

DECISIONS AMID CHAOS:  
JEWISH SURVIVAL IN BUDAPEST, MARCH 1944 – FEBRUARY 1945

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## **ABSTRACT**

Allison Somogyi: Decisions amid Chaos: Jewish Survival in Budapest, March 1944 –  
February 1945

(Under the direction of Chad Bryant)

“The Jews of Budapest are completely apathetic and do virtually nothing to save themselves,” Raoul Wallenberg stated bluntly in a dispatch written in July 1944. This simply was not the case. In fact, Jewish survival in World War II Budapest is a story of agency. A combination of knowledge, flexibility, and leverage, facilitated by the chaotic violence that characterized Budapest under Nazi occupation, helped to create an atmosphere in which survival tactics were common and widespread. This unique opportunity for agency helps to explain why approximately 58 percent of Budapest’s 200,000 Jews survived the war while the total survival rate for Hungarian Jews was only 26 percent. Although unique, the experience of Jews within Budapest’s city limits is not atypical and suggests that, when fortuitous circumstances provided opportunities for resistance, European Jews made informed decisions and employed everyday survival tactics that often made the difference between life and death.

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## INTRODUCTION

In late fall of 1944, a young man clad in a leather jacket, leather boots, a hat, and an armband identifying him as a member of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross party approached the Budapest ghetto. At the gate, he stopped to show his credentials. He had come, he explained, to collect an elderly Jewish man and to bring him directly to the Arrow Cross headquarters. After a short inquiry, the old man was located. The Arrow Cross Brother proceeded directly to the identified building and rapidly ascended four flights of stairs. At the time, the elderly Jewish man was attempting to shave using a piece of broken glass. He caught sight of the Arrow Cross brother, and stopped in his tracks. “Imréke, what are you doing here?” he cried out in joy. This young man, who fearlessly identified himself as a member of the ruling Arrow Cross party, was in fact Imre Engle, a Jewish teenager hiding in plain sight. He had come to rescue his uncle.<sup>1</sup>

The seventeen-year-old toolmaker Imre Engle displayed the capacity to exercise considerable, effective agency when he rescued his uncle from the Budapest ghetto by posing as member of the Arrow Cross (*Nyilas*). This capacity to exercise effective agency – which I define as the ability to act freely according to one’s own will based on

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<sup>1</sup>*Emery Angles*, vol. 4247, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Sydney, Australia, 1995), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=4207&segmentNumber=123&returnIndex=-1#>. Many of my sources are Hungarian Jews who emigrated and changed their names. In this paper, I have chosen to identify people using the names they went by in 1944 – 1945. To avoid confusion, I have not inverted the first and last name, as is customary in Hungary. Please note that the names in footnotes are often Anglicized and/or married names.

informed decisions – is often missing in historical narratives of the Holocaust. The case of Budapest provides a special opportunity to study such effective agency on an everyday level.<sup>2</sup> The chaotic violence that characterized Budapest under German occupation, and particularly under the rule of the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross regime, was unique within the context of Nazi-occupied Europe and created an atmosphere in which survival tactics such as bargaining and masquerading were common and widespread. This peculiar atmosphere presented Budapest's Jews with a unique opportunity to make informed decisions and employ tactics that often made the difference between life and death. Raoul Wallenberg, the widely celebrated Swedish diplomat stationed in Budapest, stated bluntly in a dispatch written on July 18, 1944: "The Jews of Budapest are completely apathetic and do virtually nothing to save themselves."<sup>3</sup> This essay will argue that this simply was not the case. In fact, Jewish survival in World War II Budapest is a story of agency. This uniquely effective agency helps to explain why, according to a survey conducted by a Jewish research group after the war, approximately 58 percent of Budapest's 200,000 Jews survived the war while the total survival rate for Hungarian Jews was only 26 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>More than 45 percent (215,000) of Hungary's Jews lived in Hungary's capital, Budapest. Of highly assimilated and professionally successful Jews, the vast majority resided in the capital; Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 461.

<sup>3</sup>Raoul Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, ed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, trans. Kjersti Board (New York: Arcade Pub., 1995), 238.

<sup>4</sup>András Gerő and Janos Poor, eds., *Budapest: A History from Its Beginnings to 1998* (East European Monographs, 1998). In 1946, 61 percent of Jews living in Budapest were female. 39 percent were male; Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide : The Holocaust in Hungary*, Rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). To put this in perspective, the total survival rate for Polish Jews was only 9 percent Wolfgang Benz, *Dimension Des Völkermords. Die Zahl Der Jüdischen Opfer Des Nationalsozialismus*. (Dtv, 1996).

In order to analyze Jewish agency in Budapest under Nazi occupation, I am chiefly utilizing English-language memoirs and oral histories from Budapest's Jewish survivors. My primary sources consist of eighteen published memoirs and other first-hand accounts, one diary, and twenty-five oral histories from the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive selected based on availability offsite. This source base, of course, represents a limited population. The survivors mentioned in this study immigrated to the English-speaking world some time after 1945. Few of these survivors would have considered themselves to be Zionists or Communists. Furthermore, the study privileges the perspective of the survivors. Moments when action led to one's demise, or stories of inaction, thus are less frequently discussed in oral histories. Nevertheless, oral histories offer a rare glimpse at the secretive – and often undocumented – nature of survival tactics such as bargaining and masquerading.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, all of my survivor testimony is based on memories. Relying on memoirs and oral histories can be problematic because it is nearly impossible for historians to verify the accuracy of memory.<sup>6</sup> Memories can fade or change, and years or

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<sup>5</sup>While many of the Jewish survivors in my study discuss at length hiding in plain sight by assuming non-Jewish identities, I was surprised to find that none shared stories of retreating from society and physically going into hiding. The reason for this surprising fact may be that it was easier and safer for Budapest's Jews to obtain non-Jewish identification papers than to find a non-Jewish family willing to risk their lives by hiding Jews within their homes. Below, the reader will find an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup>Scholars have long debated the veracity of survivor testimony. In his article "Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survival Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos," Jonathon Friedman explores the veracity of testimonials as historical sources. On the one hand, Friedman theorizes, "even the often-used gauges of consistency and likelihood have little meaning in the context of the Holocaust, in the absence spatial and temporal constants, and where everything – the unthinkable, unimaginable, the undoable – was possible," Jonathon Friedman, "Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survivor Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter - Spring 2001): 15. On the other hand, according to Harvard psychologist Daniel Schacter, "when a person experiences trauma, the essence of it is almost always well remembered, and if there is any distortion, it is most frequently in specific details."



decades have often passed since the events described occurred. Because the veracity of details in Holocaust survivor testimony can be questionable, these testimonies must be carefully examined in the same routine process as any other historical source. I will ask of my sources: Are these memories logical? Are they consistent? Are they corroborated by evidence? Are they self-serving? As Christopher Browning writes, “this is troublesome to some, who consider it presumptuous that someone like myself, born safely in America... should sit ‘in judgment’ on the memories and stories of those who were there. But the alternative is to consign survivor testimony to the realm of commemoration rather than history and to refrain from filling in gaps in our historical knowledge of the Holocaust that a careful use of survivor testimonies would otherwise permit us to do.”<sup>7</sup>

My research rests at the intersection of two fields of historiography: the Holocaust in Hungary and Jewish agency during the Holocaust. Historical scholarship on the Holocaust in Hungary often focuses on the deportation of Hungary’s provincial Jewry to Auschwitz, and often overlooks the plight of the Jews of Budapest, whose scheduled deportation was aborted at the last minute and who remained in a precarious situation in the capital city.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the historiography on the Holocaust in Hungary lingers on

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This unusual accurate recall, Schacter claims, can be traced to the release of stress-hormones, signaled by the brain’s ‘emotional computer,’ the amygdala,” Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching For Memory: The Brain, The Mind, And The Past*, Reprint (Basic Books, 1997), 205, 209, 216.

<sup>7</sup>Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup>Commonly, historians portray the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews as a last ideological stand taken by the Nazis to rid Europe of its Jews. This traditional view assumes that Nazi ideology – obsessed with the extermination of European Jewry – overrode functional concerns of a losing Germany army in the final throes of defeat. Some historians claim that the German occupation of Hungary and subsequent deportation of Hungarian Jews was driven by multiple, predominately functional, concerns. Specifically, Nazi Germany viewed Hungary, with the last surviving

the question of responsibility for the atrocities committed during the Final Solution in Hungary. This literature generally focuses not on the Jewish victims, but instead on the roles played by political, social, and religious elites in the persecution of Hungary's Jews.<sup>9</sup> When Budapest's Jewish population is mentioned, its members are typically portrayed as victims subject to the action of others. Instead of focusing on the responsibility of elite Hungarians, Nazis, and righteous gentiles, my research engages with the struggles of ordinary Jews in Budapest.<sup>10</sup> This aspect of my research situates my

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(largely) intact Jewish population in Hitler's Europe, as a source of much-needed labor rather than a final obstacle to complete liquidation. The fact that nearly twenty-five percent of Hungarian Jews were diverted to labor services rather than gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz suggests that labor shortages were a major Nazi concern that influenced and affected their implementation of Hungarian deportations; Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel: der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944 - 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl, 2004).

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion on the role of the Jewish Council in Budapest in the Final Solution, see Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996). For a discussion on the role of Hungarian elites, the Nazis, and the Jewish Council, see Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Condensed ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000). Also see Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology*. For a analysis on the role of the Christian Churches in Hungary, see Bibó István, *Zsidókerdes Magyarországon 1944 Után / Nehány Kiegészítő Megjegyzés a Zsidókerdesről*, First Thus (Katalizator Iroda, 1994). Also see Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1994* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). For more on the role of Admiral Horthy see Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback: Miklós Horthy, 1918-1944* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1994). Also refer to István Deák, *Essays on Hitler's Europe* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). For an example of an analysis on the role of Raoul Wallenberg and other foreign diplomats, refer to Paul A. Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest: Myth, History and Holocaust* (Vallentine Mitchell, 2010). For an example of an analysis on the role of righteous gentiles, see Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1987).

<sup>10</sup>The rescue attempts made by elite Jews at the highest levels, such as those of Joel (Jenő) Brand and Rudolph Kastner (Israel Rezső Kasztner), are outside the scope of this paper. For more information on these and similar cases, see Szabolcs Szita, *Trading in Lives?: Operations of the Jewish Relief and Rescue Committee in Budapest, 1944-1945*, trans. Sean Lambert (Central European University Press, 2005). See also Enikő Koncz et al., *Self-Financing Genocide: The Gold Train, the Becher Case and the Wealth of Hungarian Jews*, English ed. (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2004). For a personal account, see *Jacob Jungreis*, vol. 1169, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Brooklyn, NY, 1995),

study in dialogue with the historiography of Jewish agency during the Holocaust. This historiography largely focuses on resistance and the heroic actions of a few extraordinary individuals, and often overlooks the agency inherent in the daily decisions made by the Jewish population at large.<sup>11</sup> By addressing widespread Jewish agency on the everyday level, my research contributes to important historical discussions of agency, the nuances of victimhood, and the processes of survival during the Holocaust.

My paper begins with an analysis of the conflation of circumstances that made Budapest a relatively advantageous place for Jews to be situated within Nazi-occupied Europe. Next, I explore two survival strategies – bargaining and masquerading – which Budapest’s Jews employed to alleviate their suffering and improve their chances of survival. I then examine the ways in which Budapest’s Jews co-opted efforts made by the international community to help themselves and others. I conclude with a discussion on the difficult, often heart-wrenching decision-making process faced by the Jews of Budapest under Nazi occupation.

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<http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=638&segmentNumber=70&returnIndex=-1>. For more on the Kasztner Transport, see *Arthur Stern*, vol. 12494, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Beverly Hills, CA, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=12247&segmentNumber=3&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>11</sup>For examples of the historiography of resistance, see Nechama Tec, *Defiance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Nechama Tec, *Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror*, 2013, and Nechama Tec, *In the Lion’s Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). My research aligns more closely with Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Indiana University Press, 1989) and Eliyana Adler’s yet-to-be published study tentatively titled “Exile and Survival: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Soviet Union during WWII.” My study on Jewish agency during the Holocaust was inspired in part by John Thornton’s discussion of African participation and complicity in the Atlantic slave trade; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

## WHAT MADE BUDAPEST UNIQUE?

The Final Solution in Hungary began only during the last stages of the war. This fact goes far in explaining the unique atmosphere that prevailed in Nazi-occupied Budapest. Timing is crucial in this story, and accounts for many of the peculiarities – knowledge, flexibility, leverage – that afforded Budapest’s Jews a remarkable degree of effective agency.

Because of timing, Budapest’s Jews simply had more information at their disposal and were more aware of the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their allies than their counterparts in neighboring countries. From 1933 to 1944, Jewish refugees from regions already occupied by the Nazis fled to Hungary, which was at the time a German ally but not yet under occupation.<sup>12</sup> Many Hungarian Jews, particularly the wealthier and more cosmopolitan population living in the capital city, provided shelter and other material support for their friends, families, and even strangers.<sup>13</sup> These illicit arrangements lasted

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<sup>12</sup>While the number of Jewish refugees who fled to Hungary is unknown, approximately 20,000 “alien Jews” were deported in 1941 and 1000 more “alien Jews” were massacred in Bácska in 1942; Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1298. For a personal account of a Slovak Jew who fled the Nazis and sought shelter in Budapest, see *Davis Mandl*, vol. 46684, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Washington, D.C, 1998), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=48944&segmentNumber=58&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>13</sup>See *Agnes Vertes*, vol. 11723, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Weston, CT, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=12681&segmentNumber=2&returnIndex=-1#>, *Agnes Adachi*, vol. 13833, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (New York, NY, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=13900&returnIndex=0>, Evi Blaikie, *Magda’s Daughter: A Hidden Child’s Journey Home*, The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women’s

from mere hours to years. Often, Hungarian Jews and the foreigners seeking refuge in their homes interacted extensively. Houseguests relayed their experiences of persecution and genocide, providing their hosts with a sense of foreboding.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the extensive interaction between Hungarian citizens and the international refugee population afforded Hungarian Jews invaluable information that informed the decisions they made to protect themselves and their families.

The stories of refugees impressed greatly upon the Jews of Budapest. In her memoir, Zsuzsanna Abonyi described a memorable interaction with a Polish refugee when she was in third grade (in approximately 1942): “Hanna was not in my class; I met her in the house of my parents’ friends. But I knew that she had arrived here with her mother after escaping from Poland. She spoke Hungarian fluently; she also told stories about the Germans that made me shiver. Of course, Hanna was not the only one who spoke about the Germans and their assault on the Jews; some of my parents’ closest friends did the same... I had heard about these scenes before, and I feared them so much that at night, when I closed my eyes, I saw myself alone amid masses of people, some of

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Series (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2003), Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, *When The Danube Ran Red* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2010), and Ilana Rosen, ed., “Shoshana K.,” in *Hungarian Jewish Women Survivors Remember the Holocaust: An Anthology of Life Histories* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 11–14.

<sup>14</sup>In addition to these first hand accounts, survivor Endre Fürst remembered that American planes dropped leaflets over Budapest with a message from American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt informing the residents of Budapest that 600,000 Jews had been gassed in Auschwitz. These leaflets threatening those who had committed war crimes with punishment after the war and informed residents that anyone who helped the Jews would be rewarded; *Davis Mandl*, vol. 46684, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Washington, D.C, 1998), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=48944&segmentNumber=58&returnIndex=-1#>. See also Randolph Braham and William J. Vanden Huevel, eds., *The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary*, East European Monographs, no. 785 (Boulder : New York: Social Science Monographs ; Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/City University of New York : Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2011).

them shot, some of them fleeing, with my parents lost in the helter-skelter.”<sup>15</sup> In response to these stories, Zsuzsanna’s parents attempted to move her and her brother to Switzerland. She explained: “After the Swiss Embassy had refused to consider our application, [my father] and my mother had started to study Portuguese, because they believed we would be able to immigrate to Brazil.”<sup>16</sup>

Such information inspired many of Budapest’s Jews to act. Another survivor, identified merely as Shoshana K., stated: “I recall stories told by Jews who made it back to the west after having escaped the killing in the east. I recall hearing through the walls of my room stories of atrocities that took place in the east. Of course these stories affected me, prepared me in a way so that when the Germans came in 1944, I knew exactly what to expect... I myself did not talk to my family about the things I heard, nobody talked. We were paralyzed by fear. But it did make us act, look for solutions. Most Jews were moved to the ghetto or deported to camps. Very few hid. We did, probably because we knew things in advance. So we found places. For example, for a time we hid in the summerhouse of one of our neighbors. Later on, police found me out there, so I returned to Budapest, got a Christian I.D. and got along by myself.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ozsváth, *When The Danube Ran Red*, 1–2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 7. These plans unfortunately did not pan out, and Zsuzsanna and her family spent the remainder of the war in Hungary. It was nearly impossible for Jews to obtain visas to immigrate anywhere. For more information, refer to Michael Robert Marrus and Aristide R. Zolberg, *The Unwanted: European Refugees from the First World War Through the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Temple University Press, 2002) and Aristide R. Zolberg and Peter M. Benda, *Global Migrants, Global Refugees: Problems and Solutions* (Berghahn Books, 2001). For more on United States refugee policy toward Europe’s Jews, see Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986) and Carl J Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). See also *Agnes Vertes*.

<sup>17</sup>Rosen, “Shoshana K.”

Interaction with Jewish refugees prompted Armin and Irén Katz to arrange for their daughters to go into hiding. “It was a year before the Germans arrived in Hungary. I have flashes of memory from Shabbat dinners where we had strangers as guests,” a 70-year-old Ágnes recalled, “men with beards, very strange looking to me. My father spoke German, but they spoke a different language – I guess it was Yiddish. My father must have found out from them about the concentration camps where the Jews of other European countries were transported and that small children didn’t survive in Auschwitz, but were immediately gassed when they arrived.”<sup>18</sup>

Based on this information, Ágnes’ father made the decision that she and her younger sister should go into hiding separately. “He got false papers, which looked very authentic. I was not to be Ágnes Katz, but Ágnes Kovács, and I was to be Protestant.” Armin and Irén Katz planned for contingencies, going so far as to drill their daughters in the Christian prayers and instructed them that if anybody asked where their parents were, they should say: “[My father] is on the front fighting for the glory of Germany and my mother is a refugee from Transylvania.” Ágnes’ parents warned her “that I should never tell anyone my real name because I might be killed.” At the age of four, Ágnes didn’t know what it meant to be ‘killed’, “but I was an obedient child, and if my parents thought that to be ‘killed’ was bad, I should listen to them.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Agnes Vertes, “A Significant Memory,” in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 243–45.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. For the similar experience of Irén Kempfner, see *Irene Voros*, vol. 16473, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Wildwood, IL, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=17315&segmentNumber=5&returnIndex=-1> and Blaikie, *Magda’s Daughter: A Hidden Child’s Journey Home*, 21–24. See also *Agnes Vertes*.

Access to information allowed individuals to make informed decisions, but in no way not guaranteed that individuals would make the ‘right’ decisions.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Ágnes Katz’ family, 23-year-old Ágnes Mandl and her parents dismissed the warnings of their family and friends who had fled to Hungary by 1941. In her memoir, Ágnes Mandl wrote: “Plenty was going on. From Germany and Poland the Jews were taken to the gas chambers. We did not believe it! Few escaped in time to take refuge in Hungary – the lucky ones made it to America, England, Switzerland, and Sweden. In no time Czechoslovakia was taken and people came to us. Our home became a haven for many.” She further explained: “In spite of all this happening, we still were optimistic that Germany could not go on, and that the “neutral” countries would not allow millions of people to die by the hands of these butchers.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the Mandls did not utilize the information shared with them by the Jewish refugees staying in their house. Still, most, if not all, of Budapest’s Jews were aware of Nazi atrocities taking place elsewhere in Europe and were able to deduce what Nazi rule would bring.

Along with widespread knowledge of Nazi atrocities, Budapest’s Jews had the advantage that, unlike elsewhere in Hungary and in Nazi-occupied Europe, they were not systematically deported to concentration camps. Between December 1941 (when Hungary officially entered World War II as an ally of Nazi Germany) and March 1944 (when Nazi Germany occupied Hungary) the regent of Hungary, Admiral Miklós Horthy, refused to capitulate to German demands to deport Hungary’s Jewish citizens. He did,

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<sup>20</sup>Pressure from family members who argued that they could not leave behind their relatives prevented many of Budapest’s Jews from emigrating in the years before 1944. See *John Lowy*, vol. 13382, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Sydney, Australia, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=14069&segmentNumber=105&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>21</sup>Agnes Adachi, *Child of the Winds: My Mission with Raoul Wallenberg* (Adams Press, 1989), 4.



however, deport the approximately 20,000 foreign Jews who had sought refuge from the Nazis in the previously neutral Hungary in 1941.<sup>22</sup> That same year, Hungarian authorities began to force able-bodied Jewish men, despite their Hungarian citizenship, to serve in labor battalions. By the spring of 1943, the number of laborers exceeded 60,000.<sup>23</sup> Women, children, the elderly, and the disabled were spared forced labor but were nevertheless “degraded, treated like scum, deprived of their jobs and livelihood, and made miserable in every respect – but they were neither killed outright nor deported to death camps.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite pressure from their German allies, the Hungarian government insisted that their treatment of Hungarian Jews was an internal affair and argued that deportation would further disrupt Hungary’s economy. In a letter written to his prime minister on October 14, 1940, Horthy expressed his position in no uncertain terms:

As regards to the Jewish problem, I have been an anti-Semite throughout my life. I have never had contact with Jews. I have considered it intolerable that here in Hungary everything, even factory, bank, large fortune, business, theater, press, commerce, etc., should be in Jewish hands, and that the Jew should be the image reflected of Hungary, especially abroad. Since, however, one of the most important tasks of the government is to raise the standard of living, i.e., we have to acquire wealth, it is impossible, in a year or two, to eliminate the Jews, who have everything in their hands, and to replace them with the incompetent, mostly unworthy, big-mouthed elements, for we should become bankrupt. This requires a generation at least. I have perhaps been the first to loudly

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<sup>22</sup>Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1298. Miklós Horthy claims in his memoir that, despite Hitler’s increasing pressure, he attempted to deport as few Jews as possible; Nicholas (Miklós) Horthy, *A Life for Hungary: Memoirs of Admiral Nicholas Horthy Regent of Hungary*, vol. English (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957).

<sup>23</sup>Authorities treated these Jewish forced laborers “in a most cruel manner, designed to kill them.” Only one-third of these men were to survive. Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology*, 550–2, 590. I have still yet to gather the figures on women sent into forced labor.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 549–550.

profess anti-Semitism, yet I cannot look with indifference at inhumanity, senseless humiliation, when we still need them.<sup>25</sup>

Only on May 15, 1944, after Nazi Germany invaded Hungary and subsequently pressured for the creation of a pro-German government, did the systematic mass deportation of Hungary's Jews commence. Beginning with Subcarpathian Ruthenia and northern Transylvania, the Hungarian gendarme deported 12,000 to 14,000 Jews per day to Auschwitz. Astonishingly, within two months, Hungary had deported 440,000 Jews from its northern, southeastern, western, and southwestern regions.<sup>26</sup> Upon arrival at Auschwitz, the Nazis immediately gassed the vast majority of these deportees.<sup>27</sup> On July

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 546. Indeed, much of the Hungarian economy was in Jewish hands. In 1921, 87.8 percent of the members of the stock exchange and 91 percent of currency brokers identified themselves as Jewish. In 1930, nearly 71 percent of Hungary's richest taxpayers (with incomes exceeding 200,000 pengő, or approximately \$38,000 USD in 1930) identified themselves as Jewish. Additionally, in the interwar period, Jews made up 6.2 percent (473,000) of Hungary's total population of 7.6 million, yet represented approximately a quarter of all university students. Jews also represented a disproportionately large part of Hungary's professional class – in 1920, 59.9 percent of Hungarian doctors and 50.6 percent of Hungarian lawyers identified themselves as Jewish; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 48–50. While ethnic Germans in Hungary mirrored many of these Jewish patterns of education and employment, there were relatively few non-Jewish Hungarians (ethnic Magyars) in similar social and economic positions in Hungary. This was due in large part to the fact that Hungary was a largely rural society with few major cities and Hungary's petty nobility, which constituted 5 percent (in contrast to 0.1 percent in Bohemia) of the total population, generally did not participate in the liberal professions. According to Maria M. Kovács, “a self-respecting gentleman still regarded personal service to a social inferior as somewhat degrading... With the gentry keeping its cautious distance from the service professions, more than half of the people entering the professions throughout the last third of the nineteenth century were of non-Hungarian ethnic background, mostly Jews and Germans.” Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 15–17.

<sup>26</sup>There may be several reasons for this sequence. Both the Nazi fear of an imminent Soviet invasion from the east and the presumption that these Jews had not been citizens of rump Hungary in the interwar years may be possible explanations for the order of deportation.

<sup>27</sup>Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1994*, 204. It is important to note that, at this time, a small number of Hungarian Jews were able to escape from Hungarian-controlled Northern Transylvania to Southern Transylvania, which in 1944 was under Romanian control. Once in Romania, Hungarian Jews were treated as politically refugees and, although not permitted to remain in Romania, were provided transport to Palestine;

7<sup>th</sup>, in a series of political maneuvers, Horthy reestablished himself as sovereign ruler of Hungary and suspended deportations – just in time to halt the Interior Ministry’s previously scheduled deportation of Hungary’s most economically vital Jewish population: Budapest’s Jews.<sup>28</sup> On July 23, 1944 in Budapest, fifteen-year-old Éva Weinmann wrote in her diary: “we are the only ones here, all over Hungary. God knows only where all the others are.”<sup>29</sup>

Budapest’s Jews were among the last in Nazi-occupied Europe to live interspersed with the non-Jewish population. The lack of segregation afforded Budapest’s Jews flexibility and fluidity that allowed them to deploy tactics – including bargaining and masquerading – that provided them a uniquely high level of effective agency compared to other Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Instead of only one centralized ghetto, from June until November 1944 Budapest simply had Jewish “yellow star houses” (*sárga*

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Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 193.

<sup>28</sup>This wealthier and more education population nevertheless overwhelmingly consisted of women, children, the elderly, and the disabled, since able-bodied Jewish men had already been conscripted into labor battalions. Nevertheless, some labor battalions were stationed in the vicinity of Budapest; see Susan Gerey, “Escape on New Year’s Eve,” in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 109–10. Additionally, some Jewish men in labor battalions managed to escape and return to Budapest. See *Emery Angles, Alexander Davis*, vol. 10353, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Hollywood, FL, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=13212&segmentNumber=60&returnIndex=-1#>. *Tom Lantos*, vol. 25591, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (San Mateo, CA, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=25038&segmentNumber=11&returnIndex=-1#>. *Emil Jacoby*, vol. 10272, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Staten Island, NY, 1995), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=9663&segmentNumber=66&returnIndex=-1#> and *Arthur Stern*.

<sup>29</sup>Éva Weinmann, Általános-, Közép- és Szakiskola Lauder Javne Zsidó Közösségi Óvoda, and Judaisztikai Archívum, *Weinmann Éva naplója: 1941. okt. 10-1945. január 19.*, trans. Andrea Szonyi and Lauder Javne Jewish Community School (Budapest: Lauder Javne Iskola Judaisztikai Archívum, 2004), [http://pincus.lauder.hu/weinmannpub/weinmann\\_angol\\_full.htm](http://pincus.lauder.hu/weinmannpub/weinmann_angol_full.htm).

*csillagos házak*) integrated throughout the city.<sup>30</sup> In an oral history collected by the Shoah Foundation, Ágnes Mandl recalled: “The Arrow Cross said that every second house they going to make a Jewish house [sic]. So in Budapest, every second house had a big Magen David because they said, ‘now the Allied forces won’t bomb Budapest because they think they will kill the Jews.’ How stupid can they be? From up there they can’t see which one was a Jewish house and which one was a Christian house.”<sup>31</sup>

October 15, 1944 marked a turning point for the Jews of Budapest. At 1pm of that day, Admiral Horthy announced over state radio Hungary’s withdrawal from the Second World War. Citing Otto von Bismarck’s advice that “no nation ought to sacrifice itself on the altar of an alliance,” Horthy revealed to the Hungarian public his decision to accept the Soviet Union’s armistice terms.<sup>32</sup> Jews all over Budapest rejoiced. At his uncle’s apartment, Imre Engel recalls, “everybody was joyful.”<sup>33</sup> Across town, Arnol Mandl and

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<sup>30</sup>For an analysis on the process of ghettoization and the role of space in the persecution of Budapest’s Jews, see Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003). In a dispatch dated December 12, 1944, Raoul Wallenberg wrote: “The Jews are collected in a central ghetto intended to house 69,000 Jews, but which will probably house more than this number, as well as in a ghetto for foreigners for 17,000, already containing 35,000 of whom 7,000 in Swedish houses, 2,000 in houses belonging to the Red Cross, and 23,000 in Swiss houses. Thousands of people under Swiss and Vatican protection are taken away from here to the central ghetto or to deportation areas. The Jews live 4-12 to a room in the ghettos, the Swedish houses having the best conditions.” Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, 265–266. See also *Lily Wolf*, vol. 1363, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Sydney, Australia, 1995), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=1357&segmentNumber=85&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>31</sup>*Agnes Adachi*.

<sup>32</sup>Horthy, *A Life for Hungary: Memoirs of Admiral Nicholas Horthy Regent of Hungary*. See also Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 947–952.

<sup>33</sup>*Emery Angles*.

his daughter Ágnes broke out a bottle of champagne.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the city, Jews tore off their yellow stars and ran from their protected houses into the streets.<sup>35</sup> Ágnes Mandl was among them.

On that sunny, Sunday afternoon, black airplanes clouded the sky. “The Americans are here! The British are here!” Ágnes Mandl thought to herself. In fact, those were German warplanes employed to reinforce the German occupation of its wayward ally. The Nazis had been all too aware of Horthy’s planned armistice, and had struck preemptively. At 10am that morning, “fifteen armed Gestapo men” beat Miklós Horthy Jr., the regent’s only surviving son, “mercilessly until he fell to the ground and feigned unconsciousness. He was then rolled in a carpet and carried to a van that was waiting outside.”<sup>36</sup> Nearly a decade later, Horthy posited: “This abduction had obviously been planned well beforehand; Nicholas was to be a hostage to force my hand.”<sup>37</sup> Horthy subsequently abdicated, living out the remainder of the war under house arrest in Bavaria and his final years in exile in Portugal.

“That’s when these lunatics took over and that’s when hell really broke loose,” recalled Imre Engel nearly forty years after the fact.<sup>38</sup> “These lunatics” were the Arrow Cross (*Nyilas*), and life in Budapest under their rule was – especially for its Jewish residents – indeed like hell breaking loose. In his memoir, Tivadar Soros, who was a

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<sup>34</sup>*Agnes Adachi*.

<sup>35</sup>Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 2000, 184.

<sup>36</sup>Horthy, *A Life for Hungary: Memoirs of Admiral Nicholas Horthy Regent of Hungary*, English:122.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, English:229.

<sup>38</sup>*Emery Angles*.

middle-aged lawyer in Budapest, recalled: “I was terrified: I finally understood that Horthy’s putsch had failed, that Horthy had been arrested, that Szálasi’s German-supporters had seized power.” Law and order began to break down immediately. Tivadar elaborated: “At the corner of Oktogon Square and Grand Avenue, where a crowded streetcar was just leaving the square, I could already see how innocent passengers were being treated by thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds dressed in civilian clothes with ammunition holders on their leather belts and with aged rifles that they could barely carry on their shoulders.”<sup>39</sup>

Chaotic violence characterized Budapest in the fall of 1944.<sup>40</sup> Raoul Wallenberg, the third secretary to the Swedish Legation in Budapest, arrived in the capital city in July and began to distribute protective Schutz Passes, which designated its Jewish bearers as citizens of neutral Sweden and, in theory, afforded the holders of these passes various privileges and exemptions. They were often, though not always, honored by the German SS and Hungarian Arrow Cross and “provided a modicum of security to their possessors.”<sup>41</sup> In a dispatch written on October 22, 1944, Wallenberg, reflected on the chaos, observing that Budapest’s Jews:

Have not been able to leave their houses for almost a whole week now, which obviously has been a great hardship. All Jews previously exempted were given six hours to move into a Jewish house. This regulation was partly rescinded shortly after going into effect. Many of these same Jews have been trying to hide in basements, empty shops, or with Christian friends this week, as well as in houses belonging to the Red Cross and the section located outside the embassy building. Also, the death penalty has been introduced

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<sup>39</sup>Tivadar Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, trans. Humphrey Tonkin (New York: Arcade Pub., 2011), 148.

<sup>40</sup>For a detailed description of the early Arrow Cross period, see *Alexander Davis*.

<sup>41</sup>Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1238–1239. Braham explains: “For a while, the Szálasi government reluctantly tolerated the activities of the neutral powers in the hope of diplomatic recognition.”

for minor infractions. During the first night of the putsch, several individual arrests were made and there were several pogrom acts, in the course of which some 100-200 persons are estimated to have been killed. Several Jewish houses were also emptied by Arrow Cross troops and the occupants taken away to detention centers. These have largely been allowed to return, but a couple hundred appear to be still missing. The houses are now being systematically searched, and all men between the ages of 16 and 60 are taken away for labor service. A column of them were sighted by an eyewitness on the road to Gödöllő. The marchers were ill-treated, and a 60-year-old Jew lay dead and visibly beaten by the roadside, covered with newspapers. Beginning tomorrow, all the remaining men and women between 16 and 60 are to be put to work on the fortifications. In some instances, people with protective passports have been attacked by armed bandits and their protective passports torn up.<sup>42</sup>

Wallenberg's report highlights the chaotic violence that swept the city from October 1944 to February 1945, when the Red Army liberated the city.

Budapest's Jews faced innumerable dangers, yet the fact that the Germans were losing the war, the Soviets were at the gates of the city, and a change of regime was inevitable greatly augmented the ability of Budapest's Jews to display the capacity to exercise effective agency. Hungarians and Germans were more willing accept and elicit bribes, as Tivadar Soros expounded upon in his memoir:

As the fall of the Germans got closer and more certain, more and more people tried to put some distance between themselves and the Arrow Cross Party... People believed the slogans of the Arrow Cross press about a Jewish-Bolshevik-Plutocrat front – which seemed to prove that the Jews were the most powerful people on earth: at one and the same time they held in their hands, through their diabolical cleverness and their web of contacts, the Western capitalist countries and Russian Bolshevism. Consequently, whichever of these groups reached Budapest first – the Western capitalists or the Russian

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<sup>42</sup>Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, 262. On December 12, Wallenberg updates his dispatches to add: "Since the last report the situation of the Hungarian Jews has further deteriorated. Probably in the vicinity of 40,000 Jews, of whom 15,000 men from the Labor Service and 25,000 of both sexes seized in their homes or in the street, have been forced to march on foot to Germany. It is a distance of 240 kilometers. The weather is cold and rainy ever since these death marches began. They have had to sleep under rain shelters and in the open. Most have only been given something to eat and drink three or four times. Many have died." Ibid., 265. For more on this period from the perspective of a Jewish teenager, see *Kathy Levy*, vol. 23737, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Glasgow, Scotland, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=25891&segmentNumber=22&returnIndex=-1#>. For a personal account of a survivor who was forced to march from Hungary to Austria with his labor battalion, see *Emil Jacoby*.

communists – their first move would surely be to punish or reward people for their mistreatment of the Jews at a time of crisis. So a trend began – one might even say a secret movement – aimed at providing people with suitable alibis. Everyone tried to exonerate himself in advance. People lined up witnesses and contacts designed to show how they had sabotaged the regime, and how many Jews, and particularly how many Jewish possessions, they had saved... It was precisely the opportunists who now believed that the Jewish sun was rising.<sup>43</sup>

Many Jews died in Budapest – within and outside of the ghetto – under the Arrow Cross. Twenty-year-old Tibor Vajda recalled years later in his memoir: “The Jews who were left were locked away in yellow star or protected houses in Budapest. To the Arrowcross men, it was immaterial which houses they were in, as long as they stayed inside. Both sets of houses served as holding points from where they could collect Jews and take them to the ghetto to be killed. There were no trains now to take them to Germany to kill, because the Russian army was all around the city.”<sup>44</sup> Peter Klepa, who had been eleven years old in 1944, remembered: “It was cold and windy as we walked across the Chain Bridge, and in the twilight I saw my first dead body lying in the street. The Soviet army had the city nearly surrounded by then, and all public services were breaking down. At first we still had sporadic electricity and water service, but all ceased around mid-December. With all our windows blown out by the bombardment and concussions, we lived in our coats and sweaters and had only some dried peas and beans

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<sup>43</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 195. This false perception nearly cost another young survivor, Barbara Schwartz, her life. At the end of the war, Barbara was living under an assumed Christian identity. An acquaintance who was also a member of the Arrow Cross recognized Barbara as Jew and forced her to serve as his representative (and claimed that she was in fact in charge of his fascist operation) when the Soviet soldiers interrogated him immediately following their occupation of Budapest; *Barbara Simon*, vol. 47956, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Manalapan, NJ, 1998), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=49466&segmentNumber=70&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>44</sup>Tibor Vajda, *Hope Dies Last: A Story of Survival in Fascist Hungary* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2000), 85.



to eat. Water came from a single trickling spigot in the courtyard or melting snow. Instead of fighting or escaping, the Hungarian Arrow Cross thugs were still robbing and killing defenseless Jews.”<sup>45</sup> Another survivor, ten-year-old Erika Stein, recalled years later: “On the street we found the Jews from all neighboring houses and the Hungarian mob, ready and waiting for us with sticks and insults... After an eternity passed, we were gathered in a courtyard and told to stand with our hands high up, facing the wall, with a machine gun set up behind our backs. The whole neighborhood was there, a couple hundred condemned Jews. I asked my father if it would hurt to die. He said “No,” but then he told me to fall down when the shooting started, to play dead, and he would stand behind me to catch the bullets... The Germans guarded us in full armor. Their steel helmets glistened in the dark evening, and their shadows grew enormous on the wall behind me. I was cold, hungry, scared, and very wet because we were not allowed to relieve ourselves.”<sup>46</sup> Erika miraculously survived this encounter, but others were not so lucky. Peter Klepa described such a case: “Some strange noises coming from across the street woke me up around 3 a.m., a day in late December. I peered out cautiously and saw that the Yellow Star apartment house across the street was being emptied of all its Jewish tenants. Young Arrow Cross thugs and other teenaged boys armed with German submachine guns were lining up the Jews and marching them toward the Danube.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Peter Klepa, “Close Calls,” in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 161–63.

<sup>46</sup>Erika Montalbano, “Blood for Trucks,” in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 191–92.

<sup>47</sup>Klepa, “Close Calls.” See also *Marianna Glazek*, vol. 22530, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996),

The imminent change in regime gave many of Budapest's Jews not only leverage, but also hope and courage. This sense of hope factored greatly into Tivadar Soros's decision to go into hiding. In his memoir he explained: "Deep in my heart I was convinced that the Hitler regime was in its last months and would soon collapse. So we might not have to hide for long."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Tibor Vajda recalled: "We could see that the war was in its last phase, but we had no idea whether it would go on for another month or two, or six months, or a year."<sup>49</sup> Raoul Wallenberg observed in a dispatch written on October 12, 1944: "With the advance of the Russian troops hope is on the rise among the Jewish population that they will no longer be singled out. Many are said to have stopped wearing the Star of David."<sup>50</sup>

In November of 1944 a ghetto was finally established in Budapest, yet its hurried execution allowed Jews to move relatively freely in and out of the ghetto.<sup>51</sup> Tivadar Soros explained: "The evacuation of the Christians living within its confines, while it had been planned for some time, had not yet been carried out, because of the shortage of means of transportation and of suitable places to house the evacuees. Given that there were

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<http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=23185&segmentNumber=37&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>48</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 27.

<sup>49</sup>Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 85.

<sup>50</sup>Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, 260.

<sup>51</sup>For further information, see Cole, *Holocaust City*.

numbers of Christian residents in the ghetto area, some free traffic between the ghetto and the outside had to be maintained.”<sup>52</sup>

As terrible as the situation was for Jews in Budapest under Nazi occupation and the short-lived Arrow Cross regime, it was also sufficiently chaotic to afford room for the city’s Jews to make decisions, facilitate strategies for survivals, and ultimately display agency. These opportunities were available to Budapest’s Jews because they were better informed than their counterparts in neighboring countries. They were also better placed to act because their economically important community had remained relatively intact. Jews and non-Jews expected the war to end soon and anticipated retribution trials. Late-conflict chaos gave Budapest’s Jews opportunities to act based on informed decisions. In the process, the Jews of Budapest displayed considerable agency.

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<sup>52</sup>Tivadar Soros further explains that the ghetto was established “in the seventh district, and consists of Dob, Rumbach, and Síp Streets and their immediate surroundings, an area already densely populated with Jews. Here, the frightened bewildered Jews were gathered together, generally one family to a room, but in some places with as many as twenty people jammed in a single room.” Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 156–157.

## BARGAINING

In the late stages of the war, with Nazi defeat imminent, German and Hungarian officials were likely to elicit and accept bribes. In Nazi-occupied Budapest, a currency of bribery through bargaining emerged. This currency was not limited to money, and included also alcohol, cigarettes, food, sex, and promises of postwar testimony in retribution trials.<sup>53</sup> Money and connections were necessary preconditions for bargaining, which meant that the wealthier had a greater chance at survival. A disproportionate number of Hungary's assimilated and economically successful Jews lived in the capital, and so bargaining was widespread.

Money was perhaps the most frequent currency elicited and accepted by Nazis and the Arrow Cross. One survivor, Ivan Deutsch, described how “twice the Arrow Cross tried to take the whole house away.” He continued: “Luckily, there were always ways and means” to talk the Arrow Cross out of precarious situations. Specifically: “Money, money, and more money. And gold and whatever they could get together. We knew that from many houses they took away people. And it was one street to the Danube. And they were shooting people into the Danube indiscriminately.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>These currencies were a facet of Budapest's underground economy, which existed throughout occupied Europe.

<sup>54</sup>*Ivan Devai*, vol. 4686, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Sydney, Australia, 1995),

The story of Marika Schweitzer and her family exemplifies the ability of Budapest's Jews to bribe Nazis with money in exchange for personal protection. Marika's father, Kornél Schweitzer, owned Atlas Gépkereskedelmi Részvénytársaság, a bicycle wholesale company, and had the financial means to pay a large enough amount to make this exchange worthwhile for SS Major Kurt Becher. Sixty-five years later, Marika Schweitzer shared her story:

A few days before New Year, the guard at the gate of our Yellow Star house told us to get ready immediately. They were coming for us. They randomly selected families to be transported to the concentration camps. Shaking, we packed a few essentials into bags and suitcases and, to the accompaniment of tears from friends and neighbors, proceeded to the gate, where we were ordered at gunpoint to follow our guides. We must have been a sad sight indeed! We felt eyes watching us from behind the windows of the surrounding buildings. We had seen this happen to others many times. This time it was us!

I, a ten-year-old, held onto my parents' hands, and my two aunts followed us. An Army Corporal and an Arrow Cross Brother pointed their guns at us while roughly prodding us along. We were practically running since it was very close to the general curfew hour of 5PM, and the Arrow Cross Party patrols were instructed to shoot anyone on the street after that hour. As we crossed the Oktogon, we saw the Pók Department Store building burning. A bomb had hit it that afternoon. It was two minutes after 5 o'clock that we arrived in front of the building of Teréz Boulevard #6. This was the building that, from the side street, housed my father's offices. I didn't understand why we stopped here.<sup>55</sup>

Marika soon found out from her father that, "along with another thousand Jews, we were now under the protection of the German SS. More than fifty years later, I found out that SS Major Kurt Becher charged twenty thousand dollars for each

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<http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=5818&segmentNumber=93&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>55</sup> Marika Barnett, "The End," in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (AuthorHouse, 2009), 15–18.

family who moved into the twin buildings of Teréz Boulevard 6 and 8. My father never mentioned what it cost him to save his family's life."<sup>56</sup>

Alcohol, which was in short supply in wartime Budapest, was another form of currency elicited and accepted as bribes. The story of Zsuzsanna Lukács' family and the woman who hid them, Margit, exemplifies the potency of alcohol as a form of bargaining. Zsuzsanna's father, Kornél Lukács, was a prominent attorney in Budapest, and his wife, Erzsébet, "managed two homes and had a very busy social life." They raised their daughter, Zsuzsanna, who was born in 1930, "mostly by German nannies." The family's wealth afforded them the ability to procure a large supply of alcohol, even in wartime Budapest.<sup>57</sup> Sixty-five years later, Zsuzsanna Lukács recalled:

After the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, my father, an attorney, procured papers for us and sought a safe hiding place.

He had a client named Margit, a well-rounded, blonde, blue-eyed, typically Hungarian looking country type young woman, who proved to be an excellent entrepreneur. She imported and exported goods and more than made up for her husband's modest army officer's salary.

Her husband was fighting on the Russian front, and she was living alone in their large apartment. She suggested to my father that we should move in with her and provide her with financial compensation as well as favorable testimony after the war – if we survived. Her husband had witnessed terrible atrocities against civilians by the German/Hungarian armies and was concerned about the looming Soviet occupation and his own safety as a former officer. My father thought this is a good proposal and started making preparations.

These preparations included taking provisions to our prospective new home. This had to be done piecemeal, during the short periods between curfews, so as not to attract attention.

A large part of these provisions was liquor: rum, cognac, *slivovitz* and *barack* (strong Hungarian plum and apricot brandies). The Russians were already preparing the siege of Budapest, and we knew that when food supplies dried up, liquor would become legal tender on the black market.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 15–18. For more on Kurt Becher, see Koncz et al., *Self-Financing Genocide*.

<sup>57</sup>Suzanne Nash, "Ironies and Absurdities," in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 203.

<sup>58</sup>Nash, "Ironies and Absurdities."

Eventually Margit's husband, who had deserted from the Hungarian army, returned home. Zsuzsanna Lukács continued:

Deserters were shot on sight. [Margit's husband], however, breezily dismissed all concerns.

"Don't worry," he said to my father, "we're all going to be perfectly safe."

"How?" inquired my father incredulously.

"We'll throw a party. You have lots of liquor. There's an Arrow Cross headquarters across the street. They are all my friends. Once they drink your liquor, they'll be your friends forever."

My father was more than skeptical, but Gyula went ahead and invited the local Arrow Cross leader and his henchmen, who were more than happy to come and party. They came and whooped it up, drinking, singing, and making a great deal of noise that no one in the building dared to complain about us.

A few days later, we were asked if they could have another party. Of course they could! And then another one! We were indeed safe!<sup>59</sup>

Like alcohol, cigarettes served as a potent form of currency in Nazi-occupied Budapest. The story of Zsuzsanna Márkus and her parents, Jeanette and Dénes, highlights the potency of this unconventional currency. Zsuzsanna was seven years old and in first grade when the Germans invaded Hungary. Her father, Dénes, had owned the Windsor Toothbrush Factory but was taken first to a forced labor camp and then to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where he lived out the remainder of the war. Zsuzsanna and her mother Jeanette hid with false identification papers with a gentile family in Budapest until they were discovered by the Arrow Cross. Zsuzsanna explained:

My father was in a labor unit (*munkaszolgálat*), in 1944. Since he was in charge of food supplies, he could leave the Ferihegyi Airport, where his unit was stationed to work, to get more provisions for the camp in Budapest. Luckily, he had a driver's license, so he was the one to drive the truck from the airport, located at some distance, to the city; hence he was occasionally able to visit my mother and me. We were still living in our own apartment, which was in a protected house. I was eight years old.

One day news reached my father that all the Jews who lived in protected houses were to be moved to a ghetto in Dohány utca, where the main synagogue of Budapest

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

was located. He managed to get false identity documents for us. Our family name changed from Márkus, suggesting Jewish ancestry, to Horváth, a reliable Hungarian Gentile surname. We moved into the ghetto under this name as Christians, that is, as Jews who had converted. For this reason, the compulsory star we had to sew on our clothing was white, not yellow, as for other Jews. When it became obvious that not even our privileged status could protect us, my father found us a hiding place in the home of a Christian family. My mother and I lived in the tiny maid's room off the kitchen. I don't remember the address. It was on the Pest side of the city, near the Danube River.

On December 31, 1944, I became very sick with a bad cold and fever. To prevent her from getting my cold (we only had one narrow bed), my mother slept in the kitchen that night while I stayed in the maid's room. All of a sudden, two *Nyilas* burst into the kitchen looking for Jews and questioned my mother. First of all, they wanted to know why she had an accent in Hungarian. They accepted the reason – which happened to be true – that my mother was born in Czechoslovakia. She answered all their other questions concerning her ethnic origin and religion seemingly to their satisfaction. Then they came into the room where I was lying in bed, refusing to allow my mother to accompany them.

They asked me my name, and I answered, “Horváth Zsuzsika,” keeping in mind my new false identity.” In Hungarian, last names come first.

Then they tricked me. “Your mother told me everything about you. There is only one thing she forgot to tell us. Did you wear a yellow or white star?”

“A white star,” I said, not realizing that with this answer I was betraying us. Conversion to Catholicism was no protection for anyone born a Jew.

The two *Nyilas* brought me into the kitchen, where they berated my mother for having lied to them. Bragging that they had just shot eleven Jews into the Danube, they assured us that we would be the twelfth and thirteenth.

Somehow, my mother had the presence of mind to offer them packages of cigarettes. She never smoked, so I wondered why she had some. Of course, cigarettes served as currency to buy necessary things and also as bribes in the days when money had lost its value.<sup>60</sup>

On the eve of the Soviet siege of Budapest, chaos and corruption prevailed throughout the ranks of the Arrow Cross. Zsuzsanna Márkus explains how, with the imminent Russian occupation, in addition to cigarettes the Arrow Cross Brothers who

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<sup>60</sup>Gerey, “Escape on New Year’s Eve.” As this story demonstrates, Hungarian men in labor service had relative mobility to obtain goods in Budapest and visit family and friends. Proximity to Budapest was key, and created an opportunity for the transfer of information and goods between the Jewish men in labor battalions and the remaining Jewish population of Budapest. With the proceeds from his wartime enterprise selling forged and falsified identity papers, Tivadar Soros, himself a Budapest Jew hiding in plain sight as a Christian, shared his profits amongst his less fortunate coreligionists. He explains: “Since I did not smoke, I passed my cigarettes on to people wearing the yellow star.” Generosity such as this might help to explain how Budapest’s Jews obtained cigarettes with which to barter.

Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 112.



discovered her Jewish identity also elicited promises of postwar testimony in retribution trials. She elaborated:

By then, sounds of battle could be heard clearly, even the rumble of the Russian tanks. The *Nyilas* took the cigarettes and, promising to spare us, asked my mother if she would come forward to testify on their behalf once the Russians arrived and they were tried as war criminals. Even though my mother agreed to this bargain, we would still have to leave the apartment, they said. She could not move a sick child, my mother insisted, and she threatened to have us both take poison rather than go. We were allowed to stay for the time being and watched them leave with relief.

An hour later they were back. They assured us that they had found a safe hiding place for us. Trusting – what else could we do? – we followed to the two men along the Dunapart, or the bank of the Danube, to a large abandoned paper factory owned by Sass and Bauer (I still remember the name of the company). We were to hide in one of the giant empty crates used to store bales of paper. Then they left. Suddenly, we heard a scream, “*Márkus néni!*” (“Auntie Márkus!”). A voice called to my mother, using her real last name. All older women are called “auntie” in Hungarian. A head popped up. It was the Jewish tenant from the sixth floor of our old building. We then realized that families of Jews were hiding in every crate in the huge empty space. We stayed there till it was safe to come out. The Germans had finally been defeated.<sup>61</sup>

Zsuzsanna Márkus’ story demonstrated that, with Soviet occupation only days or even hours away, there was widespread willingness of the Arrow Cross to accept bribes in exchange for the testimonies of Jews, which, they believed, would offer them protection from retribution at the hands of the Red Army. They did this even at the risk of punishment for insubordination. This case of bargaining was not a unique occurrence, as demonstrated by the multitude of families being hidden – for a price – by the Arrow Cross in the abandoned factory.

Even before the siege of Budapest, bargaining in the form of postwar testimony frequently occurred. Ágnes Mandl, who worked closely with the Swedish embassy, encountered a similar request in the fall of 1944 when she approached Budapest’s police chief, who was “famous [for] killing people,” to remove her yellow star. She recounted: “I was scared stiff. But I went with my head up and walked in to the police chief and he

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<sup>61</sup>Gerey, “Escape on New Year’s Eve.”

took me in his arm and he cried, ‘how proud I am that I am the one who cutting off your star. And good luck my child. And will you help me when the occupying?’ ... And as I walked out I hear somebody saying, there goes another bloody Jew. Because they saw me coming in with the star.”<sup>62</sup> Reflecting upon this experience in her memoir, Ágnes wrote: “I knew that he knew the Germans were about to lose and that the occupying forces would look into his past life, so the Swedes must have bribed him.”<sup>63</sup> In the fall of 1944, Ágnes Mandl had another similar experience when trying to get back her family’s apartment, which had been confiscated. The Arrow Cross had forced her parents to move out of their home and their superintendent’s daughter was now living in the apartment.<sup>64</sup> A lawyer whom Ágnes approached for consul told her, “I give you the apartment if you promise me that you will say all the things, what a good man I was [sic].”<sup>65</sup>

It is important to note that Budapest’s Jews were often on both sides of this currency exchange. Tivadar Soros, the middle-aged-lawyer who himself lived as a Christian using falsified identity documents, also contributed as a seller in this underground market. He had a contact who was a professional forger, and also paid Christians to sell him their identity papers. In his memoir he explained: “I had three different price categories for documents. First, I gave the documents completely free to people who were very close to me or in desperate straits. Second, from those people to

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<sup>62</sup>Ágnes Adachi.

<sup>63</sup>Adachi, *Child of the Winds*, 25.

<sup>64</sup>For more on the role that superintendents played in the persecution of Budapest’s Jews, see Máté Rigó, “Ordinary Women and Men: Superintendents and Jews in the Budapest Yellow-Star Houses in 1944–1945,” *Urban History* 40, no. 1 (December 19, 2012): 71–91, doi:10.1017/S0963926812000648.

<sup>65</sup>Ágnes Adachi.

whom I felt a moral obligation not to make a profit at their expense, I simply asked for my actual expenses, without consideration for the trouble or risk involved. Third, from my wealthy clients I asked for whatever the market would bear. In fact I had no particular limits for this category, or, as they say, there was no ceiling on the prices. Sometimes I received as much as twenty times the actual cost.”<sup>66</sup> Tivadar’s clients paid him using whatever currency they could – cash, jewelry, and even food. He justified his enterprise as follows: “Since I am basically a moral person, I had to overcome my internal disinclination to make money by selling false documents. I knew then that you can’t live by abstract principles, and that sometimes opportunism is a requirement of success.”<sup>67</sup>

Along with providing Christian identity papers for Budapest’s Jews, Tivadar Soros also arranged living accommodations for his “clients.” He explained: “Whenever I spotted an advertisement for a room to let, I immediately rented it for my ‘relative from the country’ and paid the rent in advance.”<sup>68</sup> Tivadar used not only money, but also unconventional forms of currency, to obtain what he needed to bribe Christians into hiding Jews in their apartments. He recalls that one particular family “agreed that I paid them not with cash but with food.”<sup>69</sup> It was not difficult for the wealthier of Budapest’s Jews, such as Tivadar Soros, to obtain food. Another survivor, Albert Lichtmann

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<sup>66</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 85.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 86. It is important to note that, when approached, some of Budapest’s non-Jewish residents simply offered their identification papers to their Jewish friends and acquaintances, without any monetary exchange. The process for these Christians to replace their identification papers was straightforward and low-risk. See *John Lowy*.

<sup>68</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 127.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 158.

elaborated: “We were not starving... People were making good money on selling food to Jews. We were overpaying for prices, and everybody had savings. Everybody had jewelry, which they sold. And if money found its source, the food arrived.”<sup>70</sup>

There was also a gendered aspect to this currency of bargaining and bribing in Nazi-occupied Budapest. Because most of the Jewish men had been sent to work in labor battalions, the majority of the city’s inhabitants were women, children, and the elderly. The disproportionately female population was especially vulnerable to sexual violence, but this also created opportunity. In some cases Jewish women in Budapest became entrepreneurs, using their bodies and sexuality as currency. Livia Baruch was only sixteen years old when a guard propositioned her. At the time, she and her brother were being held in the courtyard of a synagogue in Budapest, along with a few hundred others, because they were not Hungarian citizens.<sup>71</sup> Years later, she recalled that one of the Hungarian guards, who was well into his thirties, “said to me if I come to his apartment/home he’ll take me out and he will rescue my brother and myself, but... in return of [sexual] favors... He took a fancy and as I said that [sexual favors] went on for a few weeks. And he took, after, when he knew that there was danger coming, because he knew, he took us out, Freddy and myself, and we went to grandma [sic].” The guard knew that the stateless and alien Jews in his care were soon to be deported. He informed Livia of this and assisted in her escape from the detention center. Livia concluded matter-

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<sup>70</sup>Albert Lichtmann, vol. 19895, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (McLean, VA, 1997), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=20878&segmentNumber=3&returnIndex=-1#>.

<sup>71</sup>Livia and her brother were born to Hungarian parents who at the time were working in North Africa. “We were Nansen,” Livia explains. “They could do whatever they wanted.” *Lily Wolf*. For more on the deportation of refugees, see *Emil Jacoby*.

of-factly: “Anyways I did go, and he let us go. So he kept his word.”<sup>72</sup> The exchange was successful. Livia Baruch traded sexual favors for her life.<sup>73</sup>

Whether through money, cigarettes, alcohol, promises of postwar testimony in retribution trials, food, or sex, Budapest’s Jews utilized a variety of currencies to bribe and bargain with the Hungarian and German authorities. This strategy was only possible because of the imminent change of regime and the chaos of the siege of Budapest. These factors facilitated the ability of Budapest’s Jews to display considerable agency under German occupation and especially during the short-lived Arrow Cross regime.

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<sup>72</sup>*Lily Wolf.*

<sup>73</sup>The majority of sexual contact between Jewish prisoners and their guards was not consensual. For a personal experience of attempted sexual assault in Budapest by a Hungarian guard, see *Zuzana Adam*, vol. 14708, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Alberta, Canada, 1996), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=15254&segmentNumber=62&returnIndex=-1#>. For a witness of sexual assault in Budapest at the hands of high ranking Nazi officials, see *Lewis Rosinger*, vol. 42470, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Columbia, SC, 1998), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=45902&segmentNumber=62&returnIndex=-1#>.

## MASQUERADING

Timing was a key factor in facilitating the ability of Budapest's Jews to deploy masquerading as a survival technique. In the chaos of the siege of Budapest, the city's Jews were often able to pass as gentiles and even Nazis and Arrow Cross Brothers. Currencies of bargaining were crucial to the masquerading process, for they allowed Budapest's Jews to buy new, non-Jewish identities.

The term "mascaraed" is used by Tivadar Soros to describe his experience passing as a gentile in Nazi-occupied Budapest. In his memoir, he expounded upon the experience of Budapest's Jews hiding in plain sight: "The air raids created a new situation. Normal life disintegrated. The hospitals filled with the wounded, and places had to be found for those made homeless. As a result, there were so many changes of address reported to police that not much attention was paid to Jews registering under false names."<sup>74</sup> Tivadar further explained: "The truth of the matter was, that, except for Orthodox Jews, whose unusual clothing and hairstyle proclaimed their religion, it was hard to tell a Jew just by appearance. That was why authorities ultimately prescribed the wearing of a yellow star, to show to all the world who was a Jew and who was not. The

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<sup>74</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 52.

star simply declared: this person is a Jew, so it's okay to beat and persecute him.”<sup>75</sup> There was but one catch: “in Hungary, the circumcision of boys was not common practice, except that the Jews circumcised their young sons in accordance with their religious beliefs. Accordingly, when carrying out male identity checks, it was most important to the Arrow-Crossers to establish whether someone was circumcised or not.”<sup>76</sup>

No similar physical distinction existed between Jewish and Christian females. This made masquerading easier for Jewish girls and women.<sup>77</sup> In Budapest, however, hiding was less of a female phenomenon than elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe because of the prevalence of falsified and forged documents. Tivadar explained: “There exists a medical condition known as tight foreskin, or phimosis, which can be dealt with through adult circumcision, and a hospital would provide a certificate in such cases. The certificate was of doubtful value. I knew of a case where Arrow-Crossers shot a Christian despite his perfectly genuine certificate, and of another case where someone managed to get out of the Arrow Cross headquarters with a forged certificate. The true value of the certificate can be summed up as follows: there's a good chance that if you have to use it it won't work, but it certainly does no harm to have it. So I handed out the certificates.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 28. Some Jews simply went out without their armbands. On August 17, 1944, Éva Weinmann wrote in her diary, “Pista was at home on Sunday. Laci was here too and both of them went out without a star in the evening.” Weinmann, *Lauder Javne Zsidó Közösségi Óvoda*, and *Judaisztikai Archívum*, *Weinmann Éva naplója*.

<sup>76</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 195–196.

<sup>77</sup>Jewish women masquerading as Christians nevertheless had to modify their behavior. Certain daily practices, such as washing one's hands before eating, distinguished Jews from many of their Christian neighbors and coworkers. See *Zuzana Adam*.

<sup>78</sup>Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 195–196.

Falsifying identity papers in Budapest under the Arrow Cross was common-place and relatively easy. To create falsified papers Artúr Stern bribed “some official for a few dollars” to obtain blank identification forms.<sup>79</sup> Tibor Vajda further described the process of falsifying documents: “I took the blank forms [police registration papers], filled them out with false information, and got them back stamped by the police. Then I filled out another registration form with Mihály Borbely’s details and a bogus address, and I manually transferred the impression of the police stamp from the other, using a fresh potato cut in half. After I had aged the paper by crumpling it and smearing it a little, it looked quite genuine.”<sup>80</sup> Another survivor, Endre Fürst, recalled that to falsify identification papers he obtained birth certificates from the town hall in Christian classmates names and then used a chemical that would “wash out ink.” He described this process as “a lot easier done than it would seem.” He explained: “In no time at all you would have a whole set of beautiful false papers. And then you went and got more. Once you had a false name – a false identity – you could accumulate one ID card after another.”<sup>81</sup>

Falsified identity papers were exponentially helpful to Budapest’s Jews. Once a Jew had assumed a non-Jewish identity, he or she was in the advantageous position to aid family and friends. Ivan Deutsch, in his interview with the Shoah Foundation, claimed that his first or second cousin George Autsale [sic] (originally his name was Appel) was

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<sup>79</sup> *Arthur Stern*.

<sup>80</sup> Of his time masquerading as a Christian, Tibor Vajda recalled: “I did not believe I could stay alive until the end of the war, so I took more risks than most. I remember thinking, *What’s the difference who kills me and how?* I decided to do ‘them’ as much damage as I could, and to save as many people as possible while my luck lasted.” Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 56–57.

<sup>81</sup> *Andrew Fürst*. In addition to these papers, Endre insisted that Jews masquerading as Christians must also learn the catechism by heart.



“working in the underground and he was the sort of head of the Red Cross with a Gestapo car and German protective service.” Ivan’s uncle was “doing a job maybe not at that size of Wallenberg but something like that.” Ivan explained that his uncle “wasn’t working under his own name.” He later insisted: “There were many Jews in the underground and taking up different names and etc. and they were able to do it. There were whole groups of Jewish people who were working for the underground and were Jewish.”<sup>82</sup>

The story of the Lukács’ family, who bribed the Arrow Cross with liquor, and the woman who hid them, Margit (who Zsuzsanna Lukács described as “a well-rounded, blonde, blue-eyed typical Hungarian looking country type young woman”) is another example of a masquerading Jew coming to the aid of others.<sup>83</sup> Zsuzsanna Lukács explained that shortly after she and her parents moved in, Margit hid another Jewish woman in her home. She recalled:

Margit introduced her as her sister fleeing from Eastern Hungary. My father was concerned because her papers were not in good order; however, he felt he was in no position to complain. Another short period later, an older couple also moved in and were introduced as Margit’s “father and step mother,” also fleeing from the Eastern Front. One look at them told us they were Jews. Furthermore, they didn’t speak the country dialect of eastern Hungary. We knew they were from Budapest. Again, their papers were not in good order, and this time my father really became quite concerned. We didn’t dare go to the shelter during bombing raids, fearing the regular “checks” that the Arrow Cross conducted in the shelters. If one person was suspect, all were in danger... My father couldn’t contain himself, and he took Margit aside to explain the danger we were now all subjected to. He told her that, had she said something earlier, he could have provided the older couple and the young woman with good forged papers. “I could have helped,” he said, “why didn’t you tell me that you were hiding other Jews?”

Margit then confessed. This really was her father. He had been married to a Gentile woman, Margit’s mother, who had died young, after which he had remarried, taking a Jewish woman as his wife and with whom he had a second daughter, Margit’s dusky sister!

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<sup>82</sup>*Ivan Devai.*

<sup>83</sup>Nash, “Ironies and Absurdities.”

We were all in shock. Margit was half Jewish!<sup>84</sup>

By adopting a non-Jewish identity, Margit managed to successfully save the lives of six Jews – including herself. Unfortunately Kornél Lukács was murdered by the Arrow Cross while searching for a new place to hide after finding “a couple of unexploded shells at the entrance of our shelter.”<sup>85</sup>

The story of Imre Engels, the teenage toolmaker who posed as an Arrow Cross Brother to save his uncle from the Budapest ghetto, again illustrates the ability of Jews to assume non-Jewish identities and, in doing so, aid their family and friends. On May 15, 1944, at the age of nineteen, Imre Engles was called up to serve in the labor battalion 101-302. His parents, who lived in Újpest, a suburb of Budapest, were deported to Auschwitz on July 2. Fortunately, he had an uncle who lived in the city and worked as a baker. Imre recalled that his uncle was a “very clever man, very unusual man, who somehow got some exemption for himself based on his heroism during the First World War, of which only 25% was true... But he somehow managed by exception to hold on to his bakery” despite Hungarian laws depriving Jews of their property. Imre, like his uncle, was clever and told his Hungarian battalion leader that he would like to provide special bread from his uncle’s bakery for the battalion. This request was approved, and Imre was allowed to go every day to his uncle’s bakery and bring back two baskets of “goodies.”

In October, while Imre was in Budapest collecting bread, his labor battalion was deported without him. He decided not to go back to his uncle’s, feeling that it wouldn’t be safe for his family to have a young able-bodied man in the house when all Hungarian

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

men, Jewish or not, were serving in the army in some capacity. Instead of returning to his uncle's, Imre decided to go to the building in Budapest that was the center for Hungarian refugees. At the time, Hungarian refugees were pouring in from the Russian front. Imre presented himself as László Horváth from Békéscsaba, a city where his aunt lived and where Imre had spent several summers. At the center, they asked him some questions, which he answered satisfactory.

Of this period, Imre recalled: "I had managed to play this role of Horváth László incredibly well, like an actor who plays the same role 500 times on the stage. He becomes that person. And I did become Horváth László."<sup>86</sup> Imre used this confidence to help others. He had a cousin and another uncle who lived in the Glass House (*Üvegház*), where hundreds of Jews had gathered under the protection of Swiss papers.<sup>87</sup> Imre knew that these people were very hungry, so he went to his uncle the baker to bring a few baskets full of bread to take them. Donning a leather coat, which was typical of military power, Imre set out. "I had a boot and I had my other paraphernalia, a hat and I put my arrow cross band on and I went in." He was especially convincing because many of the Arrow Cross Brothers really were seventeen-year-old boys.

This first experience was successful. Nobody asked questions, nothing bad happened. Imre mused: "If you want to be safest, you go to the lion's den. That's the safest, right? Anywhere else is considerably more dangerous, and I did that." Soon thereafter, Imre's uncle was taken by the Arrow Cross from the Glass House to the ghetto. Again, Imre was successful. He packed up his uncle and delivering him back to

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<sup>86</sup>*Emery Angles.*

<sup>87</sup>The Glass House had once been a glass factory. It is the most famous of the 76 "safe houses" requisitioned by the Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz. The building in Budapest is now a museum.

his aunt. In his oral history for the Shoah Foundation archive, Imre Engle explained: “I was living my role so completely that there was no aspect in it by wanting to save myself as a Jew... I didn’t do it because I thought this is a good diversion from being discovered to be a Jew because that was beyond the realm of possibility, I was so deeply and incredibly entrenched in my role as a non-Jew.”<sup>88</sup>

Obtaining paraphernalia to appear as an Arrow Cross Brother was not particularly difficult. Twenty-year-old Tibor Vajda, who like Imre Engles hid in plain sight as a Christian, explained fifty-six years later in his memoir: “My best bet was clothing which looked partly military, partly Arrowcross [sic] ... I bought a pair of black officer’s boots and riding breeches, a short, dark-brown leather coat, an army belt to be worn outside a greatcoat, and a couple of green shirts. These were all popular among the Arrowcross.”<sup>89</sup> Tibor continued: “I went on to the middle of Teleki Square, where vendors had their goods on blankets on the ground. All sorts of uniforms were on sale – German Black Panzer, blue Luftwaffe, and grey infantry – all in separate heaps. Hungarian army uniforms were green, with different-coloured collar patches to show the branch of service. I noticed that the badges of rank and the corps insignia had all been removed. People were bartering openly for all this.”<sup>90</sup> Later, he bought an Arrow Cross armband. He explained that the “Arrowcross armbands were still in the shop window, and they sold me both without asking any questions.”<sup>91</sup> Later, Tibor commented, “[I] looked at myself

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<sup>88</sup>*Emery Angles*.

<sup>89</sup>Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 62–63.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

in a shirtmaker's shop window... I certainly looked like one of those who were killing the Jews.”<sup>92</sup>

Like Imre Engle, Tibor Vajda's successful transformation from Jewish victim to Arrow Cross Brother gave him courage to help his loved ones. He recalled: “As soon as my papers and clothing were in order, I started panning to get Éva's brother Bandi out of the Albrecht Barracks... I was prepared to say something like ‘I've come to arrest a Jew who's committed a crime’, but they paid me no attention... I told Bandi to keep his hands behind his back, and pretend that he was handcuffed. A couple of metres from the gates, when we were in sight of the guards, I grabbed Bandi by the collar and started shaking him. I kept it up as we passed through the gates, undisturbed by the guards, who seemed to be enjoying the show. ‘I got you, you bloody Jew. You've been trying to hide in the barracks, you bastard’, I kept shouting and, for good measure, I kicked his backside in front of them.”<sup>93</sup>

The story of Marika Schweitzer, whose father paid SS Major Kurt Becher \$20,000 to protect his family, contains other example of Budapest Jews masquerading as Nazi soldiers and Arrow Cross Brothers in a effort to help their fellow Jews. The Schweitzers' guarded escorts, who Marika described as “an Army Corporal and an Arrow Cross Brother,” were actually Jews in disguise. Marika elaborated:

Our escorts banged on the barricaded gates while we stood on the wide, empty boulevard, in clear sight of marauding patrols. Though someone soon answered the desperate knockings and, after a brief checking, allowed us in, to us it seemed like an eternity. By that time I was prepared for anything. The fact that SS soldiers were waiting behind the gates didn't surprise me much. The surprise was that they didn't show any hostility. Within minutes we were across the inner courtyard of the building, entering the

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 92–94.

backrooms of my father's offices. Our two escorts were following us at every step and their presence still filled me with dread. It seemed inexplicable that my father didn't even try to get rid of them. Instead, without removing his coat he pulled out a bottle of brandy from a shelf, filled three small glasses and we heard with bewilderment the three men toast: "L'Chaim!" We soon learned that our guides were two brave young Jewish volunteers.<sup>94</sup>

The phenomenon of Jewish men in Budapest masquerading as Nazis and Arrow Cross

Brothers, although not commonplace, was also not unique. The middle-aged lawyer

Tivadar Soros recalled in his memoir witnessing a similar event. He explained:

"Sometimes Jews owed their lives to the miraculous intervention of such pseudo-Nazis. I had heard of Jews in SS uniforms and now here was one with an Arrow Cross armband."<sup>95</sup>

This method of masquerading would not have been possible if not for the extreme chaos preceding the siege of Budapest. According to Tibor Vajda: "I was counting on the confusion increasing amongst all the authorities, who distrusted each other. The huge number of people flooding the streets of Budapest made control more difficult every day... Any sort of uncertainty, however temporary, could give me a start if I had to disappear, or needed time to prepare a good story."<sup>96</sup> He continued: "My idea was to wear clothing that looked like the army issue but was not, and to have papers based on the personal data of Mihály Borbely which would refer to alternate service. Details would have to be unusual, and hard to check by telephone. I could not allow myself to be

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<sup>94</sup>Marika Barnett, "The End," in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (AuthorHouse, 2009), 15–18. For more on Kurt Becher, see Koncz et al., *Self-Financing Genocide*.

<sup>95</sup>Of course, such attempts had fatal consequences and were not always successful. Tivadar recalls: "The Prónay Detachment announced the execution of five Jews who had been found among their ranks, and the story was written up in the newspapers." Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros' Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 155.

<sup>96</sup>Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 63.

captured, because none of my papers would stand up to inspection by experts. I was hoping the chaos in Budapest would help me. Szálasi's government was a bunch of amateurs and primitive brigands, issuing contradictory orders that had to be changed every day or two. One example was László Baký's order for the internment of 'proven suspicious communist elements'. This resulted in 30,000 internment proposals by gendarmes and local magistrates at a time when there were no troops to guard them and no camps to hold them."<sup>97</sup>

It is important to note that Margit, Imre, and Tibor all masqueraded as Christians by adopting false identities. They could not merely convert due the racial nature of the Jewish laws under the Arrow Cross regime.<sup>98</sup> Despite this obstacle, the chaos of the siege of Budapest facilitated an atmosphere in which many of Budapest's Jews - including Margit, Imre, and Tibor - were able to obtain falsified and forged identity papers and to pass as gentiles and even Nazis and Arrow Cross brothers.<sup>99</sup> These fortunate Jews were

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>98</sup>Still, some Jews tried. Their late-stage conversions did not change their status under Hungarian law. Of her childhood, Erika Hiekisch recalled: "Mother lifted me up, and I saw that she too was crying. She continued to carry me as we were walking away from the church, bouncing me up and down to comfort me or maybe herself. She kept repeating the same words louder and louder: "We are Christians now. We are Catholics. We are safe. The bastards cannot hurt us. Nobody can hurt us. We are Christians." Ultimately, conversion was not enough due to the racial nature of Hungary's anti-Jewish laws. Erika's family eventually obtained false paper and went in hiding in a small village in Western Hungary using different names and identities. Erika Hecht, "Conversion," in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Judy Abrams and Evi Blaikie (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 145-46.

<sup>99</sup>For an example of a half-Jewish Hungarian who masqueraded as a member of the Waffen-SS, see *Leslie Banos*, vol. 3928, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Los Angeles, CA, 1995), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=4003&segmentNumber=35&returnIndex=-1#>. Unlike Imre Engles and Tibor Vajda, who capitalized on the chaos of Budapest in 1944 to masquerade as Arrow Cross members, László Banos had already obtained his false identification papers identifying him as György Német, a Volksdeutsch, in 1943. In 1944 - 1945, under the

so successful at surviving that they were even able to employ tactics, such as masquerading, to help save the lives of others.

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Arrow Cross regime, László utilized his position to rescue several of Budapest's Jews from the city's ghetto.



## CO-OPTION

The fact that the Final Solution in Hungary began only in 1944 meant that not only Hungarian Jews but also much of the international community was aware of the Nazis' plans for Jews under their jurisdiction.<sup>100</sup> With this information came international pressure and diplomatic intervention to stop deportations and aid in relief efforts. Budapest's Jews utilized these diplomatic efforts by employing tactics such as bargaining and masquerading to assist in the process and make informed decisions that displayed their capacity to exercise effective agency.

According to the former Swedish diplomat Per Anger, who was stationed in Budapest during the war: "It is said that after the Swedish king's intervention Horthy stepped in and succeeded, for the time being, in preventing further deportations from the capital. The Christian churches and the International Red Cross, too, protested, and the

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<sup>100</sup>In a confidential internal communiqué, the Budapest representative of the International Red Cross, Jean de Bavier, wrote: "On May 13 [1944], a day before my departure from Budapest, leaders of the Jewish community informed me that railway officials would be holding meetings on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. The subject of the talks was to be the transportation of 300,000 Jews to Kassa and, if possible, to Poland. Both the public as well as many authorities are being told that the plan is to employ the Jews as a fresh source of labor. However, the deportees include both old people and children, which indicates that the real purpose is something very different. I was actually told, and not even by Jews but by high-ranking government officials, that the final destination of the trains is Poland, where there are up-to-date installations for the gassing of people. The Jewish community here says it has credible evidence that their religious kin in Poland perished in this way." Arie Ben-Tov, *Holocaust: A Nemzetközi Vöröskereszt És a Magyar Zsidóság a Második Világháború Alatt*, trans. Sean Lambert (Budapest: Dunakönyv, 1992). See also Braham and Vanden Huevel, *The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary*.

American secretary of state, Cordell Hull, sent through the Swiss legation a warning.”<sup>101</sup>

Working at the Swedish consulate in Budapest, Anger remembers: “We were besieged by Jews who suspected what was coming and pleaded for help. Supplicants jammed the reception room, and the line snaked all the way down the street. However, our ability to help all of them was limited. From a strict judicial standpoint, we could only intervene on behalf of Swedish citizens and citizens of those countries whose interests, because of the war, Sweden represented in Hungary.”

It was these efforts that helped Ágnes Mandl, and facilitated her ability to help herself and others. Ágnes’ work with Swedish diplomats in Budapest began when she received a letter in “a small white envelope, very unsuspiciously printed “Swedish Legation” on the back. As I opened it, my hands were shaking. They asked me to come and visit the Legation as soon as possible. I was dumbfounded, confused. I could not imagine why they wanted me there. It was quite dangerous to visit foreign legations.”<sup>102</sup> She continued: “We had a dear friend, Pista, who was not Jewish and who already had shown us how much he cared for our family in many little ways. He had a big black Mercedes Benz. So he put the Nazi flag on it and whisked me up to the Legation.”<sup>103</sup>

Then came Ágnes’ fortuitous twist of fate. She recalled: “I was ushered into Minister Danielson, and Mr. Mezey, the Hungarian Secretary, introduced me to him. Minister Danielson was very happy to see me.” Ágnes Mandl and Minister Danielson spoke for a short while. “And then he said, ‘and your fiancée.’ And I said, ‘my what?’”

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<sup>101</sup>Per Anger, “Introduction to Dispatches,” in *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, trans. David Mel Paul and Margerta Paul (New York: Arcade Pub., 1995), 219.

<sup>102</sup>Adachi, *Child of the Winds*, 17.

<sup>103</sup>Here we have another example of someone (non-Jewish in this case) who utilized the chaotic atmosphere of Budapest to masquerade as a Nazi; Ibid.

Ágnes was not engaged. “He said your fiancée went to the foreign department and he told them that you would already be married, but because of the war you couldn’t. And therefore we have to take care of you because you’re a Swedish citizen. And I stood there, and I said, ‘huh?’ I was shocked. I mean, this is out of nowhere.”<sup>104</sup> Ágnes was completely unaware that a friend in Sweden had made up this story on her behalf. “And he said, yes, that’s what it is. And we want you to stay here.” At the time, Ágnes needed to remain in the Swedish embassy, “because that was the only way they could take care of me.”<sup>105</sup>

Efforts to protect Hungary’s remaining Jews had begun before Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944.<sup>106</sup> Wallenberg had been assigned as the secretary of legation in the Budapest mission “concerning the dispatch of a Swede to Hungary to head a rescue effort for the Jews” after negotiations between the Swedish foreign office, the American War Refugee board, the World Jewish Congress, and the United States’ minister in Stockholm, Herschel Johnson.<sup>107</sup> Upon his arrival, Per Anger informed Wallenberg “that the deportation from the countryside had been brought to an end and that most of Budapest’s Jews had not yet been affected. The deportation of these Jews seemed to have been postponed, in accordance with the appeal by the Swedish king.”<sup>108</sup> Half a century later, Per Anger recalled: “I showed him the provisional

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<sup>104</sup> *Agnes Adachi*.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1225–1246. See also Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*.

<sup>107</sup> Anger, “Introduction to Dispatches,” 221.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

passports, the visa certificates, and the Red Cross protection letter. Wallenberg looked at the documents and said, after a pause: “I think I’ve got an idea for a new and maybe more effective document.” In this way, the idea of the so-called protective passports was born at our first meeting. These were the identification papers in blue and yellow with the three-crowns emblem that would ultimately save tens of thousands of Jews.”<sup>109</sup>

Raoul Wallenberg and Per Anger employed the help of Budapest’s Jews to implement their mission. Ágnes Mandl recalled: “I was his [Raoul Wallenberg’s] first helper. Because they tell him that I was already three weeks under their wonderful wings, and I can help him [sic]”<sup>110</sup> Once Ágnes had her star removed (with the help of the Swedes), she helped distribute Swedish protective passes. Similarly, the sixteen-year-old blue-eyed and blonde-haired Tamás Lantos volunteered as a helper for Raoul Wallenberg and went around the city collecting food and medicine for Swedish-protected Jews with chronic illness.<sup>111</sup>

Switzerland, Spain, the Vatican, the International Red Cross, and in a very limited way Portugal, Turkey, and El Salvador followed suit with similar endeavors.<sup>112</sup> These diplomats and international organizations helped to save tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest, yet it was actually the city’s Jews themselves who implemented many of these efforts and, furthermore, it was ultimately up to these Jews to make informed decisions to take advantage of the opportunities at hand. In his memoir, Tivadar Soros recalled:

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 221–2.

<sup>110</sup>*Agnes Adachi.*

<sup>111</sup>Tamás explained that he did so “not because of superior courage but because of my conviction that I will not survive and I might as well be of some help.” *Tom Lantos.*

<sup>112</sup>For more information, see Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1205–1294.

“Ignoring the chance that they would be picked up while standing in line – from dawn to dusk – outside the consulates, petitioners were willing to risk deportation at the very moment of their potential salvation.” He went on to explain: “Soon a black market in certificates of immunity grew up: if the owner of a certificate needed money, he could always sell it and go back and stand in line again. This was also a great opportunity for forgers, and the market in forged documents grew particularly lucrative. Soon the situation became so confused that even the people in the embassies could not say whether a given certificate was genuine or false.”<sup>113</sup>

This black market of identity passes was another way for Budapest’s Jews to make informed decisions. Endre Steinberger, a forger working with the Zionist underground, exploited the chaos in Budapest to “enlarge the scope of Wallenberg’s activities.” Steinberger posed as a Christian under the name Endre Solyom, and worked not only to forge but also distribute these forged Schutz passes.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, Tibor Vajda recalled: “I knew about the Glass House in Vadasz Street in the Fifth District, where a group of Zionists were drawing up false Swiss Schutzpasses... To the right I saw a

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<sup>113</sup> Soros, *Masquerade: The Incredible True Story of How George Soros’ Father Outsmarted the Gestapo*, 132.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew E. Stevens, *Rebel with a Cause: The Amazing True Story of Urban Partisans in World War II* (Allied Artists, 2010). See also *Andrew Stevens*, vol. 310, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (California, n.d.), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=59&returnIndex=0#>. For more information on the Zionist underground, see David Gur, *Brothers for Resistance and Rescue: The Underground Zionist Youth Movement in Hungary during World War II*, ed. Eli Netzer, trans. Pamela Segev and Avri Fischer (Jerusalem; New York: Gefen Publishing House ; Gefen Books, 2004). Also see Szita, *Trading in Lives?*. It is important to note that these forged passes did not always work. Éva Weinmann wrote in her diary that on November 12, 1944 that “Béla brought us the Swiss protective passport... Daddy came on Tuesday, and he had his name also written on the pass. In the evening the caretaker came and he checked on people’s papers. He found ours to be fake. We were really frightened. But, finally it turned out that he was only after money, because he was wearing an Arrow Cross armband.”<sup>114</sup> Her last clause also highlights the prominence of bargaining; Weinmann, Lauder Javne Zsidó Közösségi Óvoda, and Judaisztikai Archivum, *Weinmann Éva naplója*.

staircase going up, and between that and the front door there was a desk with a lamp and a typewriter. A boy and two girls in their teens were working at the desk. One girl was selecting Schutzpasses from a cardboard box and giving them to the boy. He was rubbing out the names and passing them to the other girl, who was typing new names on them.”<sup>115</sup> They had run out of Schutzpasses and were using old ones that people hadn’t collected.

Other Jews contributed to Wallenberg’s efforts. Ágnes Mandl explained: “You know, Budapest is a very small city. And it went like a wildfire that there is an angel who’s helping... 350 people also offered their apartments and their villas on the two sides of the Danube to the Swedish embassy. And you will hear that all the time they lying about it, they said that he *bought* all those houses and he *paid* all the helpers. He never bought any house because he thought he helps the Jews to keep those houses. So they only made kiddings that the Swedish embassy was the greatest landowners of Budapest, because the Swedish flag went out of the houses and we had a Christian or a Jewish boy who looked very Christian in Nazi uniform – because many Nazis died already – and taking care of our Swedish houses [sic].”<sup>116</sup> According to Ágnes, life in these safe houses was not comfortable, but the diplomats would come with food and medicine.<sup>117</sup>

Ágnes’ greatest role in displaying agency and helping her fellow Jews came in mid-December 1944. She recalled that “Eichmann ordered the Hungarian Nazis to kill the Jews into the Danube because they will die. It was frozen. In forty years it was never that cold in Hungary. And there were big icicles in there. They roped three together, and they shot the middle one. So naturally all three fell in. Some of them, they got out by

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<sup>115</sup>Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 97.

<sup>116</sup>*Agnes Adachi*.

<sup>117</sup>See also *Tom Lantos*.

themselves, but very few. So the third day, Raoul was out seeing people somewhere else and he said, “what will Eichmann do next? How many of you can swim?” And I was the only one that put up my hand. He says, “Let’s go.” I had no idea where we going. It was a very dark starless night. And we went with the Red Cross trucks, three diplomats and myself. And we went down; they didn’t even know that we came. You know, we turned off the lights and there was noise. And we synchronized; every time he shot we jumped [sic].” Wearing a fur coat and a pair of boots, Ágnes and the three others jumped into the freezing Danube. “And thanks to the icicles, they were - the rope got stuck to it. So we knew where there is a rope there is a body, and we pulled the body out.” Fifty years later she mused: “Thank god the Hungarian Nazis didn’t hear the trucks coming because they were too busy roping and shooting.”<sup>118</sup>

Upon reflecting on how she was able to perform these courageous acts, Ágnes reminisced: “You get such a strength when you have to. And some of these people knew how to swim. You know, and so they knew. And we said we are saving you. And we said come, come, and we pulled. And they were going on shooting so they didn’t hear us bringing these people out. Fifty people we saved the four of us.”<sup>119</sup>

It is important to note that not only Raoul Wallenberg and the Swedish embassy labored to protect Budapest’s Jews. Lesser-known diplomats include the Swiss Karl Lutz, the pseudo-Spanish chargé d’affaires Jorge (Giorgio) Perlasca, and the Vatican nuncio Angelo Rotta.<sup>120</sup> These diplomats utilized the opportunity to help save the lives of

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<sup>118</sup>Agnes Adachi.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Enrico Deaglio, *The Banality of Goodness: The Story of Giorgio Perlasca* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*, 11.

Budapest's Jew, but ultimately it was up to the Jews themselves to make informed decisions to take advantage of rescue efforts.

Budapest's Jews had to make their own informed decisions based on the information they had at hand as well as intuition. As Éva Brust recalled: "We were given Swedish passports by Raoul Wallenberg, and we considered using them. But when we went to the Wallenberg "safe house" my parents didn't feel safe and decided to take refuge with several Gentile acquaintances, who hid us in various basements and attics."<sup>121</sup>

Éva Brust's parents were correct in their suspicions. Raoul Wallenberg and his fellow diplomats saved tens of thousands of lives, but their safe houses and protective passes were not always enough to save Budapest's Jews. One survivor, Sándor Davidovits, recounted that the Arrow Cross confiscated his Swiss protective papers immediately preceding his deportation to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>122</sup> Another survivor, Zsuzsanna Abonyi recalled: "On December 3, 1944, in the Vatican house, we woke up again to the screams of the Nyilas, the gang of Hungarian National Socialists. "Out of bed, lazy swines..." On our route from the Vatican house on Aréna Street to Dohány Street, we stopped in front of several houses. Some were under Swiss or Red Cross protection others were under that of the Vatican or Sweden. In front of these houses we had to wait, at times for hours. But after the third or fourth building was "cleansed" of Jews, the

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According to Randolph Braham: "As the *Nyilas* terror continued unabated, and especially during the Soviet siege, the number of those holding genuine or forged passes increased to well over 10,000" and "the number of official distributed emergency passports soon passed 7,000." Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 1237–1238.

<sup>121</sup>Eva Cooper, "Sadness, Despair, Fear, and Hope," in *Remember Us: A Collection of Memories from Hungarian Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, ed. Evi Blaikie and Abrams, Judy (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 61–62.

<sup>122</sup>Alexander Davis.



Nyilas got tired and impatient, starting to fling their rifles about, even aiming at people assembled for roll calls. Reading long lists of names, they ordered those whose names were not on the lists to stand in line and marched them off separately “for a good swim,” as our guards informed us (which meant to be shot into the Danube). The rest were forced into endless lines and moved toward the ghetto.”<sup>123</sup>

This pattern of the Arrow Cross disregarding the jurisdiction of international protected houses is repeated in a story told by Michael Beck of his childhood: “My mother acquired Swedish protective papers. They allowed us to move into one of the apartment buildings on Pozsonyi Street in Lipótváros, near the Danube River, which stood under the protection of the Swedish Legation in Budapest. Our protected existence turned out to be temporary. Soon the Arrow Cross (Hungarian Fascist) authorities ordered us to move into the ghetto, specifically into a building on Nagydíófa Street, which offered no protection at all.”<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Tibor Vajda recalled: “the Arrowcross had sometimes torn up Schutzpasses when Jews from yellow star houses produced them... Sometimes the Arrowcross were even more hostile to bearers of Schutzpasses, believing they were rich Jews who had managed to buy them.”<sup>125</sup> He later recalls: “From the middle of December, the Swiss Schutzpass became as good as useless. The Arrowcross found out about the mass forgeries, and Szálasi realized that the west would not recognize his government under any circumstances. After that, the Arrowcross simply

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<sup>123</sup> Ozsváth, *When The Danube Ran Red*, 136–137.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Beck, “If At First You Don’t Succeed, Try, Try Again,” in *Red Star, Blue Star: The Lives and Times of Jewish Students in Communist Hungary, 1948-1956*, ed. Andrew Handler and Susan V Meschel (Boulder; New York: East European Monographs ; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1997), 75–80.

<sup>125</sup> Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 78–79.

tore up the Schutzpasses.”<sup>126</sup> Éva Weinmann wrote of a similar experience in her diary while living with her family in a Swiss protected house: “In the afternoon, we were peacefully sitting in the apartment. All of a sudden, the door opens and an Arrow Cross comes in. He has a revolver in his hand. Hands up! he shouted. Everyone raised their hands, except me, because I was lying as if dead. He wanted gold. He got a wedding ring. He was very angry and went away swearing ferociously. One woman had a ring on one of her fingers, which he didn’t notice. In the other apartments, we found out, he wanted money. But one this is for sure: he did it all arbitrarily.”<sup>127</sup>

The decision-making process of Budapest’s Jews was fraught with difficult choices. For the Jews left in the capital of Hungary, their unique ability to make informed decisions always carried the possibility of devastating repercussions. Nevertheless, in Budapest choices could be made.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>127</sup>Weinmann, Lauder Javne Zsidó Közösségi Óvoda, and Judaisztikai Archívum, *Weinmann Éva naplója*.

<sup>128</sup>Like all choices, even in extreme circumstances, events could intervene and change someone’s fate.

## THE PRICE OF AGENCY

Budapest's Jews faced difficult, often heart-wrenching decision during the war. While many privileged choices that saved others, some felt they needed to prioritize saving only themselves. Sometimes decisions were the wrong one; other times they ripped families apart.

Choices for survival were especially difficult because what was beneficial for one person could endanger another. Tibor Vajda had escaped from his labor battalion and had sought refuge with his family in Budapest until his mother kicked him out of the house because she feared for her own safety. Tibor recalled in his memoir: "My mother served up the biggest surprise of my life on 4 November [1944]. She told me I could not hide in the house any longer, because I was endangering everybody's life... My mother could be stubborn once she had made up her mind, and she had always condemned my escape from the camp. She had already arranged for Mr. Pallos to escort me to the Budapest military headquarters in the Maria Terezia Barracks that morning."<sup>129</sup> Fortunately, due to the chaotic situation in Budapest, Tibor managed to escape from these headquarters.

The story of sixteen-year-old Livia Baruch and her younger brother, Freddy, further illustrates the dark side of agency – that the ability to make one's own decisions could have devastating effects. By the time the Germans occupied Hungary, Livia and Freddy were orphaned. They lived with their aunt and grandmother, but relied heavily on each other. Livia remembered being "told that we should be very quiet and that we have

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<sup>129</sup>Vajda, *Hope Dies Last*, 68.

to be humble to grandma and to auntie because they took us in and we haven't got a father, we are half-orphaned. And in a way, unfortunately, it was rubbed into us quite often that we don't have our own home, we are not with our parents. That we are... a second-rate in the family... We were two teenagers who did not have the affection from parents... who leaned on each other. I only know that many times I have protected my brother. And I said that nobody was allowed to say anything bad about him. I am his sister. I can say it, but I am not allowing anyone to say anything bad about him... I was always the leader, a protective person [sic]."

It was not surprising, then, that Livia's aunt abandoned her during the Death Marches.<sup>130</sup> In September 1944, the Hungarian authorities announcement that all Jews (women or men) between 16-60 must gather together at the sports ground. Livia's aunt arrived in high heels, hoping that she would not be made to march from Budapest to the Hungarian border in those shoes. However, this plan did not work, and she marched alongside Livia.

For five days, they walked 25 kilometers per day. The Arrow Cross shot anyone who sat down or could not walk. Livia and her aunt had hidden some jewelry in her clothing, and her aunt used this to pay a peasant to take her from one station to the next. This 25-kilometers-per-day march had gone on for quite some time, so the peasants did this regularly for profit and knew where to drop off Jews. One day Livia's aunt did not show up. The peasant had hidden her aunt and three other women in his barn until the next morning and had taken them to the train to Budapest the next morning. Sixteen-year-old Livia was left to march on her own.

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<sup>130</sup>For more on the Death Marches from Budapest to Hegyeshalom, see Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1994, 963–969.

Livia's aunt made the decision to leave her young niece behind to save herself. While this may not have been the most loving or maternal decision, it was the decision that she felt was right for her and, by making such a decision, Livia's aunt displayed her agency. Fortunately, Livia was able to convince a guard that she was under sixteen years old, and was permitted to walk the five days back to Budapest.

Upon arrival in Budapest, Livia found that her aunt, grandmother, and cousin had obtained a spot in a Swedish protected house. According to Livia, the ghetto was full of poor Jews who could not afford protective passes, and that's where her younger brother had been abandoned. Livia joined her brother, whom she had vowed to protect, only briefly. For she soon had a chance to save herself.

Livia made the choice to abandon her brother, although she certainly could not have known at the time that she would never see him again. On December 25, 1944, Raoul Wallenberg received permission to remove 23 Jews from the ghetto and bring them to one of the 32 Swedish protective houses. Using her "school German," Livia translated for Wallenberg and the Jewish officials in the ghetto. Livia approached Wallenberg, and told him that she would like to leave the ghetto with her brother. He told her that they didn't have time to go home and get her brother, but that they could take her if she were willing to leave immediately. Livia decided to go with them. She never saw her brother again.<sup>131</sup> The agency that Livia Baruch was afforded through the chaos in Budapest under the Arrow Cross allowed her to make a decision that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

Making life and death decisions is never easy, and Budapest's Jews could never know whether to go into hiding, or place their children in hiding, instead of taking their

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<sup>131</sup> *Lily Wolf*.

chances by obtaining protective papers or retreating to the ghetto. At this time, many desperate Jews in Budapest opted to commit suicide.<sup>132</sup> For those who chose to live, the decisions they made to benefit their own chances of survival often left others to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, this was the price Budapest's Jews paid for their agency.

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<sup>132</sup>The demographics of this population is unknown. For a discussion on the decision to commit suicide, see *Marianna Glazek* and *Chaim Feig*, vol. 34315, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1997), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=37315&segmentNumber=36&returnIndex=-1>. In her Shoah Foundation interview, Irén Kempfner describes that her mother, Katalin Kempfner, faked her suicide in order to more effectively go into hiding; *Irene Voros*.

## CONCLUSION

Overwhelmingly, Hungarian Jews looked forward to the imminent Soviet occupation. Randolph Braham (née Adolf Abraham), the preeminent scholar on the Holocaust in Hungary and himself a survivor, recalled: “In our minds, you know, the Soviets were liberators. The champions of socialism, liberty, and all that.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Marika Schonfeld, a 9-year-old hiding in the Hungarian countryside, remembered enthusiastically awaiting the arrival of the Red Army. Throughout her ordeal, she remained hopeful that “the Russians were coming and that maybe my parents were coming with them.”<sup>134</sup> So invested in Russian liberation was one Jewish mother that, when awoken at gunpoint in the middle of the night by “unshaven, dirty, ragged, and... fierce [looking]” men, she reassured her children: “Try not to be afraid. These are Russians. They are here to liberate us.”<sup>135</sup> Livia Baruch recalled the Soviet siege of Budapest fondly: “I was so happy to see the Russians, that they coming closer [sic]. It was a street fight. It was actually from one building to another, and from one street to

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<sup>133</sup> *Randolph Braham*, vol. 29402, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Forest Hills, NJ, 1997), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=31989&returnIndex=0>.

<sup>134</sup> *Marika Somerstein*, vol. 10252, USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive Online (Lawrence, NY, 1995), <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=9695&returnIndex=0>.

<sup>135</sup> Blaikie, *Magda's Daughter: A Hidden Child's Journey Home*, 40–41.

another.” Enthusiastic to hasten German defeat, Livia took to the streets and joined the Red Army in battle. “That,” she recalled as a matter of fact, “was liberation.”<sup>136</sup>

The reality of Soviet occupation was murkier. Food and medicine were scarce, and “people were fighting over the flesh of dead horses in the street.”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, sexual violence against women escalated dramatically. In Budapest alone, Soviet soldiers raped an estimated fifty thousand women – approximately ten percent of the female population of the city.<sup>138</sup> For many Red Army soldiers, rape was an act of revenge against the Fascists and so some, thought certainly not all, avoided raping Jewish women.<sup>139</sup> Still, many Jewish women in Budapest were not so fortunate.<sup>140</sup>

The experiences of rape and murder under Nazi- and later Soviet- occupation were horrific, yet still Budapest’s Jews fared better than their counterparts in the rest of Hungary and most of its Nazi-occupied neighbors (excluding parts of France, Romania,

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<sup>136</sup>*Lily Wolf*.

<sup>137</sup>Blaikie, *Magda’s Daughter: A Hidden Child’s Journey Home*, 46. For corroboration, see also *Lily Wolf* and *Irene Voros*.

<sup>138</sup>James Mark, “Remembering Rape: Divided Social Memory and the Red Army in Hungary 1944-1945,” *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 1, 2005): 133.

<sup>139</sup>Blaikie, *Magda’s Daughter: A Hidden Child’s Journey Home*, 40–43.

<sup>140</sup>Livia Baruch was raped by Russian soldiers during the siege of Budapest. She acquired “gonorrhea through that incident and I didn’t have any medication, there was no medicine at all. So a month or two after we got a red cross pass from the Australian relations. And in there was a medication for that little girl and the grandma, penicillin. But they survived it without the penicillin, so the penicillin was used to me and cured me for my gonorrhea, so that was ok [sic].” Surprisingly, Livia explained that her sexual assault “didn’t bring bad memories. I’ll tell you frankly I was thinking all my life these soldiers were fighting for somebody else’s life. They came through from Russia, left their families, and they came to a hostile country, Hungary, where, alright, the Jews were there to liberate them, but they were already on the way for years, these Russian soldiers. They were frustrated. They found grateful Jews who were kissing them and hugging them to liberate them. And of course for them, they’re not the most educated people, for them it was the open door to go and rape us or have sexual intercourse or whatever. So I looked at it from that point of view and, um, I haven’t got bad feelings for the Russians, really and truly.” *Lily Wolf*. Eight-year-old Irén Kempfner remembered being in bed with her mother, Katalin Kempfner, while her mother was being raped by a Russian soldier; *Irene Voros*.



and Bulgaria). Tamás (later Tom) Lantos, the first and only Holocaust survivor to serve in the US Congress, concluded fifty years after the fact that his experience as a Jew in Budapest during the Holocaust “was not hell, it was purgatory.”<sup>141</sup> While certainly victims of Nazi and Arrow Cross atrocities, the Jews of Budapest were also empowered. Their ability to make informed decisions and employ survival tactics significantly improved their chances of survival and improved – however minimally – their experience during the Holocaust.

The chaotic violence that characterized Budapest under Nazi occupation, and in particular under the Arrow Cross regime, was peculiar within the context of Nazi-occupied Europe, and afforded the Jews of Budapest a unique opportunity for effective agency in the midst of the final months of the Holocaust. Due to the delayed implementation of the Final Solution in Hungary and late-conflict chaos, Budapest’s Jews were better informed than the Jews of neighboring countries. Their economically important community had remained relatively intact, making them better placed to act based on informed decisions. Furthermore, with the Red Army approaching the city and Nazi defeat imminent, Germans and Hungarians were likely to elicit and accept bribes in exchange for promises of postwar testimony in retribution trials. In Budapest under the Arrow Cross regime, a currency of bribery through bargaining with cigarettes, alcohol, sex, food, and emerged. Additionally, the chaos of the siege of Budapest meant that the city’s Jews were often able to obtain falsified and forged identity papers and to pass as gentiles and even Nazis and Arrow Cross Brothers. Budapest’s Jews deployed masquerading as a survival technique, through which they were able to help not only themselves but also others. It was also significant that, by 1944, when the Final Solution

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<sup>141</sup> *Tom Lantos.*

began in Hungary, much of the international community was aware of Nazi atrocities. The international community pressured the Hungarians to stop deportations, sparing only the Jews of Budapest from Auschwitz. Diplomats, including Raoul Wallenberg, Karl Lutz, Jorge (Giorgio) Perlasca, and Angelo Rotta aided in relief efforts in the country's capital. The Jews of Budapest utilized these relief efforts, assisting and augmenting in the process. Of course, the decision-making process of Budapest's Jews was fraught with difficult choices. The unique opportunity afforded to Budapest's Jews to make informed decisions often had devastating repercussions. For the Jews of Budapest, there was a dark side to agency.

Nevertheless, Budapest's Jews were able to make informed decisions and employ tactics that displayed their capacity to exercise effective agency, which often made the difference between life and death. A combination of knowledge, flexibility, and leverage, facilitated by the chaotic violence that characterized Budapest under the Nazis and Arrow Cross regime between March 1944 and February 1945, helped to create this unique opportunity for agency. The inverse of the conditions in Budapest may have limited Jewish agency elsewhere. Perhaps the survival strategies used by the Jews of Budapest – bargaining, and masquerading – would have been employed by Jews in neighboring countries had they access to the knowledge, flexibility, and leverage afforded the Jews of Budapest.

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