I didn't see any Germans around the ghetto.

Q: You had the Spanish pass at that time?

A: I had the Spanish pass in my hand. I didn't have any belongings. We didn't have anything. We had nothing with us.

Q: Magda, how did you get the Spanish pass?

A: Well, I'm now I'm tell you this. Spanish Shutzpass, Havier, again Havier said, "We will give you the pass which _____ and the Legation issuing for the Jewish population you can have. But you bring back the pictures." I brought back the pictures next day right into the people. Havier was there. Havier took the pictures and took me into the room. Now Perlasca told me today, Mr. Perlasca, that I think I gave it to you. And I said, "I cannot be sure, but I think it was Spanish police who gave it to me. But Havier was there. Havier standing by...he said, "I'll see you back again at the David Star house." Because I went back to David Star. And the truth is that Havier _____ came at night 3 times or twice to the David Star, before we were taken to the ghetto. He came at night, and Anna let him in and called me down and said Havier brought us some food or some bread. I don't remember what else. I remember that he brought me a comb. I do remember that. A comb. Because I didn't have a comb. And he brought this there, and he said..."Where do we go?" I asked him. And he said, "You will be going to the St. Stephen's Park House," and he give the address. Either was St. Stephen Park 9 or 7. **[NB: Subsequent to the interview, Mrs. Lapidus remembered that it was #35, not #7 or #9, St. Stephen Park]** I have to verify this with Mr. Perlasca because he immediately knew that you were in the St. Stephen's House. And I don't remember... although I went back to the building in 77, and even now in 85, I don't remember the number. Anyhow, he told us that that's where we have to go. But apparently there was no...not enough time within the period that I had the pass from Havier and from the Legation. I didn't even understand the connection why the Spanish Legation will issue such thing because I was an intelligent girl,, and I knew that Franco is a fascist. And I know that Franco was neutral. I didn't think about any Blue Division. I learned this from Havier because Havier told me when I asked, "What is your name?" and he said, "My have is Havier _____, and my name is very famous because there was a Spanish poet in the same name." I was telling you this before, and I tell you how I came to this _____. All the time, 45 years I had Havier _____ in my mind, and Havier said, "You will go to St. Stephen House, but I tell you when." Curiously enough when he came on that night and brought this little comb and brought the food, I will see you in the Spanish house because I was supposed to go there with my mother and my brother during the 3 hours was assigned to us. But I don't know why we didn't because we...we landed in the ghetto. They lined us up the ghetto. Now I had the pass. We had nothing. Really, we had this basket. We couldn't carry. So we went to the ghetto without anything. Just as we were, except the pass. No documentation. Nothing except these two papers. We went to the ghetto and when we arrived in the ghetto on the same day...the next day, they were not only the Hungarian autocrats people, they were Hungarian police force. The regular Hungarian police was...of 1944. I remember exactly how they were in uniform because I was growing up. I made a little conversation because I was a young woman, you know, an attractive woman. I made a conversation with a police officer there and I said, "You know, I have here some document. I shouldn't be here in the ghetto at all." Because I was...I was very frightened. We didn't have food. We didn't have nothing.

And I...knowing what ghetto is from not only because I was so dumb. I knew about ghetto. I know...I heard of Warsaw. We heard every ghetto... ghetto? Why would I be in a ghetto when I grew up in a civilized surrounding? You know, I was frightened of the word. And I told this to this man. He was an old policeman. A fat, heavy set, mustache, pleasant Hungarian policeman. I don't remember his name. I only know that told him that I told him, "How can we get away? I don't have anything to give you. I...we have nothing?" He said, "You don't have to give me. I bring you out there." You know, in his Hungarian peasant way. We stayed in the ghetto and this street was Old. That's why I remember the street because it's a crazy name. Old Street. But that was Old Street, Old. Which was on the ___ of the temple. He said, "I will bring you out." I said, "I don't have to bring me out. I have a mother and my little brother as you see. You have to...three of us, we have to go." He said, "I'll bring you out there." And he did. One evening when it was curfew in the city, he came. He led us through the streets because the ghetto was really closed in as you know. But that was not closed in in that time by fence because when I went back to the ghetto in 1945, it was totally closed in with kind of an old fence, and I seen already when the...when the dead people were thrown into the truck. That was already sometimes in 45. So he took us on a very... because we were in a downstairs apartment you know. So he took us out and he said, "You have to run with me." Now you can imagine that Oldsa, the ghetto area, and St. Stephen Park....St. Stephen Park is in a modern...that time it was the modern...still is, _____. The town called Laport stadt, Laport area, that part of Budapest. I know it very well because it's just opposite the Margaret Island. The Danube River was below St. Stephen. I knew St. Stephen park anyhow, where it was, because from St. Stephen park, you walk maybe 500 yards, maybe a little bit more. You were in a main boulevard going to the...to the Margaret Island, to the entrance, so it was a very beautiful area of Budapest that particular time. It still is. As a matter of fact, when I went back. It's a distance from Oldsa from the policeman. He was so heavy. I don't even know how he could run. He had boots on. We had nothing. We had...we were already. We just had a coat and a cover and nothing else. And he said, "You run with me because if you don't run, you will be never seen because anybody can stop us and if somebody stops us, I will save you." Because we didn't have the David Star. He said, "Take this off in town." And we ran in that dark night, in that cold night with this policeman. I didn't even know how...where he takes me, exactly how he took us, but the took us in the main boulevard, and from the Olds, ---main boulevard, then side street. Always avoiding the main boulevard, which is a main...main boulevard even now which goes to the Margaret Island. If you been in Budapest I can show you on the map. And he took us to the Parposha is the main...main wide street before Santishon Park. I been visiting there now. And we went there. And in the building there were already lot of people. And I was amazed at why a lot of Jewish people.

Q: Which people?

A: In the Spanish protected building. It was already the Spanish Court of Arms and the Spanish flag. I don't know where the...the court of arms.

Q: Okay. I'm going to stop you at this point, Magda because we've run out of tape. But you can

sit back now and take a drink if you like and then while everybody changes their tape....

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

- A: We went with car, driving around all night. I couldn't sleep there. I didn't like it. So the next day we went to the ____ officer, and said, "You must put us somewhere else." And curiously enough, which is, you know, circumstance in life, they put us in ___ in ___ district, not very far from Sanpart, maybe 3 streets, so we just walked there and back which was one of the places we wanted to visit. And they put us also in the...near to the building where we.
- Q: Okay, Magna, I'm going to have to interrupt you now.
- A: Fix your collar on your left. One of them was turned down.
- Q: Okay. Thanks.
- Q: We're going to go back now to the experience with the safe pass. We are going to ask you again as...as directly as you can to tell us the procedure that you went through...uh...with Havier to obtain that safe pass and how you then find yourself through the ghetto experience back in the Spanish safe house.
- A: Can I tell you now? Sure. Well...uh...just as I...I mentioned before, my old professor, my professor met me on the street, on one of these 3 hours, indicated that the Spanish Legation is issuing Shutz passes____, safety passes for some of the Jewish people. They come to the Legation, and that means for me that they will put us in a building assigned by the Hungarian government under the safety and the protection of the Spanish Legation. So that exactly we done. We went to the Spanish Legation. We went through with a hundred people. They were standing there. We came into this little so-called, if I remember, fore-room like, not the Ambassador's room, but reception room. That would be the word. And as soon as we got in, we got to this young Spaniard who I didn't know that time, but whose name was Havier, because later on I learned, and he explained to us what he needs and he explained to us that through this document we will be able to move away from the David Star House to a protected house, which will be protected with the Spanish Legation, and hopefully, we can survive all this horrible upheaval in Budapest. So I was very grateful, and I said that I'm not only alone. I have my mother and my brother...and my father. I wanted...I told him my father is already taken, but still my father? He said, "Never mind." He explained to me that I have to bring photographs of the family. "Do I have it.: I said, "Yes, I have it because my has a basket which is full of family pictures in a container and that also survived during the war, interestingly enough, and I can cut out some of the photographs. And I didn't ask much of him what we have to do. I just asked, "Do you know where we will stay?" And he said, "Well, at the moment he didn't know," but he said, "When you come with the photographs and when you have the pass and you have these documentations in you hand, we will direct you and we will tell you what happen." Because, forget now the time is also short. We had an hour or two, I don't remember, to come and go. So I thanked and I left with my...my professor together, actually from the Legation. He done his business. He said goodbye. I never seen my professor ever after. I went back on next day on the same hour to the

Legation. The Legation was equally crowded. I was looking for this man because he was my connect...contact at the Legation, so and I asked, "What's your name?" He said, "Havier," I didn't know that time that his name was Havier _____. I didn't even ask. I didn't care, but I said that he gave me the documents which was...he didn't give me really himself the documents. I think that time police gave me the document. He was only present to give me this document. He came with me out and said, "Keep this document because it's very important. I will let you know. I'll let you know...in that House in David House. Where you live?" And I said, "I am living King Street 95 or 93." I don't remember exactly. And he came. It's true he came. Not the same night. Two or three days after, he brought us food and he said, "We learned that the Spanish protected buildings"...he mentioned a number of them..."You will go to the St. Stephens Park building. And I asked him, "Do I go now or tomorrow when I am free to go out from the building." He said not yet, because the building is not hundred percent arranged apparently with the Hungarian government because I suppose the Legation had to discuss with the government who goes and who doesn't. The buildings were apparently, what I learned later, vacated with everybody who lived in the building and given to the Spanish Legation. All these buildings. The people, they lived in the building, whether they were Gentiles, Christians, whatever, they had to leave the building. So they had a hard time probably through this too. Any how, so Havier when he came to the house, to the David Street house, I asked him during the conversation...I told him that my father was already taken. He said, "He can be on the document too." And he is on the document, his picture. I said, "Where...how will be this...this departure?" He said, "I'll let you know when you have to go to the St. Stephens Park when it's ready to be...to move there." And on that particular night, I asked, "What is your name?" And he said to me, "My name is Havier _____." That's how I remember those years. Forget that many years passed by and that name was in my mind since I speak Spanish, and in the meantime I learned Spanish. I lived in a Latin country and so I _____ was in my mind. And he mentioned also right way, that is a very important name because a Spanish poet had this name, this same name. So I accepted that, and he also told me that...are you employed. I said, "Are you with the Spanish Legation?" He said, "No, I am...I am with the Blue Division. "Do you know what the Blue Division is?" he asked me. And I says, "Yes, I know the Blue Division is the...the Corps, the elite Corps of Franco." And I knew that the Blue Division was fighting in Russia on Hitler's side. And h.He said, "How come that you hear it?" We are deserters. We left. The offensive came, and we just run away. There is some of them...some of us at the Legation. Which was proved to me today by Mr. Perlasca, because I didn't know that time. What was very interesting that in other time when he came again to the house, the David House, he said come tomorrow and said that I should come back to the Legation. And I did go back to the Legation on other time. And I don't know why he wanted to...that I should come back. And I came and he said, "I will show you some of the people that we are hiding here at the Legation. And I didn't ask yet...Mr. Perlasca, he has to tell me because there was a puzzle in my mind that he took me back in the Legation in a room or in a hiding place, there was a room divided with a little stairway and the stairway you go up and there were men sitting up there. Two men were sitting up there, and they were Hungarian Jews. I don't...I don't remember who they were. And we were talking to each other and I said, "I am from the King Street David Star House and I tried to go back to my mother and brother and take them

to...to the Spanish Legation protected house and we just said goodbye and I never went back anymore to the Legation. So in my mind, it's still a mystery who were these people that Havier let me talk. Because we spoke German...Hungarian...I'm sorry. Havier didn't speak Hungarian a word. My conversation was with Havier ____ only in I my good German and his broken German. And so I left, and I went back, said goodbye and I left back. This was the hour from 10 to 12 or whatever the hour was, and I never seen them again, him again, only at the Spanish protected house because after this, I was taken away with my mother to the ghetto and with my little brother, we lined up in marching to the ghetto and that where I was lucky and smart enough to make contact with this Hung...this old policeman, who risked his life. And not only that he risked his life. I'll tell you more about him.

Q: Before you tell me more about him, we would like to get you back to the relationship you had with Havier.

A: That was the relationship that was...then emptiness. There was nothing happened until I got with my mother and brother to the Spanish protected house. When we got to the Spanish protected house, the policeman left us there. And there were so many people already in the building that they accommodated us in the basement in the building.

Q: That was in the ghetto?

A: No, the ghetto is after the protected house. We left with the policeman after...I wasn't long in the ghetto. I must say that. Maybe 2 days or 3 days. Because I told this policeman, "I have this document. Please rescue us." And he says, "I will," as he does...he done it. When he done...when we went to the Spanish protected house, there were a lot of people already there. He left us. It was night time. We were pushed into there, to stay there and we said, "Here is our document." And there were no...no leadership. I don't remember any leadership in the house. Everybody went wherever they could stay. And I couldn't go anywhere with my mother except to the basement. And the basement was terrible, because the basement has water. And so we really suffered for a long, long while in the basement.

Q: How long were you there, Magda?

A: Well, this was probably the end of October, beginning of November, and I was...we were liberated in January the 18 by the Russians. And when the Russian came into that building, we still stayed for quite awhile because there was war...that was a siege of Budapest. We didn't go out at least another 3, 4 weeks from the building.

Q: What did you do while you were in that building? How did you spend your time?

A: Well, I'll tell you. First of all, I have to tell you that we didn't have anything as you know. We didn't have anything. We told the Hungarian policeman that if you want to help us, if you can, in the King Street on that building and I told him the address...93 or 95. I think it was 95. On the second floor in the apartment number so and so, there is a basket and that's all our

belongings. Can you bring that eventually? And he did. He did bring it to the protected house. Not immediately, but after a few days where we had the two or three pillows in there, so we had some warm...warmer clothing and some pots and pans. But at that time, if I remember correctly, in the building there were no gas, no electricity. Nothing. So the people there had to cook. And my mother had two big bags of flour...I remember that...in the basket. Like this. And she didn't...we couldn't eat anything else. My brother and my...we didn't eat anything else during all the time until well after...even when the Russian came in...only snow water was...this was heavy snow...brought in at night from the street by others too in the building, which was made a little fire into the gas stove with the furniture, pieces whoever found it...little wood. Some people went even out...I don't know how they got it...some branches because the trees and the branches were all empty. No leaves. So they brought that in and we made fire on it. And my mother, in one of the pots of snow water, made...we called it, very funny now when that it comes to mind, we called it ___ because it was flat like a pancake, but it was just flour and water. And it was delicious. That's what we eat. That was our staple. Well, we didn't do anything in the building, really. People stuck together if they could. They were bombing in the house...outside in Hungary, and afraid who comes to pick us up because there were a million rumors. Because, you know, you heard all the time, the shootings and the bombings and the time to the Spanish protected house, in the Margaret Island, we knew from rumors that there are still German soldiers and Hungarian autocrats people they tried to...to beat, to fight. And not only that, during that period...that time that we were in the protected house and later on we were upstairs...they accommodated us upstairs. And we were on the last floor, and I asked Mr. Perlasca today, "Was it five floors or was it nine floors?" And he said, "I think it was five floors." And I think it was nine floors." We were on the top on this protected house. On...during that period of time, there was an explosion and the Margaret Island bridge exploded totally. All the bridges, by the way, the Hungarians probably did, but we seen it through the window and the windows were all blown in, so there was no windows in the building. I only remember that I was standing in the window and I said, "Oh, my God. The bridge goes." And my face and my hair was full of glass. And all little bloods running which I didn't know. But they says, "What happened to your face?" The little glass went into my hair and cut me. I put this down that there was a professor on the building, a Hungarian surgeon, whose name I don't remember _____ and he cleaned by face with a little clip or something. Look, my face is still here.

Q: Yes, it is. Magda, when you were in the safe house, how safe was it?

A: It wasn't safe. It wasn't safe. There was nobody who...it was safe because it was protected by the Spanish flag, so maybe some Hungarians or some Germans maybe respected or respected not. But because we didn't know this, whether they would respect us, we were in constant fear. Also, there were all the rumors how the people got it...we only heard the rumors. I wasn't outside. I went only outside sometimes at night for water because the younger people...there were a lot of elderly people in that building, you know, not only my age and my mother...much older people they were. I know that in the room where I was, on the end, two people died. And they were very elderly, Mr. and Mrs. Elephant. So there were a variety of..of people in the building. So we...we were protected by them, it's true. They

risked their lives, but we didn't know whether we were protected. Why? Because we heard the rumors that the Hungarian...uh...Nazis, they are going to even to the protected homes and try to take out people.

Q: Did anybody try to take anyone out of your home?

A: Absolutely. That's the last time...the building...not the home, in the building. That was the last time I seen Havier, and that's the last time when...I think and I believe that all so Mr. Perlasca and other Spaniards were at the building. This was on a...on a morning hours at 5 o'clock. It must have been...I think it must have been end of November.

Q: What happened then?

A: It happened the following. On early morning, the shouting was in the building...I was actually downstairs at that time with my mother and my brother, downstairs in one of the rooms, and they came...the Hungarian Nazis and they said, "Everybody who is in the building has to come out and line up on the street." Mind you, it was very cold. It was snow, ice. That particular winter apparently was colder than others. And everybody from the building, from top floor, they all have to come. Because some people they even slept on the stairways. They were...I don't know where they were. Everybody has to line up. When we lined up, we just didn't know exactly what will happen, only what we heard. That these people will be marching us directly into the Danube and will kill us. That much I knew. I didn't tell this to my mother and little brother but I said, "This is the end of us. If these people will take us out and the Spanish are not around to save us, we are dead." And it happened to other people I know after the war. To us it didn't happen because...I don't know how. That's what I have to find out from Mr. Perlasca. How is it possible that on that morning, suddenly the Spanish Legation representative, one of them was Havier _____ with a document in his hand and maybe Mr. Perlasca, because there were others...they were debating and shouting and discussing with the Hungarian Nazis downstairs that this is...they cannot...this is Spanish diplomatic protection, and they were really fighting for us...for us. I only stood there...downstairs, because we were downstairs, and other people all lined up...on the stairway lined up, because there were at least 200 in my opinion in that building. And they were shouting and discussing and in the meantime, we heard shootings. It was already the end of the war for Budapest. The Russians were all around. And one minute to the other, it took us minute, my brother...my brother, George, had a little knapsack because that was in this...in this basket...had on his shoulder...had a little cap. I see him as today...is behind me because I was in the front, my brother and my...and all the others. There were others...lot of people in the same situation as we were. We freight...what...how can we get away from this? And the Spanish people from the Legation whether it was Havier or Mr. Perlasca, Giorgia Perlasca, whoever it was, they won over these Hungarian Nazis, and they tell, "You cannot touch these people because this is the Spanish government protection. The Spanish government was befriended with the Hungarian government. They got none because the Spanish Franco was a fascist, and the Spanish Legation was there until the Russians came in. And that morning because it was still dark, Havier came to me and to my mother and to my

brother and to others...I'm sure he said goodbye. I only observe what he done to us, and he said, "We are seeing you last time. The Legation must leave Budapest because we are surrounded with the Russians. The Russian come in and close in the city any minute." And I said, "Where do you go, Havier?" He said, "We go to Switzerland. Do you want to come along?" And I said, "How do you go?" I said, "By train and by car, we all...we will leave the Legation, whatever the Ambassador...everybody has to leave. We close the Legation, what he said. And he said, "you want to come along?" And I said, "I will never go without my mother and brother, which is true, and we embraced and everybody embraced. It was a terrible moment. It's terrible even me for now. And he left and disappeared in the blue yonder.

Q: Okay, at the moment that...that Havier and others argued against the Germans that convinced them to allow you to stay...

A: They convinced that we should stay. They convinced them that this building is under the Swiss...Spanish Legation, Spanish government protection, and they cannot touch us because they are Spanish. They are diplomat, and they cannot go. And when I read the article is absolutely that's how it...how it was.

Q: Was that the last problem that you encountered?

A: That was what is interesting what you asking me because, curiously enough, after that period of time that the Hungarians cleared the way, these Nazis and the Spanish, everybody cleared it away, the misery was there in the house because we didn't know that nobody else will bother us, but I don't recall in my mind, thinking about this million times, that anybody from the Hungarian Nazis, or the Germans or anybody or no Spaniards, nobody came to that building. We were on our own. I only know that there was a heavy shooting, bombing, all this December what I heard...if this was the beginning of December because I don't recall. I don't recall that until the ____ that anybody was bugging the building. I don't remember that any Hungarian came. At least, we were upstairs really with my mother and brother and, you know, we were hundred...I don't know how many people were in that apartment, probably 40. I don't know.

Q: What did people eat?

A: We didn't eat. Nobody ate.

Q: How did you survive?

A: I don't know. I was...I was skeleton.

Q: During the period of these two weeks.

A: Well, this was from the beginning. I...I don't think that it is right, but I wrote December, end

of November. This was sometimes in the first week or first 10 days of December when this happened and I was confirmed this with Mr. George Perlasca because I think I am one of really the people who are here this gathering who had at least their mind because of my age. I really believe that. Because I don't know whether the other remembers in other buildings how it was. I don't know what happened. But apparently it happened to others. I only know from other friends and later other people conversing that in other building...not...not only Spanish, Swedish...the same thing happened, that the Hungarians were there and took them and some of them, took them and shoved them into the Danube. I know that historically. I know that it happened. So while we were saved by the Spanish...that particular morning was saved our lives. This is really the crucial day because it was crucial that they gave us the Shutz pass. It was crucial to me that I was lucky to meet my old professor who says, "Go to the...with me," because otherwise I wouldn't...my faintest mind wouldn't set on the Spanish Legation because I heard Swedish and Swiss...uh...Swiss...because you hear always a little more. We knew about...already in that time, we knew exactly Auschwitz, Birkenau. We know exactly what's happening outside, but we didn't...I didn't know Spanish Legation, so this was really...they were our saviors. No question about it. My life and my mothers and my brothers, definitely!

Q: That's a wonderful statement. As we draw the interview to a conclusion, if we can just go back now to the realization that you have, that the war was ending and...

A: That was a...that was a...that was also very emotional moment, I'll tell you. Because when nothing happened, when it was fairly quiet to...to say fairly quiet that nobody came to take us out or shoot us, but we heard the shooting and people in the building, you know, men. They were men. They were all talking. Everybody was rumoring, "Where are the Russians. The Russians are near." Because we heard...I knew from Havier. Havier told me. Remember he said that the Russians are all around the city, you know, and it was such a shooting, you know, everywhere that we knew that they come any day. Every day we said now, today, tomorrow. But December the 25th was the worst night of my life of the bombing because we were upstairs and Budapest was sounding like a drum. Boom, boom, boom. And I was so upset and we were so hungry and we were so miserable that I told myself and God should forgive me, I said, "Just a bomb should drop on us. It should be a end." It didn't. So it came other days and other terrible days and hunger and hunger and people were helping each other what they can. Some people they just slept. They didn't do anything. And on the 18th of January, I know that we went out from the house where we lived and the professor who cleaned my face with his hands because we didn't have anything, suddenly I heard him saying and I seen him as now...he says, "_____." And the Russian soldiers appeared in the building. And not one, not two. Many! They came all around the building and ripped off the David Star from us immediately so we thought it will be fantastic. This our...our...this we are alive. Of course, after this horrible thing, there were miserable situations because firstly, we didn't have food. We didn't have water. We didn't know where to go because nobody had homes. Nobody had nothing. So everybody really stayed for quite awhile in the building. I think that I left with my...I left actually with my little brother. My mother stayed. Because I thought I'd go back to the _____ street, not to the _____ street, to the _____ street, where we had

our belongings. And that was already I think in sometimes in the beginning of February. Snow! Ice! Misery! Dead horses on the streets, frozen! Dead people frozen on the...on the street. And I took my brother's hand and I was dressed like a mummy because I had a man's pair of shoe. I don't know how. I mean I...I really looked as anybody can look in a war, and I had a scarf on my face, on my head. I had no warm clothing and we said, we go back to and see if we have anything there. We didn't get to ___ needless to say, be cause from park, we had to go to this ___ district, ___ state district. And we went to the modern district and you have to go through the...to the train station bridge. There is...was a big train...have two train stations big in Budapest, east and west. This was the west station, Rios, and through this leads a bridge. And we had to go through this bridge into the area to reach and walk over to our place. And when we got to the bridge before us, there was a woman walking, also in the same miserable condition as we were and they just called...I don't know whether she was Hungarian or Hungarian Jewish. I don't know, but as she went in the middle of the bridge, she was shot. ___ went into her and she collapsed on the bridge like an accordion, bleeding. And I didn't know what to do, so I ran back with my brother. I...I was afraid that we will be shot, you know. Because, you know, there was shooting everywhere in Budapest in that time. And this woman was dead, just collapsed...I have it like an accordion right there in the middle of this...it's not the bridge. It's overpass. Overpass. So I...then I went back to my mother and very much later, a few days or 3 later, we left the house. We went back to the other street where we had friends and we asked if we can be accommodated and we were accommodated there and we stayed there. Terrible condition. No water. No nothing. The Russian were...the Russians were raping, killing, stealing, namely everything else was there. It was a horrible period at that time. And we were hoping that my father and brother comes back. Nothing happened.

Q: What...what did you learn about your father?

A: My father...I...that's...that's a very important question because when we were still in the David Star House and my father was taken with me, we got two post cards in the mail. One came in the name, _____, I have here the post card. I will leave to this Museum if they need it. The one post card is written by my father...it's in Hungarian, needless to say, and directed to Mrs. Yano Mezei, Mrs. John Mezei. First of all, my brother was never married. Secondly, he was never any more with us. So I don't know why he had this idea to send it Mrs. Yano Mezei, to my brother. Anyhow, it was written by my father, directed to my mother and came to the _____. It had the correct address, everything, and says that...in the letter, translated that after a long walk, we reached Suring, which is a town in Hungary, but not in Budapest, further away toward...toward Vienna. We reached Suring. I am still well, and something like that. It says...I'm not needed that I should translate that...that we should take care of my mother and George, take care of my mother and all these things. That was one post card. And immediately after, maybe a week after, we got a other post card, brought over, handed to my mother from the _____ family where my father was hiding originally. Mrs. followed the column where the Hung...where the Jew because this is a very famous march. Maybe it was the Wallenberg march, possible, which was very famous. My father she followed. She was so good friend to us, she followed. Because she brought a post card to my mother which was

directed to her, Mrs. , and was written by somebody else who I don't know...we don't know who it was. And the card says in Hungarian, "Please take this card to Mrs. Mezei," to my mother, and tell her that Hendrik, my father is in Nagycnk in this sugar refinery. Nagycnk, N-A-G-Y-C-N-K, Nagycnk which is near to the Austrian border. Hendrik is in Nagycnk in the sugar refinery but he's unable to write. This is...this is all the post card. So that was the last which we had or still when we were in the David Star house and we kept this. When after the liberation, after we settled into this ____ street house where we could stay because we couldn't go back to our own apartment because every furniture, every piece was stolen. There was nothing. We couldn't...strange people lived there. We couldn't get there. When we went back to the ____ street, the second apartment, there were totally strange people...Christian people, nice people...they lived in the building. Nothing was ours. So we were without absolutely any...anything at all. The only thing we survived is..was the basket which was still in the ____ park. And some pots and the pillows and old ragged clothing what was there. And when we went back to ____ street, we had friends. They gave us beds. Two beds and a wardrobe, you know, kind of a wardrobe and some help to us this _____, because people can occupy any apartment where they wanted to do. There was no registration or or I rented or nothing. We just went into this apartment and stayed in the apartment. There were no window in the apartment. In the whole building, there was no window.

Q: What happened to your father?

A: My father...so we knew on the card after the liberation, that my father was in Nagycnk sugar factory, so...a sugar refinery, so we didn't know whether he's alive, but we were waiting that he comes back. Time passed. February, March, April, whatever, and May. In summer time in 1945, there were...they created in the newspaper...the newspapers at that time, they printed 2, 3 pages of paper in Hungary. One was called _____, a very communistic paper. But everybody tried to read what's happening if they could get hold of a paper. And we couldn't get hold of much but whatever we got back from people...they hidden on my mother's tablecloth and things they came back to us, we could exchange that for bread, for food, for paper for whatever. A terrible inflation at that time because today you couldn't buy it, tomorrow... Anyhow, in that newspaper, there was a decree that people, Jewish men, they were taken on that and that day and on end of October on the march to the Nagycnk sugar refinery will meet at the Jewish community center again in the ____ street area. I don't remember where the center was, but it was somewhere there to get information about those people they survived or those people they...they did not. I went there like a locomotor. I made a sign with my father's name, Mezei, Hendrik. It was in Hungarian. __ is opposite __. And I stood there. And there were...I would say people, relatives there, maybe 100, 150, so there's a plenty of people there and a few men. And I was holding this up all the time, and they were explaining to us what happened. That the Nagycnk sugar refinery...one they were totally evacuated. They marched everybody and apparently, there were 30,000 people in that refinery jammed together. I didn't know this. And all the 30,000...whoever stayed alive...because many people died on this march from Budapest to Nagycnk, because Nagycnk is on the Austria-Hungarian border. If you look at the map, it's a long way and a long walk. But apparently, my father survived up to that point because he was a soldier in the

war. He...he played soccer all his life so he was very strong man. They said that all these people were lined up again and they were supposed to march from sugar refinery through the Austrian border and I always think that _____ much too tall because that's _____ another gathering camp. I don't know whether this is right or wrong, because I went in Jerusalem to the _____, and I researched this and I got information through a book where all Nagycnk is in the book. And it just says that the Nagycnk gathering place where these people were supposed to march away, many of them were shot down on the way to Austria and many of them just died from hunger. So I never knew really what happened to my father. I spoke to these people. I don't know who they are and I don't remember and I asked, "Do you remember Mezei?" Nobody knew. But there were so many, that those people they survived they knew their own bodies who survived with them because there were very few that survived. On the whole march, apparently just maybe 100 or not even that. So they were eliminated. They were not supposed to go to Auschwitz. I know that because it's in opposite direction. But I know that my father's card I have which have...I will give it to you or to somebody else tomorrow, and I have my brother's...little brother's card. My little brother has a totally different story. A totally different story, not even matching to the Spanish protected house.

Q: Magda, you have done...you have done a superb job of telling us your story.

A: Thank you. Half of my story.

Q: Well, we certainly do appreciate that you shared this with us.

A: I appreciate to you, to the Holocaust Memorial, that they brought me here that I can have a chat and enjoy George Perlasca, George Perlasca, and that I could speak and really maybe unknock, unknock the _____ knock, this _____ which is still in mind because certain things I don't...I just don't know. I only know what I experienced.

Q: Well, you've told us very well.

A: I'd also like to tell you this before anything that my brother was taken to Mauthausen. He was in a concentration camp and he was liberated by the American forces on 5th of May in Gonskerchin, which is an _____ forest of Mauthausen with 6,000 people were in that forest, which just a few hundred only stayed alive. He was alive. The American liberated...on the 4th, they took him to American Lazarette in Wales. From Wales he was taken to Lindstadt near Mauthausen. He stayed alive until September the 2nd, 45, and he died. And unfortunately, we never seen him alive. The American forces buried him in a military cemetery in _____, Austria, and when we escaped from Hungary in 1946, our goal was to go to the American zone which we did. We landed there and we looked for my brother's grave and my brother's we found and then we exhumed him and reburied him in Linz in the Jewish cemetery. And he's still there and I brought a photograph. With other Jewish Hungarian boys they died during that period. In short, the rest of the family were all gassed. Everybody else. Uncles, cousins, name it. I have some cousins. One in Australia and one is

in Rio, but the rest they all exterminated. And that's the sad story. And I wish that everybody should remember for generations and generations and generations what people could do. And not only to the Jewish people, but the Gentiles too.

Q: With your help, it will be remembered.

A: Thank you.

Q: We thank you.

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview