

Excerpts from the Diary of Eva Heyman

Born: Oradea, Romania

February 13, 1931

The only child of a cosmopolitan Hungarian Jewish couple, Eva grew up in a city on the border between Romania and Hungary. Nearly one-fifth of the city's population was Jewish. Eva was a small child when her parents, Agi and Bela, divorced, and she went to live with her grandparents.

February 13, 1944

I've turned thirteen. I was born on Friday the thirteenth. Agi is terribly superstitious, though she is ashamed to admit it. This is the first time Agi didn't come for my birthday. I know that she's about to have an operation but she could still have managed to come. There are good doctors in Varad, too. She didn't come home for my thirteenth birthday. Agi is happy now, Uncle Bela is out of jail already. Agi loves Uncle Bela very much; I love him, too. Grandma says that there isn't another soul Agi loves besides Uncle Bela, not even me. But I don't believe it. It may be when I was little she didn't love me, but she loves me now. Especially since I promised to be a news photographer and to marry an Aryan Englishman. Granpa says that by the time I get married it won't matter whether my husband is Jewish or not.....

I always used to have a birthday party. But already last year only my two best friends came over - Marica Kecskemeti, my cousin, and Aniko Pajor - and Agi was there too.

My grandmother said she wouldn't allow a birthday party, so that the Aryans shouldn't say that the Jewish children are showing off.....

Grandma says that I'll be even prettier than Agi, and that she's only charming but I'll have a modern figure. That's because I do a lot of athletics, swimming, skating, bicycle riding and exercise.....

February 14, 1944

Dear diary, I promised to write Márta's story down in you, because you're my best friend and I mustn't keep any secret from you. Márta was two years older than I. Ági said that she was a genius in dance and resembled Josephine Baker, except that she is a Negro and Márta was only dark and glorious. I was always very proud that a genius two classes ahead of me was my friend. That afternoon, it will be three years this summer, Márta was over at our house. First we went riding our bicycles in Szálldobágy. That was my first "tour" on this bicycle. Marta's was just like mine, only hers was a brighter red. Then we came home, and Ági asked Márta to dance something to music from a record but Marta didn't want to, because she was tired from riding the bicycle. Then we had an afternoon snack, chocolate with whipped cream and strawberries with whipped cream, which Márta loved more than anything else, even more than dancing. Suddenly the bell at the front gate rang five times. It was Márta's nursemaid, who had stayed on

with them as a cook, because Márta didn't need a nursemaid any more. She came in and said: "Mártika, come home. The police are there, and you have to go with Papa and Mama". I still remember Ági. She turned white as the plaster on the walls. But Marta said it must be because she rode her bicycle so fast on Rimanóci Street, and her father had said many times that she would end up at the police on account of "speeding". That explanation reassured me, but Ági paced up and down the room in such a strange manner, and she kept calling Aunt Pástor, Márta's grandmother, on the telephone but there was no answer. In the morning I also called, but there was no answer from Márta's telephone. I heard Ági tell Grandma that at the Journalists Club the night before they had said that the government was preparing to do something terrible, and Jews who weren't born in Hungary would be taken to Poland where a horrible fate was in store for them.

I didn't understand this right away, because Márta was born in Várad, and so was her mother, and her grandfather had owned a daily newspaper in Nagyvárad an awfully long time ago, even before Ági was born. I think the name of the newspaper was "Nagyvárad Friss Ujság". But Márta's grandfather, Uncle Pásztor, is dead, and now they only have a bookstore and an advertising agency, managed by Márta's father, Uncle Münzer. Ági said that Uncle Münzer was born in Bukovina, but that doesn't matter because that area also belonged to the Monarchy. At that time I didn't know what "monarchy" meant, so I thought I would ask Grandpa, because he is old and remembers everything; he remembers things that happened a long time ago. When Márta's mother was still single she studied in Vienna; Uncle Münzer did, too. They fell in love, and got married, and ever since they've been living here in Várad. Uncle Münzer knew Hungarian well, but Márta didn't know German, only English.

The tension then was awful. Ági cried and cried and kept telephoning, and Grandma kept saying that it was dangerous to discuss such things on the telephone. Then Ági rushed into town to the journalists, and they told her that tens of thousands of people like Márta and her family had been taken away to Poland in a train, without luggage and without food. They said that if Aunt Münzer hurried up and got a divorce, she and Márta might be allowed to stay. But they didn't want to get divorced. And Márta didn't want to stay here without her father. Ági heard that Grandmother Pásztor went to Pest, the capital, where she tried everything. I think that some Minister by the name of Keresztes-Fisher sent a telegram to the Polish border to have them taken off the train, but the telegram never arrived. Ági said even then that this was a lie and that they were only making excuses, because nowadays everybody was bad and nobody obeyed orders, not even from a Minister. Márta's bicycle was left near mine, beside the gate, and we didn't have the heart to send it to Márta's grandmother. Ági cried a lot whenever she saw the two red bicycles standing alongside each other. I even asked her why she always cried, since they wouldn't take us away from here, because my father was born in Budapest, Uncle Béla in Komárom and Grandpa in Kaposvár. But she only cried more and said that a lot could still happen, and that they could still take us to Poland in a train just because we were Jews and because there was fascism here. I don't know what fascism is, but one of the things it probably means is deporting Jews to Poland. Márta's grandmother says that Márta and her parents are alive, but they can't write, because the Germans don't allow it.

A lot of soldiers have already dropped in on them quite a few times, and after asking her for money they told her that they had seen Márta, and her mother, too, in some Polish town called Kamenetz-Podolsk. I found the place on my map and marked it with red. But they don't have any clothing, because they weren't allowed to take luggage along, and the soldiers bring them their clothing so they shouldn't suffer from the cold. I've also heard that Aunt Pásztor

brushes Uncle Münzer's dress-suit. Because the suit is in the house where it isn't of use to anyone. The soldiers ask especially for warm clothing, because it's cold there, but Márta's mother doesn't seem to be bothered by the cold, because my grandfather heard that recently a soldier came to get her summer dresses. I asked Ági about it, but she didn't want to talk about it.

February 14, 1944

My birthday is over. We had tea with sandwiches and Sacher torte. We used to have cacao with whipped cream, but now there isn't enough milk, because of the war. Besides, drinking tea is more grown-up. It was quite a good party. Marica wasn't so nice, because she's a year older and studies dance, English and piano, though she hates practicing. Agi won't let me study piano, even though I have a good ear; she says I don't have any talent at all, and that I'll study English when I'm a little bigger. A news photographer has to know English, too. My father promised that at the end of the year I would get a magnesium lamp for taking indoor pictures, because I'm pretty good at that already. I've even taken a picture of Anni, but she came out ugly, and she said that I don't know how to take pictures at all. But I do know how to, and I'll do it still better if I have a Zeiss-Ikon like my father, and I'll learn how to develop the films. Anyway, the bathroom window is all pasted up with black paper against air raids, and it's absolutely dark in there, so it will even be possible to develop the pictures.

Many people say that there will be bombing here, too, as in Germany. Agi heard on some foreign radio broadcast that Munich doesn't even exist any more. But she loves the English very much, and the only things she believes are those she hears secretly on the English radio; it's forbidden to listen, and Grandma Rác says that we will all end up in jail on account of Agi – she even listens to Radio Moscow, which is even more serious, but Agi thinks that the Russians don't tell lies, and neither does the Voice of America; only the German radio and the Hungarian radio tell lies. Just as we were having our afternoon snack yesterday, Agi telephoned from Budapest to say that she was going into the sanatorium tomorrow. She says there is nothing to worry about, because it's only going to be a minor operation; if she were having the operation here I could visit her every day, but as it is, only Uncle Béla will be with her. She also says that in March they will come and stay here until the war ends. Uncle Béla can't work anyway, on account of the Jewish Law. The law also applies to pharmacists, but thank God it doesn't include Grandpa, because Jews are allowed to keep pharmacies if they actually own them; only pharmacy managers cannot be Jews. That is why Bácskay is now in the pharmacy, too, as manager, but Grandpa does the actual work, even though Bácskay is a young man.

Grandma says that our income has gone down because of Bácskay, but what can we do about it? We should only come out of the war in one piece, and then Grandpa will be manager again. Grandpa was the President of the pharmacists in our town, but he was thrown out because he is a Jew.

February 17, 1944

Agi told Grandma Racz that it's better not to pay any attention to the fact that I'm jealous. Every child has its faults. Agi has known children who always lied, and even stole. And I really hardly ever tell lies - mostly in school, or to my French teacher, when I haven't done my homework, and I say that I had a headache or a toothache.

February 21, 1944

I neglected you these last few days, dear diary, because I didn't have time to write. We got our mid-year report-cards. Anni Pajor and I are the best ones of the class.

Jusztí was here today, she was very happy about the report-card, and she gave me a present of the fourth and fifth volumes of "The Little Rebel". I love Jusztí more than anyone else in the world, a little more than Agi, but right after her; Agi, then Papa, and right after Papa comes Uncle Bela and Grandpa and Grandma Racz, and then Grandma Lujza. Grandma Racz mustn't be told this, because she will get cross immediately.

March 14, 1944

The Agis are here. I haven't scribbled in you for a long time, dear diary. But I've been very busy. I've done a lot of studying, because Anni jumped ahead, and even though she's my best friend, I can't allow that. I love Anni a lot, and Agi thinks she has a good influence on me, but still I'm a bit jealous of her.....

Dear diary, you know something interesting? When we were alone together, two minutes hadn't passed and Agi, as though she saw right to the bottom of my soul with her eyes, asked me: So, Eva-Doll (she always calls me that), you don't happen to have some secret you want to tell me, do you? I just don't understand how Agi guessed that I'm in love with Pista Vadas. You know, dear diary, I immediately told her everything! Even that I walk in the direction of the Vadas shop when I really have to go in another direction, and sometimes I hang around for ten minutes looking in the Vadas shop window.....

Dear diary, it's so different with the Agis at home that I don't even care if the war goes on for a long time! But that's disgusting of me, because so many people are suffering. That's not that I mean. What I mean is that the most wonderful thing in the world is when the whole family is always together. For us, that's a very rare thing!

March 16, 1944

In the afternoon Papa was here too. He came to visit Agi and Uncle Bela. They had a very pleasant conversation, the way friends talk. Agi always tells me that she was never angry at Papa, and she explains that I should love my Papa the way I love her, and that even though they got divorced, I'm a child of both of them equally. Dear diary, I have a lot of homework. Ever since the Agis are here, I hardly ever study, and something unpleasant may still happen to me in school.

March 18, 1944

There are constant air raid alarms in Pest. Dear diary, I'm so afraid that here too, there will be air raids. I can hardly write, because I kept thinking about what will happen if they bomb Varad, after all. I want to live at all costs.

March 19, 1944

My little Diary you are the happiest, because you cannot feel the great misfortune that happened to us. The Germans came to take over! What only uncle Bela feared, has indeed happened...

This is the first day that Agi got out of bed for lunch, grandfather even noted that she is as weak as an autumn fly, yet she sat and ate with us. There was excellent punch cake, wine and espresso. No one turned on the radio all day long. At noon, uncle Bela wanted to listen to the news, but Agi begged him not to and said: Today, let's not worry about politics, let's live our private lives...

Somehow, word got around that uncle Bela and Agi were here and in the afternoon, Agi's girl friends came over. Uncle Bela was visited by his best friend in Oradea, uncle Sandor Friedlander. A large crowd has gathered, when uncle Bela and uncle Sandor Friedlander went out to a cafe. Less than ten minutes later, uncle Bela and uncle Sandor Friedlander came back, both of them white as the wall. I can still hear uncle Sandor's voice: We are all ruined, the Germans are in Budapest since this morning.

March 21, 1944

Agi's friends and uncle Bela's acquaintances spent all day at our house. Now everyone in the city knows they're here and everyone is seeking their advice. Uncle Bela is telling everyone that they should get false papers and cross over to Romania. But grandmother is turning her eyes in such a weird manner when she hears about escaping and it is impossible to escape with Agi, since her scar still hurts...

March 25, 1944

I was on my way home when the German soldiers came marching in, with cannons and tanks, the kind I've seen in the newsreels.

Grandma says that the Aryans are greeting her coolly in the street, or turning the other way. There is a new government already, and Sztojaj is Prime Minister. I don't know the rest of it, but Agi says that this is the end of everything; we won't see the end of the war.

March 26, 1944

On the radio they keep announcing all kinds of regulations about the Jews, all the things they are not allowed to do. Agi spoke to Budapest today, too. She says that all their friends have already been captured by the Germans, who kill all of them, including children.

Since the Germans are here, I can think only of Marta. She was also a child, yet the Germans killed her. But I don't want them to kill me. I'd like to become a photo journalist and at age 24 marry an English Aryan...

March 27, 1944

Jusztai came by today. She cried terribly and said that Mrs. Poroszlay would allow me to hide on their land, but Mr. Poroszlay would not even hear of it. Yet, I could live in a pigsty, or in a stable, I'd work anywhere, I'd drive the sheep, only not to be shot by the Germans, like Marta...

March 28, 1944

Aunt Friedlander was just here. Early this morning the German and Hungarian police took Uncle Sandor and everyone they knew who is a Socialist or Communist.

We heard on the radio this evening that in Budapest all the books ever written by Uncle Bela were taken to some kind of mill, because his books mustn't be read anymore, and they are harmful to people. But not only Uncle Bela's books are harmful, also those written by other people. For example, those of Ferenc Molnar, of which I've already read "The Pal Street Boys." I really don't know how that can be harmful to people.

March 29, 1944

Today they came from the Jewish Community and they took away nearly all the linen. The Germans request almost daily something from the Jews, one day the typewriter, another day the carpets, today the bed linen. First, grandmother tried to negotiate, then she said it was futile, and let them take it. She did not even want to make selections, she handed the keys to the linen closet to these total strangers, the same keys which in the olden days she would not easily give even to Jusztai or Agi.

Jusztai came by again today. Her eyes were red from crying, as if she were Jewish herself. She says she will die because she can't save me - whom she loves most in this world - from possibly what awaits me.

March 31, 1944

Today an order was issued that from now on Jews have to wear a yellow star-shaped patch. The order tells exactly how big the star patch must be, and that it must be sewn on every outer garment, jacket or coat.

April 5, 1944

Grandmother Lujza was very happy to see me, she is very calm. She says she doesn't mind if she has to die. Yes, but she is 72 and I am only 13 years old. Grandmother Lujza is worried only about my father, my aunt, aunt Lilli and myself. She says that now it is of utmost importance to stay healthy, because then one can endure everything. While there, a lady came in running with the news that Emil Vaiszlovics was arrested and taken to the Elementary School on Koros Street. They broke into his hotel and the Germans and Hungarians robbed him of everything they could. Even though grandmother is not on speaking terms with Emil Vaiszlovics, she was still terrified. Grandmother Lujza believed that they will not dare touch Emil Vaiszlovics, after having been beaten up by the Romanians because he was so pro Hungarian. Grandmother Lujza questioned if it has been worthwhile for Emil to be so 'Hungarian'...Now they even helped the Germans rob the hotel, instead of defending him.

April 7, 1944

Today they came for my bicycle. I almost caused a big drama. You know, dear diary, I was awfully afraid just by the fact that the policemen came into the house. I know that policemen bring only trouble with them, wherever they go. My bicycle had a proper license plate, and Grandpa had paid the tax for it.

That's how the policemen found it, because it was registered at City Hall that I have a bicycle. Now that it's all over, I'm so ashamed about how I behaved in front of the policemen. So, dear diary, I threw myself on the ground, held on to the back wheel of my bicycle, and shouted all sorts of things at the policemen: "Shame on you for taking away a bicycle from a girl! That's robbery!"

We had sold my old bicycle, my layette and Grandpa's old winter coat and added the money we had saved. My grandparents, Juszti, the Ágis, Grandma Lujza and Papa all had chipped in to buy my bicycle. We still didn't have the whole sum, but Hoffmann didn't sell the bicycle to anyone else, and he even said that I could take the bicycle home. My father would pay, or Grandpa. But I didn't want to take the bicycle home until we had all the money. But in the meantime I hurried over to the store whenever I could and looked to see if that red bicycle was still there. How Ági laughed when I told her that when the whole sum was finally there. I went to the store and took the bicycle home, only I didn't ride it but led it along with my hands, the way you handle a big, beautiful dog. From the outside I admired the bicycle, and even gave it a name: Friday.

I took the name from Robinson Crusoe, but it suits the bicycle. First of all, because I brought it home on a Friday, and also because Friday is the symbol of loyalty, because he was so loyal to Robinson. The "Bicycle Friday" would be loyal to "Éva Robinson", and I was right, because for three years it never gave me any trouble, that is, it never broke down, and there were no expenses for repair. Marica and Anni also gave their bicycles names. Marica's was called Horsie, and Anni's was called Berci just because that's such a funny name.

One of the policemen was very annoyed and said: All we need is for a Jewgirl to put on such a comedy when her bicycle is being taken away. No Jewkid is entitled to keep a bicycle

anymore. The Jews aren't entitled to bread, either; they shouldn't guzzle everything, but leave the food for the soldiers. You can imagine, dear diary, how I felt when they were saying this to my face. I had only heard that sort of thing on the radio, or read it in a German newspaper. Still, it's different when you read something and when it's thrown into your face. Especially if it's when they're taking my bicycle away.

Actually, what does that nasty policeman think? That we stole the bicycle? We bought it from Hoffmann for cash, and Grandpa and all the others worked for this money. But you know, dear diary, I think the other policeman felt sorry for me. You should be ashamed of yourself, colleague, he said, is your heart made of stone? How can you speak that way to such a beautiful girl? Then he stroked my hair and promised to take good care of my bicycle. He gave me a receipt and told me not to cry, because when the war was over I would get my bicycle back. At worst it would need some repairs at Hoffmann's.

Ági said that we had been lucky this time, but that next time we should let them take whatever they wanted. In any case nothing could be done about it, and we shouldn't let those stinking scoundrels see how much we suffered. Still, I don't understand Ági. What do I care whether they know or don't know that we suffer. It isn't hard to see that if everything you own is being taken away from you, and soon you won't even have money to buy food, you suffer.

But what does it matter? Ági doesn't have to hug the bicycle wheel and sob. Anybody looking at her can tell that not only does she suffer, but day and night she trembles over what is in store for Uncle Béla.

April 9, 1944

Today they arrested my father. At night they came to him and put a seal on his door. For several days now I've known that a few hundred people are being held prisoner in the school in Koros Street, but until now they only took the very rich people.

April 20, 1944

Every day they keep issuing new laws against the Jews. Today, for example, they took all our appliances away from us: the sewing machine, the radio, the telephone, the vacuum cleaner, the electric fryer and my camera. I don't care about the camera any more, even though they didn't leave a receipt for it, like when they took the bicycle.

May 1, 1944

My little Dairy, from now on I see everything as a dream... We started to pack, taking from everything the quantity Ági has seen written on the poster. I know it is not a dream, but I can't believe it. We can also take bed linen, but we don't know when they are coming to take us,

so we can't pack the bed linen just yet. Agi is making coffee all day long for uncle Bela and grandmother is drinking cognac. No one says a word. My little Diary, I was never so afraid!

May 5, 1944

Agi and Grandpa went out into the street between nine and ten in the morning to hear the latest news. The city was divided into sections, and a German truck would wait in front of the houses and two policemen would go into the apartments and bring the people out.

The two policemen who came to us weren't unfriendly; they just took Grandma's and Agi's wedding rings away from them. Agi was shaking all over and couldn't get the wedding ring off her finger. In the end, Grandma took the ring off her finger.

One of the policemen saw a little gold chain on my neck, the one I got for my birthday, the one holding your key, dear diary. Don't you know yet, the policeman said, that you aren't allowed to keep anything made of gold? This isn't private Jewish property anymore but national property!

May 10, 1944

We are here for five days, but my word of honour, it feels like five years. I don't even know how to start writing, so many horrible things have happened since I last made an entry...

I have no idea how it will be later, I always think this is the worst, then I realize on my own that everything can become even worse, actually much worse. Until now, there was food to eat, now we won't have any. On the inside of the ghetto we could visit one another, now we are not allowed to get out of the house...Agi doesn't mind anything if they only leave us alive, that is what she keeps constantly saying... Last night I dreamed of Juszi, my little Diary, and in the morning I woke up crying.

May 17, 1944

You see, my little Diary, I told you the other day that everything could be worse? You see how right I was? They started the interrogations at the Dreher beer factory. You know my little Dairy, the gendarmes don't believe the Jews that they have nothing left...

Now everyone in the house is shaking with fear, wondering when are they going to be taken in for a beating at the Dreher.

May 18, 1944

Yesterday, the same thing happened to me, my little Diary as did to Marica. I couldn't sleep and I overheard everything the grown ups were talking about. First I heard only Agi and uncle Bandi Kecskemeti, because they know everything from the hospital. They both said that in the Dreher not only do they abuse people by beating, but they also use electric shocks. Agi was relating this in such a crying voice, that had it been not said by her, I would think the whole thing is a made up horror story. Agi said that they bring people from the Dreher into the hospital, that blood is dripping from their nose and mouth, some have their teeth knocked out, and their soles are so swollen, that they can't stand. My little Diary, Agi was also saying what the gendarmes do to women, because they also take women in there, I just don't want to write it down. I simply can't write it down, although you know my little Diary, I have had no secrets from you so far. I also heard, but this was said by grandfather, in the dark, that here in the ghetto many people commit suicide. There is enough poison in the ghetto pharmacy and grandfather gives some to older people who ask for it. Grandfather added that he would be only too pleased to take some cyanide himself and give some to grandmother as well. Hearing this, Agi started to cry, and I heard her crawl to grandfather's mattress and still crying, she said: Patience daddy, this can't last forever.

May 29, 1944

My little Diary, now it all comes to an end! The ghetto has been subdivided into districts and they are taking us all away.

May 30, 1944

My little Diary, everyone says that we will remain in Hungary, that they gather the Jews from the entire country somewhere around the Balaton region for work. But I don't believe it. It must be terrible in the freight car and now nobody is saying any longer that they are taking us, but rather that they are "deporting" us. I have not heard this word so far and Agi says to uncle Bela: Bela, don't you understand, they are deporting us! A gendarme is walking up and down in front of the house. Yesterday, he was in the Rhedey Park, because that is from where the Jews are being deported. Not from the real train station, as here the town's people can't see them – says grandfather.

Much do the town's people care. If the Aryans didn't want it, they could have stopped our ghettoization. But they were rather enjoying it and even now they don't care what will happen to us.

This gendarme, whom uncle Bela calls a friendly gendarme, because he never yells at us and doesn't address women in the familiar form, came in the backyard and told us that he will leave the police force, because it is inhuman what he has witnessed in the Rhedey Park.

They forced 80 people in freight cars and they gave them altogether only one bucket of drinking water. But it is still more awful that they are sealing the cars with padlocks. People will surely suffocate in this terrible heat! The gendarme said he truly didn't understand these Jews. Not even the children cried. They were all like sleepwalkers. They got into those cars stiff, without a word.

The friendly gendarme didn't sleep all night, while other times, he said he is fast asleep as soon as he puts his head down. This was such a horrific view, he related, that even he could not sleep. Even though he is a gendarme!

Now Agi and uncle Bela whispered something about us remaining behind in a typhus hospital. Supposedly, we will say that uncle Bela has contracted typhoid fever. This is possible, because he had it earlier while in the Ukraine. I don't know, I trust mostly nothing, I can only think of Marta and I am afraid that the same thing will happen to us as it did to her, even though everyone says that we are not going to Poland, but only to Balaton.

Yet, my little Diary, I don't want to die, I still want to live, even if it means that only I remain behind from this entire district. I would wait for the end of the war in a cellar, or in the attic, or any hole, I would, my little Diary, I would even allow that cross-eyed gendarme who took the flour from us to kiss me, only not to be killed, only to be left alive!

I now see that the friendly gendarme let Mariska in, I can't write any further, my little Diary, I'm crying with tears and I am in a hurry to see Mariska...

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