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Vera Parocai - Holocaust Rescuers Interviews

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Interview with Vera Parocai, rescuer from Hungary

August 11, 1986 in Israel

Respondent: Vera Parocai

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This is an interview with Vera Parocai, a rescuer from Hungary. The interview is translated from the Hungarian language into English.

I. What is your name?

R. Vera Parocai.

I. Where have you been born?

R. In Tisse Alper.

I. Where is Tisse Alper located?

R. Near Kiskunfelepy here in Hungary.

I. What was your father's name?

R. Tstvan Parocai.

I. What was your mother's name?

R. Irobs Easter.

I. How many sisters and brothers did you have?

R. Ten.

I. We go back to the year of 1940. Can you remember what happened this time?

R. Till 1944 not much happened.

I. I was there in 1940. Many restrictions were brought for the Jews, but the hard time came only in 1944. In March, 1944 the Germans arrived and then the hard times came for the Jews. You could not serve the Jews anymore and at this time I came back to Vyirepy here. Gyuri's grandmother lived there where I used to be before. What was the name of the family where you went?

- R. Stresser Miliely. At that time I went to Vyiregyliese because I could not stay in Budapest with Gyuri's parents, because there in the house everyone knew me, that I stayed with Jews. This house became marked with a Jewish star. There were living about hundred Jewish families and only two Christian families there.
- I. In 1940 you lived already with the Stresser family. So first you lived with the Stresser family and then you lived in Budapest with the parents of Gyuri, with the Grossman family.
- R. Yes, they took me there as a maid to look after the child called Gyuri.
- I. What was the situation at this time in 1940? Did they tell about what is happening to Jews?
- R. No, never told anyone anything about it. But in 1942 my brother was a soldier in Poland. The Germans always pushed forward the Hungarians. In the fighting military group was my brother and always traveled on the horseback.
- I. How many sisters/brothers you had?
- R. Ten.
- I. What was the name of your brother?
- R. Gyule.
- I. Have you been the first child?
- R. No, the fourth one.
- I. So what happened to Gyule?
- R. He was called into the army. Went to Poland and in Poland, where always two soldiers went together, the mine exploded, the other man died and my brother got wounded on the eye. When he recovered in the hospital he came home for vacation. At that time in 1942 he asked me: "Vera what is happening with the Jews, with the Stressers?" He told me: "Tell the doctor that they should do something or they should leave for some place because one should not see what see what terrible things happening in Poland to the Jews."
- I. At this time you acknowledged already what is happening to the Jews?
- R. Yes, I in Hungary never heard these things, also they hoped, the uncles of Gyuri, that probably nothing will happen there. Or it will end the trouble.
- I. How did you feel when you heard about the bad news?

R. Good, I also thought as they did that the Germans will never reach us, that the fights will come to the end. This is what I heard, but no one spoke anything before.

I. What happened after?

R. When in 1944 came out the law that I cannot stay with Jews, I went down to the Gelepy haze to the Gyuri's grandmother. Grandmother was already 84 years old and sick. There I could not stay either, but went to see her. That was 8 km distant from Alper and in the evening I went out in the morning in and I was there with the grandmother.

I. So you left your city because you have been afraid that someone will hurt you because you work for Jews.

R. Yes.

I. What have you been afraid from?

R. From nothing. I had to leave so I could not stay there. When someone could see that a Christian is still there with the Jews could respect me and they would take me away. Everyone know me. I knew a family in Budapest where was also a young peasant girl staying for a long time with Jews. The Jew was a doctor. The girl always cried that what will be with her when they will take away her lady. The lady told the maid that when they will be taken away they will take care of her that she should have enough money to live on. One morning when she had to leave, when the Jews were taken away, she still went to the house through the window. This morning she found the doctor and his wife dead in the bed. She started to run and she went to the mother of her lady to tell about the happenings. She became very worried about her future and she jumped out from the window and she died.

I. So you heard it and you became also worried?

R. Yes, yes. I was there. I talked to the girl.

I. You have been afraid of that something similar can happen to you?

R. I told you the story to show that it was not allowed for Christians to work for Jews. I came in and back. In the evening I went with a motor train. In the mornings at eight o'clock I went again. Sunday morning I went in because grandmother was religious. We managed a kosher household. At this time the grandchild always came to visit, also, the daughter of her oldest daughter. She was already married, her husband was already taken away. This morning I came in and I see that the German officers are standing in front of the shop. The apartment wasn't on the same place where the shop. Still one of the sons was living with the grandmother. When I came in I told him, "Young man don't go on the street because the Germans are standing in front of your shop. They are rounding up the wealthy merchants." But he told me: "Teca I have to go to open the shop." In spite of the fact I told him not to go, he went and was caught.

I. When was it?

R. In 1944.

I. You do not want to talk more about what was going on till 1944?

R. No.

I. So let us continue. What was going on in 1944? How long have you stayed with the Stressers?

R. For one year, before Gyuri was born. Before I came to Felepyhese. My sister was born in Budapest at Gyuri's parents.

I. Who is Gyuri?

R. Gyuri is the man with whom I stay now. Mr. Gyozy Grossman, the only son. To this man they took me as a nursemaid.

I. What was the name of Gyuri's father and mother?

R. Grossman Armin and Stresser Jolan. Their only son was Gyuri. When Gyuri was born in 1924 I went there. Gyuri was born on July 6 but I went there already in May.

I. Let me clarify things. In 1944 where have you been? How long have you been in this house? It seems that you have been already there for 20 years.

R. Yes.

I. Who was staying in the household?

R. Four people: father, mother, Gyuri and me.

I. Then Gyuri went to the forced labor camp. And what has happened after?

R. After, his father and mother stayed alone. I went down to Felepyhese, because I did not have a place in Budapest where to stay. Since then I was in Felepyhese at the grandmother.

I. What month was it in 1944?

R. In May. In July they went into a ghetto. I was there everywhere in the house. I helped them to pack for the ghetto and to take things there. I went into the ghetto. I took for them food and clothing there. There was a 9 year old girl there and I wanted to take her with me. I took her with me. At this time I already had a cousin in Felepyhese where I lived.

- I. Who had this 9 year old girl?
- R. Gyuri's uncle. There were four families of Stressers in the ghetto.
- I. How many children were in the Stresser family?
- R. In 1944 there were four children. Gyuri's mother, one boy, the youngest who stayed with the mother and two married. Everyone lived separately. I moved from one family to the other. I stayed in Felepyhese until they were deported.
- I. How many members were in the uncle's family?
- R. Six. They could not take the grandmother with because she was sick and shortly she died. I arranged the burial for the grandmother. The sons could not go to the cemetery. They advised me what to do. They advised me to bury her next to her husband but I could not put the name already on the stone because it was no time left. Then they took them away. They took them away in July. Resso still wrote to me a care to Solnok. They were put on the cattle train in "Vecshemet". The train stopped in Solnok. He wrote to me a card saying, "My Teca, the God left us alone." I never saw them anymore. No one returned.
- I. When they left where did you go?
- R. I went to Alper and I went to work in a pub as a cleaning woman.
- I. What happened with all?
- R. I helped all in the ghetto. When it was more, they had to put everything on one place.
- I. What was your feeling going in the ghetto? Have you been scared?
- R. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. They were more scared than I have been.
- I. What would happen when they would catch you?
- R. At the worst care they would take me with them. I would not be able to do anything. You know that against the law you can not do anything.
- I. Who was with you? You did not want to save them?
- R. Yes I wanted to save them. Resso had a 3 year old girl and I wanted to save her. I took her out for a week but they were announcing with a drum beat that when they catch someone who saves Jewish items of life, they will be shot. They were already in the ghetto and Resso said "Because I came in still everyday from 11-4 you could come in." I should bring back the girl, because they do not want me to be shot.

- I. What happened to the girl?
- R. They took her away, she never came back.
- I. Where did you meet Gyuri?
- R. Then when the Russians came, because they took them in July. In October the Russians occupied Peged and I went again to Budapest. We escaped from the Russians in Alper. My father came, my sister who died in Budapest by a bombardment. I worked in the MABI hospital then, when I went back to Pest.
- I. What do you think, how did you help them to save the family?
- R. With food, they always gave me money. I had their money, their jewelry. They gave it to me that I should have money when they will need something. I did not do it because they gave me money. I did not take any money for myself.
- I. So you could not save anyone?
- R. No, I had to take the girl back because I did not have an apartment. I always came and gone. I tried to save them but I could not. That time it was already very dangerous. I was there when they took them away.
- I. How did it happen that you took out the girl from the ghetto?
- R. Then I lived in Vjiregyhase in a rented room at my cousin's, but she did not mind. She was always employed by Jews so she did not use abusive language about Jews. So I kept the girl there for a week. Then I had to take her back to the ghetto. They took them away and they never came back.
- I. What did you feel during the time when the girl stayed with you?
- R. That it will become better. The girl liked me very much. I was always in the family. They had a beautiful villa and I was always there when they had a party or a holiday. Her father always told me that they have a room furnished for me and still I live I can stay with them. Then the terrible time came. Even they did not think what is going to happen because if they would think they would act differently, because they were not poor.
- I. So how do you feel about it? What was the things that you helped?
- R. Good. I am not sorry. I wish I could help them. Even now many times I dream with them with the doctor. I think I dream with them because they feel it now, that they did not give me to save the girl. The girl has a brother in America who survived.
- I. So you wanted to save them, but you could not save them. You helped them only with food.

- R. Yes, what I could help I helped, but I could not save them because they did not go anywhere. They had many, many friends because they were in the wholesale business, many people came in the shop and called them. They told them: "Come dear doctor we take you with our coach, we will dress you for a peasant and you will come out with us on the fields for hoeing."
- I. So you tried to offer them to save them? If some of them will hide in your apartment you will hide them?
- R. Yes, in my apartment they could not hide because I did not have my own apartment.
- I. They did not ask you to hide them?
- R. No, no, even the other offers they were not willing to accept.
- I. That you had so much good quality in you. What do you think what was it that did it?
- R. The long time that I stayed with them, the long time.
- I. Why did you think that you had to help?
- R. I thought because they were good to me, also for humanitarian feeling. They were good to everyone they liked even my parents very much.
- I. What was their relationship with your parents?
- R. They came to the shop to buy and the doctor used to tell my father: "Come in the shop Mr. Parocai and we will give you everything you need."
- I. You say the occupation of your parents were peasants and what was their religion and yours?
- R. Roman Catholic, but we were not religious, did not go to church.
- I. Your religion influenced you by helping?
- R. Yes and my parents also helped. When I came again to Budapest my father was also there and when we saved Gyuri my father was already there and told. In the hospital court stayed a big building where the doctors lived. My sister received an apartment there with her husband. They hid Gyuri under the bed of my father for one night.
- I. Who hid Gyuri?
- R. My sister and I. Two more people helped in the family. Yes, even my brother-in-law. One day a "Nyilas" told my brother-in-law that he should help to catch a Jew for him. He answered: "You should do what you want, I do not help, I don't harm anyone."

I. Who was the person who influenced your life, who served as a role model for you?

R. No one. I stayed alone. No one told me anything.

I. Your mother?

R. She died already in 1926.

I. But during your life time who was your role model?

R. In our house we never heard to tell abusively about Jews. In our village there were living only three Jewish families. The Germans never came there.

I. Can you tell about what was your relationship with the Jews before?

R. I was employed by them. I was with them. They were good.

I. What did your parents tell about Jews? Did they discriminate Jews?

R. No, never. Gyuri had an aunt and when my mother came in the house she always saw her that she is suffering from rheumatism and limping. When she came home she told us: "I am so sorry for this young beautiful Jewish woman."

I. Did you know other people who tried to help Jews?

R. No.

I. What happened after the Jews were taken away?

R. I went to Budapest.

I. How did you feel about the Jews at that time?

R. With the same way as before. At that time I was also always with them. I went to visit Gyuri's mother everyday to see what happened to them.

I. Did you feel that the Jews or probably the Gypsies are different people?

R. No, I always thought that everybody is equal.

I. Can you talk a little bit about your parents?

R. I never heard from them to use abusive talks about Jews. They never hurt anyone.

I. What was your education?

- R. I never went to school.
- I. So not even your teachers influenced your attitudes?
- R. No.
- I. Have you had many friends?
- R. No, I never went anywhere. On Sundays I always went out for a walk with the family and the child. I never had even a single friend, to me no one came.
- I. Did you feel as a strong Catholic? Did you go often to church?
- R. No, I never went to church. I rather went to the synagogue till the child was small with the father. I went to the "Doliany" Synagogue and later on with Gyuri's mother after 1944 I was every Friday night at the "Doliany" Synagogue.
- I. So when did you come together with Gyuri? After the war ended?
- R. I went back. I worked in the Mabi hospital.
- I. What was your relationship when you find from the family? From the four family?
- R. Only the Grossmans. Those who lived in the province did not return home.
- I. How did you feel about this thing?
- R. Sometimes good, sometimes bad. I cried a lot.
- I. Did you feel guilty?
- R. No
- I. So you felt that you did whatever you could do?
- R. Yes, what I could I helped. Later on Gyuri came and from this time on I still stayed for 13 years with his mother till she died. And after that I came her to Gyuri.
- I. When you think back into the past, what is it that you would do differently now?
- R. I would try to save them harder.
- I. How do you feel about the Germans or about those nations who helped to destroy the Jews.
- R. I don't know what shall I say. Even now I am sorry for that what the Germans did.

- I. Do you think that people are generally good or bad?
- R. There are good and also bad people.
- I. Do you think that they could help more?
- R. Many people could do many more if they would have the good will.
- I. What do you think why they did not help?
- R. Because many people were very glad to see the hurting Jews. In Budapest we went to bring wine for my brother-in-law who loved to drink. Standing in the line on St. Istvan place where my sister was with me was saw marching Jews. I made a remark about the suffering of these Jews. The man next to me answered as follows: "Are you pity for them? Go with them?"
- I. What did you answer?
- R. I did not answer anything. You could not because the "Nyilas" would take you out from the line and beat you up. They were terrible people.
- I. What did you see during the time the "Nyilas" were in the region?
- R. Where they could everywhere they killed the Jews. Everywhere. You could not say a word in Budapest. I worked in the Mali hospital where I also lived. We were five cleaning women. Gyuri's mother came very often to visit me.
- I. When was it?
- R. In 1944.
- I. Before the ghetto?
- R. No, there were already ghettos, also in Budapest. Gyuri's mother lived in the Protected House. There was a cleaning woman among us by the name of Anne who told me: "Vera, I do not care, but I don't want to see anymore this Jewish woman coming to you." Since then she never came to me. I was also scared. I told her that I will go to see her, but I do not want her to come again.
- I. What would happen when the "Nyilas" would know about it?
- R. They would shoot me. At that time it was such a terrible atmosphere during the Nyilas time. I had a friend where I went to buy something sometimes. My sister suggested to go out this evening to buy something. Gyuri's mother told about my whereabouts to her brother-in-law. He came there this evening to this place. He asked me to do something

for him. He run away from the Protected House because the “Nyilas” rounded up the Jews there and he did not have where to go. These friends were dangerous “Nyilas” people, so I had to lie about Gyuri’s uncle and I told them that he is my very good friend who run away from the Russians, who entered into his city. He slept there one night.

I. So you saved him for one night. When I asked you before if you saved someone you did not remember. Even for one night to save someone in this bad time is a big thing.

R. For one night I had the sister of Mr. Grossman by the name of Lentie. Also Gyuri was there. When the Germans did not know already what to do with a group of “labor camp” Jews, they put them, 200 boys, in the “Nyugeti Pebyaudvar” railway station. Their watchman was so nice and told everyone to go wherever they think to go. Gyuri’s mother told Gyuri that I am working in the Mabi hospital, so Gyuri came to me and slept over two nights in my place. Then my oldest sister’s daughter went to the police station to get Aryan papers for Gyuri. At that time you could not walk on the street without papers. So Gyuri got the papers and was able to walk on the streets.

I. When I asked you previously whom you saved it seemed like you did not remember these things.

R. Yes, because we talked about Felepy here and did not want to jump forward so much. In Budapest Gyuri and his mother survived.

I. His mother survived? How?

R. At this time Gyuri had the Aryan papers and he brought out his mother from the Protected House.

I. So you got the Aryan papers for him?

R. Yes, yes, he brought out his mother, rented a room and they lived there together.

I. How did you help them at this time?

R. I could not help them because I could not get there. I did not see them all of the time. They lived in Prater Street. I saw them only after the liberation. At this time in “Elizabeth Square” was still shootings in Bude but they were back already in their apartment. I went there again. The Germans were in Bude and Gyuri’s mother was still afraid that they will return, but they did not succeed anymore.

I. When Gyuri got the papers how long was he able to use it?

R. Till the end. That was in December and Pest was liberated in February. He took a post as a Nyilas watchman with the Aryan papers.

I. How many times you saw him during this time?

- R. Not, I did not meet them, not the mother. His father was taken away already in October. When I came to Budapest Gyuri's father was not home anymore. I went to her mother all of the time. Once the "Nyilas" closed the door and did not let me out. The Superintendent saved me. They let me out telling me that at this time they let me out, but not anymore and I should not hear or see anything what they did. By another occasion me and my father went there with a card. They prepared three suitcases from the cellar.
- I. How long did you live in Israel with Gyuri?
- R. Since 1963.
- I. How long did you stay in Hungary?
- R. Gyuri left in 1949, her mother stayed there and I stayed there with his mother until 1962 until she died. When the mother died I came here.
- I. Who brought you here?
- R. Gyuri.
- I. You wanted to come to Israel?
- R. Yes, when I would not come here I would go to America.
- I. How do you feel about living in Israel?
- R. Well, I did not want to go back to Hungary even for a visit.
- I. You have not been going back to Hungary?
- R. Once I went.
- I. You have still some relatives in Hungary?
- R. I have my sister over there, also my brother.
- I. What is your sister's name?
- R. Julia.
- I. Did she also help Jews?
- R. No she has not been with Jews lately. She lived in Csepel. She worked in the factory in Csepel.
- I. What else would you like to tell us more? What else comes to your mind?

R. I haven't got more to tell. When Gyuri's mother died I came here. I have not been back to Hungary for many years. Only two years ago I went back for the first time to Hungary.

I. You want to stay here?

R. When I was there I did not want to stay. My sister and her daughter asked me to stay there but I did not want to stay there.

I. Now I would like to interview Gyuri. I wanted to here how he saw things to happen. How he felt towards you. And now I have to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to interview you. We are going to use this interview for very important purposes. To show the world that there were some nice people at that time, who helped the Jews and were not standing by without helping.

R. Were there people who helped. In our house the superintendent saved 70 Jews.

I. He is still in Hungary? Has he had children?

R. No he is not in life anymore and he did not have children.

I. Do you know about other persons who saved Jews?

R. I know Aunt Anne told me that she had 70 Jews in her house, but I do not remember their names.

I. So thank you again for the interview and your noble work of saving Jews.