Hedvig Endrei Interview Excerpts
Centropa Interview

Excerpt I: Family Life

My maternal grandparents came from Tolna county. They lived in Bonyhad. My grandfather was Adolf Reich. I don't remember whether grandpa had any siblings or not. My grandfather's family and the relatives didn't really deal with agriculture, rather with stock-farming. I remember a one-storied house with a garden.

My grandfather married twice. The family never talked about my real grandmother. I don't know anything about her, because she died very early. She was probably also from Bonyhad. They met there. The step-grandmother was a certain Aunt Betti [Bettina Reich]. I don't know whether she was from Budapest or not. I only remember her from here, from Pest. My grandfather and my step-grandmother were buried here in Budapest. Two girls were born from my grandfather's first marriage, my mother, Roza Reich and my aunt, Hermina Reich. My mother and grandma Betti were on good terms, they liked each other. At least I don't know of any conflicts between them.

Four children were born from my grandfather's second marriage, three girls and a boy. Jeno Reich was the boy. The girls were Frida or Frici Reich, Sara Reich and Eszter Reich. My mother was the oldest, then came Hermina, then the step-siblings: Frici, Sari, Eszti and Jeno, he was the youngest. They were born one after the other, they weren't many years apart. So my mother had a blood-sister and four step-siblings. Despite this they got along well, while they lived they were close to each other. My mother's step-siblings were all milliners. Frida's milliner's shop was on 12 Vamhaz Boulevard, my aunt Eszti also had one on Klauzal Street, Jeno also had a hat-shop on 57 Rakoczi Avenue. I even worked for him later. Jeno's wife was Jolan.

I didn't know my paternal grandparents. They were from Budapest. I don't know much about my paternal grandfather unfortunately. His last name was Weisz and I know that he was blind. I remember that when grandpa was at our place once in my childhood and he bumped his head in one of the shelves and I asked him not knowing about anything, if it hurt. Then I got a beating from my parents. At that time I didn't know that he was blind and that it must not be talked about. Grandpa died when I was at middle school. I had never seen my maternal grandmother. I don't even know her name. She was also from Budapest perhaps.

There were three siblings in my father's family. My father, Albert Weisz, his sister, Regina, and Geza Vajda.

Four children were born from my grandfather's second marriage, three girls and a boy. Jeno Reich was the boy. The girls were Frida or Frici Reich, Sara Reich and Eszter Reich. My mother was the oldest, then came Hermina, then the step-siblings: Frici, Sari, Eszti and Jeno, he was the youngest. They were born one after the other, they weren't many years apart. So my mother had a blood-sister and four step-siblings. Despite this they got along well, while they lived they were close to each other. My mother's step-siblings were all milliners. Frida's milliner's shop was on 12 Vamhaz Boulevard, my aunt Eszti also had one on Klauzal Street, Jeno also had a hat-shop on 57 Rakoczi Avenue.

My father was born around 1885 and died at the age of 85, in the 1970s. He learned the picture framer's trade in Vienna [today Austria].
My father learned accounting at a very young age. I don't know where. He made the tax return and did everything related to accounting in all the shops of the family.
My mother was a hairdresser. I don't know when and from whom she learned the trade. At that time she didn't work at a hairdressing saloon, but she went to houses.

I went to nursery school, elementary and middle school to Papnevelde Street, downtown. The children were mixed at the nursery school and at school too. Since we were Neolog, there was no point in us going to an Orthodox school.

I often went out with my brother and his friends. In the 1930s my brother had a boat-house on Romai bank. At that time it was in fashion that there were boat houses on the Danube, which one could buy. We usually spent the summer there. This was a way of having fun at that time. It was very nice. We rowed, the boys fished.
After graduating middle school I went to the so-called bride school for a year. There we learned how to budget the money, the income. Besides this there was also a sewing and cooking course, too. We learned to bake strudel, and to cook, and we invited the children who went to school and the teachers, too.

My husband, Istvan Endrei was born in Budapest in 1914, but he lived in Debrecen with his parents. He was of Jewish origin but he was raised as a Roman Catholic. His father magyarized his name from Edelstein, my husband was already Endrei. My father-in-law was called Laszlo Endrei, my mother-in-law was Katalin Roth. My husband's father died in World War I. My mother-in-law remarried and remained in Debrecen with her second husband throughout. I was at their place once after our wedding. My mother-in-law's second husband had a clothing and underwear shop in Debrecen. He was in trade until 1944. Imre Endrei was my husband's brother.

My husband was a professional seed examiner at the Corn Exchange. This meant that people brought wheat or some kind of produce to sell at the Corn Exchange, and he controlled the produce they had in their sack.

I got married in 1941. I only had civil marriage, because my husband was Roman Catholic and I am Jewish. We made an agreement that our children to be born would be Jewish.

My husband was called-up right after our wedding. He had to go to Godollo. He was a cadet, but they had him change his clothes there and deported him from Godollo. One of my cousins met him at the end of April 1942 and gave him some underwear, we don't know anything else since then. I have a notification issued by the Red Cross in 1943 that he was missing. Then I got the death certificate, he died in Zhytomyr [Ukraine].

On the 9th November 1944 they gathered us, young people, and took us to Szerb Street, where the Serbian church was, and then the police was there. The jammed us into a small room, so that we could only stand. They took us to the KISOK estate [5]from there, and then to the Obuda brick factory. On the first d ay we weren't transported from the Obuda brick factory, so we came home. The janitor here went to the police station to report, that I had run away, even though we had been sent home.

On the next morning we had to go back to the KISOK field, they took us to the Obuda brick factory again, and then we went to Kophaza from there, which is near Sopron, on foot.

From Kophaza they took us to Wienerneustadt [today Austria], then to Lichtenworth in Austria.

In April 1945 we escaped in the last moment, when the Russians came. When the camp was liberated one of the jupo asked a woman if she had a white sheet, which they could hang out on the camp so that they wouldn't bomb it because there were Jews there. That's how we found out that we were liberated. I was there for 6 months. [Editor's note: The Lichtenworth concentration camp was opened on the 10th December 1944, and the Soviet army liberated it on the 2nd April 1945.]

In 1951 I started working in the catering trade. First I was a managing clerk at Bukarest restaurant, it was Borostyan restaurant at that time.

I was in the Borostyan for 2 years, for 8 years in the Korter, 8 years in the Szeged and for four years in the Kiralyhago restaurant. After having retired I worked in Aranyhordo restaurant, up in the Castle Quarter for 10 years. I calculated the prices. Then until I turned 87 I worked in the Biarritz.

There was a band in Szeged restaurant, and Istvan Laki played in that. He became my partner in life. We lived together 24 years, he died around 1982. He wasn't Jewish. He had two children: Istvan and Andor. Andor became my step son, because I didn't have my own. Andor spent a lot of time in the shop, too. The other one, Istvan, was quite an autonomous boy. His father sent him to learn catering, he was a waiter apprentice. He became a waiter and he worked in Park restaurant.

This was quite a calm period of my life. I spent my time working in the catering industry. Since I didn't have a child, I worked very much. Now my brother's daughter, born from his second marriage, and Andor's second wife take care of me.

Excerpt 2: Household

In Bonyhad when we were children, we spent quite a lot of time there. This must have been in the 1920s-1930s. They observed the holidays strictly, the Friday night for example. They stopped working on Friday afternoon, they cleaned the house then cooked dinner. There was meat soup and beef with tomatoes quite often. We had to eat that almost every Friday. When we spent the summer there we went to the synagogue in Bonyhad on Friday evenings. And nobody worked on Saturdays. They managed a kosher household of course. My grandfather observed the rules of the kosher household strictly. I don't know anything of the relatives from Bonyhad.

My mother handled the maids as if they were her children. She taught them many things and was nice with them. They ate with us, they could use our bathroom, at holidays they got presents. Only this kashrut was always a problem.

My mother always had a hard time making the maids understand that they shouldn't mix up the dishes, until she got bored with it. Not that they couldn't remember things, but they didn't think that it was a mistake. They didn't do it on purpose I think, but somehow they couldn't remember that it was a religious regulation.

My mother noticed several times that the milk-pan was in the oven, it wasn't washed. So my mother always bought a new pan. She taught [the maid] in vain, she always messed up dishwashing. My mother wanted to manage a kosher household, but then she said that she wasn't going to fool herself. The maid always mixed up the dishes. And so we switched over to Neolog housekeeping. So from then on my grandfather didn't eat anything else at our place but hard boiled eggs.

We ate challah, too, usually on Fridays. The cholent was made in old times so that they prepared it at home, they put poultry, smoked things, hard boiled egg and beans in it. We put it together in a jar and there was a kosher baker on Dob Street, the Jews from the surroundings took it there. These were all covered with colored checked cloths, and everyone wrote their name on it. And when the bread was ready in the oven, they put these jars in, too. We went to get it on the next day, on Saturday. We also had to pay for it. [Editor's note: Perhaps the maid or the children went to pick up the cholent, because an adult Jew is not allowed to carry anything between private property and public place on Saturday. They had to pay in advance or later.]

We had a cockle stove, and there was a hole in the middle, and we baked food there many times. My mother baked there potatoes, layered potatoes many times, of course without sausage, there was only potato and egg in it. When the cockle stove was turned off, my mother swept the ashes away and put the food there to bake it. Besides the iron door there was another door, which was transparent, and we looked through it to see if the potatoes were done.

I was a picky eater as a child, my mother cooked for me separately. Cold cuts were very expensive at that time, we bought 5 decagrams, exactly scaled, but my mother always bought for me so that I would have something to eat. I ate very much cod-liver-oil. I remember that we kept it between the windows. There was a spoon in it, we only used that spoon for that, because it smelled and tasted like cod-liver-oil. I had a sweet tooth, I

loved chocolate. They sold Meinl's chocolate at that time, which was in a round box, and I got some of this chocolate every time after I ate some cod-liver-oil. I got so much of it that in the end I got pimples because of it.

This was the New Year, and ten days later is the Day of Atonement. The fast of the Day of Atonement starts on the evening before, and we light candles for the deceased, and one has to fast from the time the star rises until the next evening, when it rises again. One can't eat, can't even drink water, nothing. The Orthodox Jews fasted so that they didn't go to the synagogue, but they sat at home next to the table, which was set. Many things were piled up on the table, fruits and food, but one wasn't allowed to eat any of it. As a matter of fact fasting is a torture, they tortured themselves so that they saw the food, but the couldn't eat. My parents used to do it this way, too. [Editor's note: Hedvig Endrei might be referring to some local custom since it is obvious Jews spent Yom Kippur in synagogue, not at home staring at food.]

My cousins were younger, they were allowed to eat. [Editor's note: Children only have to fast an entire day, like the adults, after their bar mitzvah /bat mitzvah/, until then they only fast half a day.] And I had to give them the food, the torture was that they were allowed to eat, and I wasn't. I shouldn't fast anymore, but I still observe it. [Editor's note: The surrender of fast isn't linked to an age, but one only had to fast if it doesn't compromise his health in any way.

Seder at our place was celebrated so that on the first night we sat around the table at dinner. The prayer leader sat at the head of the table, this was usually my father. There were two pillows on his armchair, behind his back, and he had to eat leaning on them. The dinner was a hard boiled egg, clear soup with matzah balls in it. And there was also tomato sauce and the so-called hremzli. The hremzli is something like a doughnut and it is made of matzah flour. Matzah flour, lemon juice, walnut, sugar and egg was needed to make it. My mother made it often. [Editor's note: The Pesach hremzli is a food made of grated potatoes and egg, seasoned with salt and pepper, and fried in hot oil. Instead of potatoes it can be made with matzah flour, instead of pepper it can be seasoned with lemon, nut, and perhaps sugar can be put on the latter kinds.] Out of this [namely matzah flour] we also made matzah cake.

Then there was a big plate with a long-shaped napkin, which we folded in three and put three whole pieces of matzah in each part. At the end of one of the prayers my dad had to break a piece, which was in the middle, and he hid it between the two pillows, and the youngest one sitting at the table had to steal it.

At the end of a certain prayer one had to break a piece of this and give a tiny little piece to those sitting at the table. But if the matzah had been stolen, they couldn't give and since the youngest child only gave it back if he got something for it, they had to promise him a present. A pair of shoes or a suit for the youngest one, and he had to get it by all means. That's how he gave it back, and not distributed.

Besides the three pieces of matzah there was also a goose or duck neck baked in ash, salty water in a dish, parsley in it, in a bowl or mug there was walnut, wine and apple mixed together and egg, this represented that the Jews wandered in the desert, baked their bread in the ash, and the goose or duck neck baked in ash symbolized this.

Excerpt 3: Deportation

Everyone got a piece and we knit. It was just an idea, it didn't really have a point, we just did it for fun, so that time would go by. In Lichtenworth we didn't work, only in Kophaza. We helped each other when we washed, too, when we stood in line to wash, to comb, to set ourselves in order.

We got barely any food. We distributed the bread so that we stuck a nail into the middle, and with string and chalk we traced it and then cut it. We put the bread under our head, so that nobody would steal it. I don't know who had chalk. Eva did this. The piece of bread was like a slice of cake. We ate so that the five of us put a blanket on the straw and ate there. It was animal instinct that they stole each other's food, because that happened, too. Many times we heard someone cry that her bread had been stolen. They didn't really steal anything else, I don't remember that.

I had a sleeping bag, I slept in it. Right next to me slept a man who helped in delivering the food in Lichtenworth. He went to get the food with a truck with others. I don't know from where they brought it, but in the morning we got coffee in the mess-tin, and some kind of soup in the afternoon. We agreed that he could sleep there, because I had a sleeping bag, and the bag was closed on that side, besides that we kept his place tidy as we could, and we got an extra mess-tin of food for that. That's how we helped each other, because we took care of him. He could get food more easily there. I don't know what happened to him later.

It often happened that the air raid started and the cars had to stop, and they could only continue their way with the food in the evening. Many times they woke us up at midnight and gave us the soup then, and everyone got diarrhea because of it. There was a gate at the end of the factory building, with grating, but we weren't allowed to go all that way. We could only be next to the factory building.

[In Lichtenworth] the toilet was in the courtyard, it was a latrine, like a tub, with a wooden frame above it and something to hold on to in front of it. It didn't matter that there was several of us there at the same time. We were happy that we could go there. Women didn't have period, they mixed something into the food [Editor's note: There isn't any factual evidence that sedatives (bromide) were administered, though many people from different places said that the prisoners were given bromide.] Many tried to escape through the latrine and run away. The Austrian people were very nice, they let them bathe, wash hair, and they packed food for some, so that they would give to others, too, if they came back. It's unbelievable, but there were who came back, because they had nowhere to go.

There were some who betrayed them and the guards were already waiting for them in the big room. There was a Jewish guard with ten members in the camp. They were called jiddische polizei, Jewish policemen, jupo. [Editor's note: Juden Polizist (German) -Jewish policeman] . The German soldiers talked with them, they didn't talk to us. We had to make our beds so that we had to make a path for the SS soldiers with bricks, where they walked through time by time to see if there was order. We weren't allowed to go near the bricks, only next to the wall, so that they wouldn't touch us and catch something from us. They only contacted these Jewish policemen. They told us all the news. For this

work they got an extra slice of bread. And they had those, whom they caught [because they had run away from the camp] lay on the crossroads and we had to go there and hit them.

Excerpt 4: The Recipes

The five of us wrote a cookbook in the camp. The cookbook was made so that the five of us women, who became friends there were all housewives and we regularly cooked. In Lichtenworth we were very hungry already, we always talked about food. I took letter-paper along and envelopes and pencil, thinking that I would write home. That's why I had this, what they hadn't taken, and we wrote the recipes on this letter paper.

Everyone of us dictated simple recipes, which we had made at home, how much flour, how much of this, how much of that they called for. I didn't know the proportions very well, because when I asked my mother she always told me a little bit of this, a little bit of that, she always told me so. These had all been tried, they were „tried" recipes. We wrote all these by head, we didn't have a cookbook with us. We wrote this book daily. We wrote with very small letters, so that more would fit on the paper.

The situation was that we got up early in the morning so that we could wash. The factory had a shower for 80 persons, and there was 3000 of us. There was a long pipe, and there were faucets on it at a certain distance from each other, and a tub in front of it. We stood in line there at 6 in the morning in order to get in, one had to go on time, because they often turned off the water after a while. We washed our clothes there. We took the string out of the backpack and we dried our clothes on it. Men, women, we bathed together, there wasn't time for us to look at each other.

When we had washed, we started searching for lice, there were many lice and fleas. Sometimes we didn't wash for weeks, when there were bombings, because they always turned off the water at that time. Not everyone had a small-toothed comb, but I did, because my mother was a hairdresser. She somehow instinctively packed this up for me. It was very useful there. After having washed, we usually went outside in the courtyard. We were only allowed to go next to the factory building and everyone combed her hair with it. There was body louse, too, of course, we searched for lice that, too. This was a daily routine. Then we got dressed and then lay a blanket on the ground, sat next to the wall, where we either wrote the recipes, or later we knit. This was also routine.

I wrote the recipes, because the paper and the pencil was also mine. That's how I got to keep it. The entire recipe collection became mine. Someone else of the five dictated the recipe each time. I don't remember that I would have dictated, I only wrote, with very small letters so that the paper would be enough. It didn't matter what kind of recipes we wrote down. Whatever came to our mind. Recipes for making spices, sweet and salty cookies, meats, sauces and such food. There are many dishes with potatoes and meat among them, and cookies. Not many soups, perhaps because we had enough of them. If someone looks at the recipes there are mainly filling and 'fattening' dishes in it. This wasn't conscious of course. There isn't a system in the recipes, we wrote them down as they came. We wrote it every day, 1-2 hours a day. We talked, too, in the meantime of course. This was also a way of having fun, and time went by easier. I don't know whose idea this was. I kept all of it, we didn't divide it among each other. I don't remember whether I cooked out of it, I probably didn't.

After the war I found it. I didn't throw it out, I had a cookbook and I put this bunch of paper there, that's how I still have it. There are many recipes in it, which I had also done

before, I knew many of them. This is a memory for me, I kept this cookbook as I kept the photos, too. This is important for me. After the war everyone told his story, because everyone had been somewhere else, and then I found this recipe book, too. I told many things about it to the people in the house. A woman (Mrs. Szollosi) lived in the house, upstairs, she also came home from Auschwitz. She told me that they had everyone take off their clothes there, and then they were given clothes at random. She got a beautiful evening dress, and she cut off its bottom so that it would be more 'comfortable'. She lived through the whole thing in this, the poor thing.