



## Unlocking the Doors: A Woman's Struggle Against Intolerance

By Dr. Eva Olsson

Eva Olsson grew up in Hungary, born into a Jewish family in Satu Mare (now in present-day Romania). She remembers the family's Hasidic traditions, and the poverty and simplicity of her early life. Like other Hungarian Jews, Eva was comparatively isolated from the war raging all around them; they heard rumours and such, but as Hungary was allied with the Axis powers, day-to-day life was relatively unchanged.

That was not the case after May 1944 though; Nazi Germany occupied its Hungarian ally, and Hungarian Jews immediately felt the weight of the Shoah. Eva and her family were now inside the ghetto, and within a matter of weeks the deportations began. The family walked seven kilometers and were boarded on to the waiting boxcars, where the brutal conditions were unrelenting for four days. They arrived at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and with the selections, the family was separated, with most going to the gas chambers and crematoria. Eva and her remaining sister, Fradel, were selected for slave labour, and after spending a few weeks in the camp, they were sent to Dusseldorf, and then Essen, Germany, to work in the Krupp factory system. Eva spent some time there during the winter of 1944-45 and was present during the day-and-night bombing that made up the Allies' Ruhr bombing campaign. Bombs eventually destroyed the part of the factory where Eva was working, so she and the other forced labourers were herded into a hole in the ground, before being forced onto the boxcars again.



This time she was sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which would be her final destination. She spent several months there, barely surviving starvation and disease, when British forces liberated the camp in April 1945. That is when her emotional and physical recovery began, and during this time she made the decision to relocate herself and her sister to Sweden. There she would meet Rudi, her eventual husband, and a few years later the two made the journey to Canada, where they settled and raised their family.

Eva did not speak about her experiences for many years; in fact, it was only when her grandchildren were old enough – fifty years after the fact – that she began to open up, first to her grandchildren’s classes, and then to audiences all over Canada, and even at the United Nations. Eva has a passion for social justice, and her mission is to maintain the legacy and the memory of those that were murdered during the Shoah.

The *Unlocking the Doors* chapter-by-chapter question sheets enable your students to develop empathy & compassion through learning what hate can manifest into.

Class sets of Dr. Olsson’s book are available for Ottawa-area schools to borrow upon request through CHES. Please email us at [info@chesatottawa.ca](mailto:info@chesatottawa.ca) for more information.