Mrs. Gábor Révész

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Budapest, Hungary
Interviewer: Szilvia Czingel
Time of interview: September, 2006

The first time I called her, Mrs. Gábor Révész asked me to use the familiar mode of address with her. She always received me kindly in her home in Csillaghegy, which had at one time been the holiday villa of the actress Ilona Titkos. Her vitality and memory disarmed me. Besides her love and respect for animals, she is a great opera fan and loves to drive. Even today, she reveals flashes of her impressive understanding of human beings and her feeling for psychology. Once a week she provides mental healthcare for those in need.

I don’t know the first thing about my paternal great-grandparents. This branch of the family remains a mystery to me. I know nothing at all about them, not even whether they lived in Pancsova or not, only that my grandparents did.1I don’t even know how well off they were. I don’t think that they could have been very poor – I don’t mean the great-grandparents, but the grandparents. I say this because they sent their two sons to school in Brno. Both of them studied to be textile technicians in Brno. I know this only from family lore. I was still a small child when I saw my grandfather – this was the only time that I saw him. His name was Adolf Greiner. But my mother, who tried to keep the memory of the family alive, didn’t really know him either. Or her mother-in-law. Just this grandfather from Pancsova, whom she saw only once in her life, like me. I assume that the emotional ties must have been rather loose between the children and the father, who was still alive then, and the brother who lived in Pancsova. I heard that this grandfather from Pancsova was a miller. Róza Greiner, the sister who stayed at home, never married. It might be of interest that basically everyone, their mother and Róza, too, died of cancer relatively early. By the way, Janka Greiner, my father’s sister who lived with my father and taught the piano also died of cancer. My father [Mór Greiner] didn’t tell us about this. After all, I wasn’t even eight years old when he died.

All I know about my mother’s side of the family is that my great-grandparents lived in Hahót [County Zala]. My mother told me that she visited her grandparents in Hahót several times, where her grandfather – in short, my great-grandfather – was a baker. My mother said that my great-grandmother was familiar with medicinal herbs. People would often ask her to come and heal them and to give them medicine, because the village had no doctor and no pharmacy. She was especially good with people suffering from diphtheria. At the time they called it the croup. In short, they asked her to cure children with croup. My mother told me that she cured children with an

advanced medical treatment. She reached down their throats with a cloth saturated in petroleum and wiped off the saburra. I have no idea what role the petroleum played, but I do know that it was this pussy saburra that made the children choke, and it killed many of them. Apparently, she cured many children with this method. This is what my mother told us about her grandmother, who was apparently a lively woman with a good sense of humour. I don't know the name of my healer great-grandmother. My great-grandfather was the Ziegler ancestor.

As far as their religion was concerned, all I can say is that they merely kept the formalities. I would think that the Jewish families in the village must have kept a kosher home. It was the norm. But later the children were not religious at all, by which I mean my grandparents' generation, though the old people kept things up. My mother also told us – it was something of a family legend – that once when she spent the summer with them, her grandmother gave a pair of chickens to my grandfather to take them to the shochet to the neighbouring village, which was not far. And then her grandmother said to her granddaughter, meaning my mother, "Do you know, child, where that shochet lives?" And my mother said, "No, I don't know." "Behind the pub, because that's where your grandfather takes them, kills them, goes sits in the pub, then after an hour, comes home." In short, my great-grandfather didn't take this thing too seriously, but neither did my great-grandmother, it seems, because she didn't make a big deal out of it. Apart from this I know only that they brought up twelve children and most of them lived to be adults, and that their horde of grandchildren often spent the summer with them.

When they grew up, the children all lived there, in southern Zala County. Later I often visited them at Csáktornya.2 Two siblings of my grandfather lived outside of Csáktornya, I think, in a village, which was not a town with Hungarian inhabitants, like Csáktornya, but a Croatian or Slovene village. But all this was during the Monarchy, so it was the same country. The village was called Vinyica [today Varazdin, Northern Croatia]. I visited them there. That's where I first came face to face with a highly blatant show of nationalism. I must have been seven and a half or eight years old. I still remember it vividly, though at the time, I didn't understand it. This was in the summer of 1936. I remember because my father died on April 4, 1936, and a cousin of my mother came to Pest and took me to Csáktornya so I wouldn't be a burden to my mother, who was looking for a job because she had to go back to work. As I said, Vinyica was inhabited by Croats, and there was a Hungarian-German soccer game one Sunday that was broadcast on the radio. The children hooted with delight whenever the German team scored a goal. I don't know what the final score was or who won, but I know that when they shouted, "Zhivyone, nemachki – long live the Germans!" that was aimed at me. I remember hiding under the table because this chorus was so scary, and because I knew that it had targeted me, a Hungarian child.

The relationship with my maternal grandparents was very close. My mother's father was called Gábor Ziegler. He and I were very close. They lived in Pest. He moved to Pest from Csáktornya or Hahót when he was thirteen. I'm not sure, but I think it was from Hahót. He learned the cabinetry trade there.3 He became a carpenter and made sets for the National Theatre. When I first met him – my mother had me late in life, she was thirty-six when I was born – grandfather was also well on in years. He was about sixty, and he wasn't working by then.4 He made all sorts of things for the family. I still have a piece of furniture, a chest with a lid that was originally meant to store firewood. When the lid was down, it served as extra seating. When I was small, we kept it in the bathroom, and my mother used it to store the dirty laundry instead of firewood. It was thoroughly scrubbed

inside before she used it as a laundry chest. He'd made it for my mother when she got married. I took good care of it and painted it over several times. It's in the kitchen now. It's in the way, but I haven't got the heart to part with it, because it reminds me of him.

Grandfather was an old man of average appearance. He didn't have a beard or a moustache, but he always had a smile on his face. He wore a suit, meaning a nice jacket, but he rarely wore a hat, except maybe in winter. My parents looked after grandfather. My father had a new suit made every year, and one of his old suits went to my grandfather, but it was impeccable and not a piece of worn-out hand-me-down. My father worked in the textile industry, so I guess the material cost him nothing. He had it tailor made, and then it went to my grandfather. It was a ritual. I remember that come New Year, he always took grandfather a suit, and also a couple of ties. While my father was alive, this was not a problem, financially speaking. Also, every year he got two or three litres of plum brandy. My father brought it from the countryside. My grandfather loved it, and my father, too, and they always drank a shot each. We had a demijohn, and father always took him some.

Grandfather's first wife was called Fanni Katz. I read her name on the tombstone when my mother once took me to the cemetery in Rákoskeresztúr. Mrs. Gábor Ziegler, née Fanni Katz. I was very surprised. What is that supposed to mean, Mrs. Gábor Ziegler, when my grandmother is Mrs. Gábor Ziegler? That's when my mother told me that grandfather had another wife and that actually, our real grandmother is buried there. When my real grandmother died, my grandfather became a widower with four small children. Their first child, Anna, had died, which means that my Katz grandmother gave birth to five children. The second, Aranka, was my mother. She was eight when her mother died. She told me several times that they had to take grandmother to hospital at night, because she was very ill. She had a hernia by the abdominal wall, and it got incarcerated. They couldn't leave the children home alone, so they took the four of them to the hospital with them, and the doctor, who saw right away that it was too late – my grandmother was a young woman of thirty-eight – turned on my grandfather in a fury. He said, "You're animals," this is the word the doctor used, "letting this beautiful young woman come to this state!" Mother told me that she was terribly frightened when she heard how the doctor talked to her father, though of course she had no idea why. Grandmother died that night. And there was my grandfather, with four children. My mother also related many times that she was taken out of school – she was in second grade – to look after the other three. She even did the cooking. Grandfather made a stool for her so she could reach the cooking-stove. This is also a family lore.

Soon after that, my grandfather advertised in the papers, and Grandmother Szidi answered the ad from Nyitra. Our grandfather and Grandmother Szidi were wed in 1902. My mother was ten at the time. Grandmother Szidi, she had very prominent, thick lips. I remember that her lips protruded so far, she wasn't a very handsome old woman. She was thin with a bent back, but very quick. She was way past forty when she became my grandfather's wife,5 and I don't think her parents were alive. She spoke Hungarian and I don't know if she knew Slovak, because there was no one she could have talked to [in Slovak]. I don't even know if she spoke German. But I do know that my grandfather didn't speak German. I assume that my grandmother from Nyitra probably spoke German, because people from Upper Hungary generally spoke three languages. My mother gave her credit for the way she brought up the four children. I can't judge how close they were to each other, but when my grandparents were old, I know that my mother looked after them. Grandfather had a bad spine. I remember that every time he went back home from our house, we always said

good-bye with these words, “Good-bye, Grandpa, hope your back won’t hurt!” My mother used the formal form of address with her parents, but we, their grandchildren, used the familiar form.

Grandfather wasn’t the least bit religious, unlike our Grandmother Szidi. There was one very sweet sign of this. Grandmother insisted that they keep the Seder during Passover, and everyone had to be there, including the children. The three children were there, my mother’s younger sister Sári, who went alone because she never got married, my Uncle Sanyi with his wife and two sons, and while my father was alive, the four of us, father, mother, my sister and myself, and then just the three of us. When I was a child, I was there every year. I found it all a bit too ceremonious, and I remember that my cousin and I would be up to some mischief. We got under the table and pinched grandfather’s leg to make him laugh while he was saying his prayers. I remember us doing things like this. We enjoyed ourselves tremendously, and I had no idea about the meaning of the whole thing. For instance, I loved the matzoh, and we were happy that it was part of the dinner, which was always special. Besides, the whole family were together. We had traditional Seder food. I remember the chicken soup with matzoh balls. I used to make it myself. I always have matzoh at home, and I still always make it. I don’t remember the main dish, except that there were small bowls with all sorts of food in them. For instance, there was an apple and walnut mixture mixed with wine [charoset], and we all got to taste it. But only a bite. I also remember that my grandmother made a delicious cake from matzoh with prunes. It was very good. I don’t have the recipe. Needless to say, my grandfather knew how to read the Hebrew text. He also prayed and sang. And whenever grandmother went to the kitchen to attend to dinner, he’d always skip eight or ten pages, and we all winked in complicity. None of us were religious, but we had the Seder out of respect for grandmother. In short, her foster-grandchildren loved and respected her. My mother kept the holidays out of respect for her. I don’t know whether grandmother attended synagogue, but I’m sure she must have. Her being observant was not a source of conflict between her and grandfather, though grandfather just laughed at it.

When I was young and my father was still alive, my grandparents lived in Ó utca. I even remember the arrangement. It was a two-room apartment. They had a bedroom and a dining room, and there was a long hall that led to the kitchen, and there was also a pantry. I don’t remember whether there was a bathroom, but there must have been. It was a big old apartment with windows looking out on the street [and not the inner courtyard], furnished with old furniture, and a credenza in the dining room. There was a chaise lounge in front of the double bed in the bedroom – once in a while I stayed over – and I slept on that. They didn’t have a maid and I don’t know about a washing woman. We went to see them once a week, on Saturday afternoon, if I remember correctly, because I remember that my father came with us, which means it had to be on Saturday or Sunday, because otherwise he was working. We always took them something, and they served us cake. Grandmother Szidi kept a kosher home. I know that she was a good cook.

That Jewish symbol, the domestic blessing [the mezuzah] was affixed to the door. We had one on our door as well. When my father was still alive, we lived in the fifth district, in Géza utca – now it’s Garibaldi utca –it was there on our door as well. Later, when it was just the three of us, I don’t know if we had one. My grandparents owned a radio, but we didn’t have one, not because we couldn’t afford it. Maybe it was on principle. On the other hand, we had a telephone. I still remember the number, 146-19.

Then when grandfather became a widower [in 1942], he moved in with his son, Sándor, who had a big three-room apartment, while we only had a one-room apartment with a hall, and there were three of us, my mother, my older sister, and me. Sanyi and his family lived in Szondi utca, on the corner of Szondi and Felsőerdősor utca. Whenever I pass by, I look up at their window. But grandfather spent almost every weekend with us. He had four grandchildren. My mother's younger brother had two sons, and mother had two daughters. He loved us a lot more, and we loved him, too, very much. I'll never forget that he read me my first Petőfi poem, and he also sang beautiful old folk songs to us, and told us about his time as a soldier – the same thing, of course, twenty times over. In short, we were always very close, but when my father died and my mother was alone, especially then. He was like a surrogate father, and we loved him very much. Grandmother only in moderation. I wouldn't say I didn't love her, but we never really hit it off.

In 1942 Grandmother Szidi broke her hip and died of pneumonia. She died a year before grandfather. She's also buried at the cemetery in Rákoskeresztúr. She was buried according to Jewish law. My father's grave is next to theirs. Father died first, in 1936. Then Grandmother Szidi in 1942, my Aunt Sári also in 1942, and my grandfather in 1944. He died in February 1944, at the best time, just one month before the German occupation. He died of a cerebral haemorrhage. He didn't suffer. At the time we could still give him a proper burial in a cemetery.

Grandfather Gábor had lots of siblings, eleven brothers and sisters. They all died in concentration camp. They were taken to Auschwitz and were sent to the gas chamber immediately – all the older generation, and most of the young ones, too, because they were all older than my mother. They were well over fifty, so they were sent to that side [during the selection]. The younger ones were mostly with little children. They didn't survive either. A couple of the women survived, though. I met one in Bergen-Belsen, but then she died, too.

Of my grandfather's brothers and sisters, we were closest to my Uncle Gusztáv, because he had two sons and three daughters, and the girls were my mother's favourite cousins. Uncle Guszti and his family were farmers, just like mother's other relatives from Csáktornya. Uncle Guszti's wife was called Malvina Zeisler. They had five children. I remember four, Ilona, Klári, Kálmán, and Aranka. My mother was on good terms with all of them. They exchanged letters and everything, but the three girls were especially close to her heart. They came up to Pest to the spa a number of times. They lived in Csáktornya, and when I was in Csáktornya, I always stayed with Uncle Guszti. Of the three girls, I loved the youngest best. She was a couple of years younger than my mother, and she was quite something. Her name was Aranka Ziegler. My mother's maiden name was also Aranka Ziegler. There were three Aranka Zieglers, come to think of it, because my Uncle Sanyi's wife was Aranka Wollner, but her real name was Aranka Ziegler. It was funny. Aranka was sweet, lovable, and full of life. She got married very late to a man from Szabadka who was not Jewish. He was a soldier in Csáktornya. This was in 1942, when they reannexed the Délvidék, or Southern Hungary, to Hungary proper.6 His name was Sándor Gyenizse. He was a very nice man, a pastry chef. The three girls had a pastry shop in Csáktornya, and that's how they met. Sándor went there, and he was interested in the place, and when he got discharged, they got married and he started working in the pastry shop. Aranka Gyenizse, or Aranka Ziegler according to her maiden name, wasn't working in the pastry shop. She was a clerk in a stocking factory in Csáktornya. I even remember the name, Graner.7

I also remember grandfather's eldest brother, because the largest family get-togethers were always at his home. He was Uncle Lajos, and his wife was Aunt Mariska. They were also farmers. They had a long [traditional-type] peasant house in Csáktornya. They had two or three children, I think, who lived there, too, in the same yard, except in a separate part of the long house. When we were there for the summer, all the big family get-togethers were held there. We went with mother when she was on vacation. We didn't go regularly. While Csáktornya was part of Yugoslavia, going there was complicated. We needed passports. But I was there in the summer of 1936 when my father died. I spent the whole summer there, and mother joined us with my grandfather, because one of our cousins died. He was one of Uncle Lajos's sons who worked in the cold-storage plant in Csáktornya. There was a big cold-storage plant there, and that's where he worked.

There was also an Aunt Malvin and an Aunt Giza, and I remember them both. They also lived from farming in Csáktornya and died in Auschwitz. Also, two of my grandfather's siblings lived in Vinyica, I think. I also stayed with them. It was a real farm with all sorts of animals. They worked the land. Their children also worked on the farm. I don't know whether they were observant [Jews]. I don't know anything about that, because we never talked about it in the family. Then in 1944 we lost track of them. We knew that they had been deported. Aranka Gyenizse had two small children. One was born right after they were married, the other a year later. In the spring of 1944, when her husband was called up again, she stayed with her parents. Her mother-in-law lived in Szabadka – it was also part of Hungary then – and when she heard about the deportations, that they were taking away the Jews, she boarded a train, went to Csáktornya, and gathered up her daughter-in-law and the two small children, and took them with her to Szabadka. She got them out of the ghetto. She probably bribed someone. They were the only ones to survive. When I met Aranka after the liberation, she told me that she went back to Csáktornya with her mother-in-law and went inside her parents' house, where she found the bed unmade, because they took them away from their bed. She said how terrible it was. She found the unmade beds of her parents and sister just as they'd left them, grabbed some clothes, and were dragged away. Later Aranka and her non-Jewish husband moved to Israel, where eventually they died. The others were killed in Auschwitz, almost to the last man.

We didn't use to visit Nyitra, and we didn't know grandmother's relatives. But she had a nephew in Pest with whom we were very very close until he died around the late-1950s, I'm not sure. My mother treated him like a cousin, whereas they were not blood relatives, but they were as close as the closest of cousins. His name was Jenő Ehrenfeld and he was a bachelor. He got married when he was old, sometime in the 1940s. He must've been around fifty by then. He married a divorced woman, Ilonka Groó, who died relatively young. She was a Jewish woman from Pest. Jenő was an administrator at the Stühmer chocolate factory in Győr.8 They loved us children very much. We saw him a lot even after his wife died, and I visited him regularly in his old age. I don't know how he survived the terrible things that happened, but I do know that he was not deported.

I have only vague memories of my father not only because I wasn't even eight when he died, but also because he worked a lot and came home only in the evening or in the late afternoon. And when he came home, we spent very little time with him. It was always special when our father spent time with us, because he rarely did so – Sunday, but mostly Saturday afternoon, and maybe on a weekday, provided he came back home from the countryside and didn't have to go back to the office. We loved our father very much. He played with us. He wasn't that young any more, but I

remember riding on his back and the like. He had a good sense of humour, a bit mordant, so it wasn't ha-ha humour, but more like ironic.

He worked at the Cotton Fabric Plant, which was a big textile factory. He was in charge of its warehouse in Sas utca and he represented the factory. In short, he was employed in sales. Two or three others worked with him. He knew a great deal about textiles, but he didn't say any more about it because I was a small child when he died, and later, my mother didn't tell me too much about it either. Sometimes when we went for a walk with my mother, we dropped in on him. I remember that it was a big dark shop with a long counter, and there were mostly samples – not materials or bolts like in a textile shop, just a collection of samples attached to cardboard. They sold them mostly to merchants, so it wasn't a retail place. He was away a lot. He left in the morning or at dawn and came back home late at night.

He also had to go to the country a lot. My father visited the textile works in Pápa. I think he must have brought that brandy from there, too. I also remember – because the four of us slept in the bedroom, the two of us children and our parents – that he went to the wardrobe and drew out a flask from behind the underwear. He had a small, two-decilitre glass flask with a screw top and he'd fill up the top and drink it on an empty stomach. Then he'd go to the bathroom to shave and wash, and when he came back, he asked us children, "I don't remember, have I had my plum brandy?" And we knew we had to say, "No". And then he went to the wardrobe and had a bit more. This was our morning ritual, and I remember that we always thought that it was great fun. He brought home some of the fabric that was no longer part of the company's offerings. There was a shelf in the bathroom, and I remember, that's where these fabric samples were kept. And on the weekend, when he gave us our pocket money – our pocket money was fifty fillérs – he asked if we'd like a little extra to go with it, and he gave us some of the samples. We used it to clothe our dolls. This was our Saturday night or afternoon ritual.

Father's fifty-seventh birthday was on April 4, 1936, and we just were getting ready to celebrate. It was on a Saturday, the Saturday before Easter. I was in second grade and my sister was in fourth, and there was an Easter celebration at school, where my sister played a shepherd boy. She wore a fur vest, I think. Father couldn't come with us because he had come home late the night before, and he needed his sleep. We let him sleep and left. And at noon, when the celebration was over, my sister and I went home with mother. And when we reached the house, we called upstairs, "Daddy, daddy, we're home!" It was a beautiful spring day. I remember that the balcony door was open, but we thought he must still be sleeping and so we stopped shouting and went upstairs, but we couldn't find him anywhere. And then my mother went out on the balcony and saw his slippers. We later reconstructed what must have happened. He heard us calling to him in his sleep and went out on the balcony in his slippers, leaned out and fell. In short, while we were going up in the elevator, he was already lying on the street. That's how he died. It was terrible. It was a great trauma for mother, too. It was a very good marriage. I never heard them argue. What's more, I never even heard them raise their voices or see them irritated with each other. They were married for fourteen years. Father was much older than mother, almost by fourteen years. Of course, a child can't see into the lives of others, but our lives took a dramatic turn then.

My mother was a fascinating woman, and I knew her better than I knew anyone else in the family, because she lived to old age. She died at the age of eighty-three. She was very beautiful, blond,

with blue eyes. Everyone in the family had blue eyes. Only my father and my sister had brown hair, but my mother and I were blond. I know because I found a poem once that her colleagues had written her, a birthday greeting, and they wrote, it was like a byword, “beautiful Aranka Ziegler”. My mother had four brothers and sisters. Of the five of them, three survived – my mother’s younger sister, Sarolta Ziegler, who was two years younger than she, my mother, Aranka Ziegler, and Sándor Ziegler. The fourth, József Ziegler, who lived to be a grownup, turned eighteen during the last years of the First World War, and right away died at the Italian front in 1918. It’s evident from the family history that the family were not educated. They were tradesmen. Józsi, who fell in the war, was a fancy leather goods maker. Sanyi was a gas fitter and plumber, Sári was an assistant in a stationery shop, then had her own shop, and my grandfather was a carpenter. In short, they mostly learned some trade. Even those of their Csáktornya relatives who abandoned farming all wanted to be tradesmen and learned a trade. My mother and all her brothers and sisters finished the sixth grade. They attended six years of elementary school.

When my mother finished the six years of elementary school, her teacher went to her parents and said that she’s not only an excellent student, but she has such thirst for knowledge, she must be allowed to continue her education. My grandfather was relatively poor – he had brought up four children, he wasn’t a rich man, not even comfortably off. But this teacher accomplished one thing: my mother took a supplementary exam and went to higher elementary school [the higher elementary school for girls in Dohány utca. – The Ed.] She finished the four years of higher elementary school, and then she attended a course in commerce. She learned the basics of office work and by the time she was fifteen, she had a job. The portion of her salary that she had to give to the family she did – I presume that she must have come to an agreement with grandmother, because she wore the pants in the family and she managed the household – and with the portion she was allowed to keep, she attended German classes and learned German, which she couldn’t do at home. She must have learned some German in higher elementary school, but two years meant a lot.9 She learned German quite well. She spent all her holidays in places where they spoke German so she could practice. She went with a colleague of hers to Germany or more like Austria, so they could practice. In this way my mother advanced up the ladder and became a German correspondent at the office.

When she had perfected her German, she started learning French. She attended a course in the same way, by using a portion of her earnings. Anyway, I don’t think she had a private tutor, because that would have been expensive. So she ended up as a German and French correspondent. The fact that her German was very good – her French less so – is apparent from the fact that she eventually got a job with a German company. She was the German correspondent for the manager of the Domestic Combed Yarn and Textile Works.10 She was still in her teens when she started working there. Then during the war she was transferred to Textile Headquarters [the Hungarian Textile Centre Shareholding Company], which had been turned into a centre for wartime economy. I don’t know where it was, but I do know that my father also worked there during the war [i.e., the First World War], and that’s where they met. They were colleagues. They got married after the war, in 1921, I think.11 I don’t know if she got married in a synagogue but I would think so, because my mother wouldn’t have wanted to offend my grandmother. At the time, people got wed in a synagogue.

After the [first] war, my mother went back to work in the Combed Yarn Works, and until my older sister was born, that's where she worked. My sister was born in 1925. In short, my mother was always ambitious and was always educating herself. She read a lot. We had a couple of volumes of poetry, János Arany, Petőfi, and also a series of novels, works by Jenő Heltai. When my father died, they'd stopped buying books regularly, but we always got a book for Christmas, usually poetry. My mother went to the library and read. While my father lived, they went to the theatre, and also attended concerts. I think they usually went to the Vígszínház, and they took us, too, because they had children's performances. On Sunday morning they took us regularly to Uncle Lakner's Children's Theatre.12 I remember one play, "My Sweet Step-mother".13

We got the papers, but we didn't have a radio. We always subscribed to the papers, a German language paper at that, the "Pester Lloyd". My father and as a result my mother, too, held liberal middle-class views. The paper that we read was also a liberal German-language daily. Everyone read it, my father, my aunt, my mother. In short, that's the paper we subscribed to, and later, after my father died and my sister was getting to be a big girl and started to have her own opinion, we subscribed to "Népszava". She was devoted to social democrats and the movement, too.

My parents' circle of friends and acquaintances were mostly merchants and tradesmen, tradesmen who had one or two employees – in short, small trades merchants.

It was always important for mother that whatever she did should be perfect. From darning socks to cooking, she was a very meticulous woman and very ambitious. I have no idea where she got it from, because grandfather wasn't like that. He was pretty easy going. He made us a clothes closet for the hall and all sorts of furniture, and that was nice. But he was not obsessed with work. My mother, when she sat down to do a crossword puzzle – in her old age especially she did lots of crossword puzzles – she surrounded herself with lexicons and poetry books to help her. She always said, I need to exercise my mind, because I don't want to turn senile. She used to say, it's terrible, all my girlfriends have either died or have gone soft in the head. I don't want to be like that. As a rule, mother was ambitious about caring for us, too, the things that had to be done after school. While my father was alive and she didn't have to go to work, she sat next to me when I did my homework. I was in second grade when my father died, and my sister was in fourth, and she always helped both of us. She regularly checked our homework. She saw to it that she should read and practice. She made us feel that studying was very important.

My mother was also very studious and valued the intellect very highly. My grandfather was very proud that she was the first educated person in the family. After the liberation, when I came home from deportation, I immediately enrolled in the gymnasium for workers, and graduated in 1950. My mother was over the moon. Then I applied to ELTE [Eötvös Lóránd University] to study pedagogy and philosophy, and I was admitted. I was an excellent student both at the gymnasium and the university. Meanwhile, I also had a job. And when I got my teacher's diploma, my mother was as happy as if she'd won the grand prize in the lottery, that's how proud of me she was. She was not the type to brag, but she bragged about me. When she spoke about me to her friend, she referred to me as "my daughter, the teacher", as if she had ten daughters and she needed to differentiate between them. You'd think I got married to the royal family. In short, I was her greatest pride. She was happy. It's things like this that she was most proud of.

I gave her two season's tickets to the theatre for her birthday every year so she could take someone along with her. She was on the best of terms with both her sisters-in-law and she usually invited one of them. If she didn't have anyone to go with, I went with her. Even at the age of eighty-three, one week before she died, she went to the theatre. I remember that I bought her season's tickets to the Madách Theatre, and she came out of the theatre and said, "Listen, child, I haven't been in the new metro yet, on the escalator." The bus that could have taken us home stopped right in front of the theatre, but she suggested that we walk down to the National Theatre and take the metro home from there, because she wanted to ride the escalator.14 She was an exceptional person. Had she been born fifty years later, let's say, or who knows, eighty, she would have achieved great things. For me, she has, even so. She took an interest in public life. She was trade union steward as long as she worked, till 1955 or '56, I'm not sure. She was also a regular blood donor.15 She was exceptionally open to the world.

Until she died, my mother went to the synagogue once a year, when they said a prayer for the dead [the Kaddish]. I always asked her – even after the liberation, when we lived together from 1955, when my mother's health began to decline – to tell me honestly, when she went to the synagogue, did she believe in God? And she said she didn't. "Then why do you go?" I asked. And she said that she went in order to remember her parents, but especially out of respect for my grandmother, because if her foster-mother knew that she didn't do it, she'd have a bad conscience. It would be good to know which synagogue she attended, but I don't. I also want to say about my mother that not always, but sometimes it would happen that she'd light a candle on Friday night, maybe even every Friday. But except for Passover, we didn't observe the holidays. I don't know about grandfather, but this [the Seder] was a family affair. We celebrated it for two nights, if I remember well.16 There were eleven of us at the dinner table. We had one of those extension tables and old-style chairs with leather backs. We had no ties to the Jewish community.

When I was a child, we lived in the fifth district. The house was on the first side street that opens from Nádor utca, it's called Garibaldi utca now, but back then it was Géza utca. One of my aunts, my father's older sister, lived with us. Her name was Janka, but my sister and I called her Koki. I don't know why. She was a tiny, slender woman with weak nerves, which prevented her from performing in public although she had studied the piano and was the pupil of a very important person. She was a Thomán pupil.17 She was a very talented pianist but she couldn't perform in public because she suffered from stage fright, and so she became a piano teacher. She had a big Bösendorfer piano.18 We had a three-room apartment, and one of the rooms was hers. One of the other rooms was the dining room, and there was a bedroom where four of us slept. There was a bathroom, and the bedroom had a double bed and there was a bed at the foot of the bed, where my sister slept, and my small bed was against the wall by the bathroom door. While my father was alive and we lived in this three-room apartment, I slept on that cot.

We also had a maid with whom we kept in touch until she died. She was also from Zala [County]. I even remember her name, Ilona. The name of the village from where she came was Zalagalsa. She came to work for us when she was sixteen. She was with us for many years. I don't know how my mother found her. We loved her very much and we were very close. My mother was like a mother to her, which shows how much she cared for her. My mother got her married off and gave her a dowry. After she got married, she lived in Horn Ede utca, but until then she lived with us. Her room opened from the kitchen. How she found a husband is an interesting story. A grocer's apprentice

started courting her. He worked at the grocer's where she and my mother did their shopping. My mother and Ilonka always went shopping together. They did their shopping at the Hold street market, and there were shops by the front of the building. There was a grocery and delicatessen shop, and that's where they shopped. This apprentice was there and they became such good friends that Ilonka got pregnant and told my mother. When she heard this, my mother sprang into action. She went to the young man and his boss and made a fuss saying, kindly marry Ilonka or else! And so it happened. Their wedding was in the Basilica. My sister and I were the flower girls. This is why her family didn't attend. She had an older brother in Pest. He was a shoemaker whom we called Suszti.19 We were on very good terms with him, too. The baby was born. The two of us, my sister and I, were the godmother, and Suszti the godfather. They lived at Horn Ede utca 4 in a one room apartment with a kitchen and we used to visit them a lot.

Ilonka did everything with my mother except for the wash, because we had a washing woman. But she did the ironing alone. Mrs. Jakab came once a month, and I remember that on these occasions we always had something for our midday meal that she especially liked. We had chicken soup and noodles with cottage cheese, or some other dish with noodles, because that's what Mrs. Jakab liked. I don't know where she was from. All I remember is that when she was there, we weren't allowed into the kitchen because that's where she set up the tub, and the clothes and bed linen were boiling in a big pot. Back then the beds were changed once a month. There was a laundry room in the building, but we didn't use it. I don't remember where we hung the laundry out to dry. Probably up in the attic. The house had four storeys, and we lived on the fourth.

While my father lived, we attended the Szemere utca elementary school in the fifth district and then to the school in Szív utca for another two years. That's where I finished the third and fourth grades. We were both very good students. My mother wanted to send us to gymnasium, to a state school, of course, but we weren't admitted. My sister should have started gymnasium in 1936, but she couldn't attend a state school because of the numerus clausus. Those few who were admitted had patronage.20 We didn't know any people who could pull strings for us. This upset my mother very much, because she had great hopes for us and she wanted us to get an education, which she had been unable to do, and so she enrolled us, meaning first my sister and then me, in a fully licensed private gymnasium. The school was on Andrássy Road.21 It was rather expensive, but she managed to get us a "half-prize ticket" by pleading that we're half-orphaned. These schools were bound by law to provide lower tuition for a certain number of students, and we fit the quota. My sister attended for four years, and I for two. My sister stopped attending when she chose the industrial drafting school where she applied, and after taking her entrance exam, she was admitted. She was admitted on the strength of the work she did for her exam. After two years of gymnasium, I had to be taken out of school because my mother couldn't afford the tuition any more.

So after finishing my second year I ended up in a Reformed institution in Szentendre where they quoted me a very favourable tuition fee. We lived under cultural and intellectual circumstances like in the novel Abigél.22 The school on Andrássy út was meant for children from the upper middle class and the children of well to do parents. The school in Szentendre [the Jókai Mór Reformed Higher Elementary School] was for the middle class, where the children of small tradesmen, postal workers and petty clerks studied. As a matter of fact, I liked the atmosphere there very much, because in the private gymnasium I was among wealthy children. I didn't like that. I always felt

how poor I was because, for example, a child would take a roll with salami for her snack, while I took bread with butter or lard. I can't say that it caused any serious psychological damage, but it meant constant pressure. In Szentendre, the other children were from families like mine, where every penny counted.

In Szentendre I lived in an institution [the Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Boarding School for Girls]. It was furnished in a very puritan manner. The building was supposed to have been from Turkish times, when it functioned as a mill. The main gate opened from the main street. That's where the office and the reception room were, and also the guest room where visiting parents could meet with their children. In the back there was a dining hall, a study room, and the bedrooms. Twenty of us slept in one room. Cockroaches were everywhere. The bedrooms opens onto the back street and the boys came there in the evening to flirt. After lights out, we chatted with them through the window. We went home only during recess. But I was often being punished and wasn't allowed to leave. We kept in touch with my family through correspondence. Needless to say, the letters were censured. It was no picnic, but it could have been worse.

This is where I first experienced anti-Semitic behaviour by one single person, but that was an isolated incident. There was no institutionalised prejudice, and the supervising deaconesses were definitely not like that. It's something like the sisterhoods with the Roman Catholics. They wear habits, too, except they don't take a vow of virginity and they can get married. They're much more permissive and open-minded.23 There were a couple of Jewish children, too. We – maybe three or four or five girls – attended Bible class together. It wasn't a big deal, but in the afternoon we had to attend Bible class, just like the Catholics. The Protestant religion was built into our morning lessons, and I attended those classes too, because I was interested, and also, I liked singing the psalms. To this day, if I go on a long drive, I often sing them because they're beautiful.

Bible classes for those of other religions were held in the afternoon. Ours was in the Jewish elementary school in Szentendre, and it was taught by a teacher from the Jewish school, but I wasn't the least bit interested. I couldn't have cared less, maybe because I didn't know any Hebrew. I can't speak a word. I don't even know the letters. I attended Jewish Bible classes all the way up to the war, until I was deported, and as long as school was open. But it left me cold, because as far as I was concerned, it lacked interest. Until the liberation, Bible classes were compulsory in all the schools.24 That's how I knew what the Seder was. I can't remember who told me about it, but I do remember that they read out a special text that's read at the Seder, and it was read in Hungarian. It's about the exodus of the Jews from Egypt.

I was not motivated and I got no motivation from home either. For instance, I never learned to read Hebrew, even though I was supposed to, and that's why my grades were always so bad. I simply refused to participate. My teacher was an avid Zionist and he kept telling us that one day we must all go to Palestine. And I thought to myself, go, if that's what you want, but I'm staying put. I couldn't have cared less. I'd had excellent report cards where I nevertheless got a four for Bible class, but here I got a two, and also for behaviour.25 I deserved both, but the four for Bible class was unfair because I felt that they weren't judging me on the basis of my knowledge, which didn't concern my teacher too much anyway, but because of my attitude, in short, that I shrugged my shoulder at the whole thing. I deserved the four for behaviour. In fact, I'd have deserved worse. When we went back for the fourth year, and during the first lesson this teacher asked about my

report card, I impertinently said that my report card would have been excellent if only I hadn't received a four for Bible class. I said this on purpose to be provocative, and I succeeded, because he was nonplussed. In short, I knew that I'd hit the mark. He had a very strong sense of Jewish identity and he must have felt that with the mark he gave me he'd hurt Jewish prestige, or something of the sort. But that was just a feeling I had. It may not have been like that at all.

After I finished my fourth year, I came back home to Budapest. This was in the summer of 1942. My mother's life was turned upside-down because due to the second Jewish law, she lost her job. She couldn't support herself or keep up the apartment. The question was, what should become of me? I need to study something from which I could make a living. The situation was pretty hopeless by then, so the idea that I should go to gymnasium didn't even come up. And then the Jewish Gymnasium started a new faculty called the industrial faculty, the equivalent of today's vocational secondary school structure. It was in the building of the Jewish Gymnasium in Abonyi utca, which is today's Radnóti Gymnasium. It didn't cost anything and offered a reduced syllabus. But it came with a diploma and had perspective. I learned sewing. This was a four-year school, or would have been, but of course, I couldn't finish. I went there for about two weeks, more or less, then they took the building away and moved us into another building in Wesselényi utca that belonged to an industrial and trade school. At the Jewish Gymnasium there was teaching every other Sunday, because of course, there was no school on Saturday.

I went there from Amerikai út in Zugló for maybe a month. Meanwhile, my aunt [Sarolta Ziegler] died in the fall of 1942. Naturally, my mother decided right away that we'd move because she and Mrs. Erdős didn't get along at all.26 From the severance pay she got from the Domestic Combed-Yarn Works – they took into account not only the six years she spent there but also the years she worked as a youngster, which amounted to a very handsome sum – she bought a one-room plus hall apartment in Fillér utca, in Buda. The three of us, including my sister, moved there. From then on, I went to school from there. I hated the school. The students were mostly rich, the children of well-to-do Jewish merchants. That social environment was alien to me. The puritan life at Szentendre had somehow been closer to my heart. The next year was the 1943-44 school year, which lasted only until March 19 [because of the German occupation of Hungary]. We were occupied by Germany, and the school year came to an abrupt halt. Any Jew that went out on the street was in danger.

My mother was conscious of the fact that she came from a Jewish family and considered some traditions important. She didn't particularly bring us up in the same spirit. This was so much the case that as I've mentioned, I attended a Reformed Church institution for two years, and I am much more familiar with the Reformed religion than the Jewish. I much preferred it. I considered it much more human and closer to life, because it was in Hungarian, it had lots of tales and stories, and the psalms are very beautiful. I can still sing many of them today. We received a religious education at school. When I came back, I was fourteen years old. My sister had strong ties to the social democratic movement by then, and she laughed at my religious mania. I said that I'd go to church on Sunday, but she laughed at me. Once she said, "Stop it, don't be ridiculous!" I looked up to her, she was three years older than I. She was a confirmed atheist and in the blinking of an eye, this religious veneer fell off of me.

I got my first taste of politics when my sister took active interest in it. I was still a child when she was already an adolescent, and she was among people for whom these things were important. She was still a student herself, but in her circle of friends the boy she was seeing, for example, was a gardener, and he held strong leftist sentiments. My first politics-related memory concerns the János Vajda Society. I went there with her to attend a political-type event. This was a literary circle, which means that there were artists with pronounced leftist leanings, and the performers were leftist artists and Jewish artists who'd been fired from the theatres. These were literary matinées with strongly political content. I heard poems with strong political overtones. That's when I started collecting books. I bought Attila József, Ady, the poets of the Nyugat, Kosztolányi, Babits. In short, I got involved.

My girlfriends weren't Jewish. In fact, my first boyfriend was the son of a top ranking army officer there [in Szentendre]. He didn't attend the same school as I [i.e., not the higher elementary school in Szentendre], but the gymnasium, and next I was seeing a gypsy boy who studied there. I always went on a date when I should have been attending Bible class, but instead of Bible class, we walked along the Danube. I had two very close girlfriends, girls from two diametrically opposed social classes. One was from an impoverished branch of the Mednyánszky baronial family. Her name was Magda Mednyánszky, and she was also studying at my school along with her sister.27 They lived in Nagymező utca. I visited them once. They had many very beautiful pictures. Her uncle was the painter László Mednyánszky, who painted beautiful forest landscapes. He was a very famous Hungarian artist.28 We kept in touch for a while, but then we stopped. My other best friend was a girl called Éva Herl from Kalocsa. She was the daughter of a blind miner and was in state care, though she and her family remained in close touch. She wasn't the sort of social case who'd been abandoned by her parents, because she'd go home during recess, it's just that her education had to be covered by the state. She was an intelligent and studious little girl. I don't know what became of her after she finished the four years of higher elementary school. She ended up in a small town somewhere, and I lost touch. In short, I was not close to any of the Jewish girls there. Still, I'd like to mention the name of the girl from whom I heard my first anti-Semitic remark. She said, "dirty, filthy Jew". This was in Szentendre. But that was the only time. I never had any other similar experiences. Of course, that changed after the German occupation. I never experienced anti-Semitism at all. Prior to 1944 I knew nothing about it. Needless to say, I knew that Hitler existed and that he was dangerous and all that. But I wasn't concerned. The entire Hungarian Jewry didn't take him seriously. I think this was because we somehow felt that what had happened, first in Germany and then in Poland, couldn't happen in Hungary, because in Hungary the Jews were completely assimilated, and they were Hungarian. In short, there was no sense of danger until the German occupation. There really wasn't.

From the time my father died, we found it difficult to make ends meet. We now knew that we were poor. While my father was alive, we took it for granted that we lived normal, well-tempered middle-class lives. But afterward my mother made it clear, again and again, but we felt it too, of course, that everything had to be carefully portioned out. For instance, when she made stew, we were each given three cubes of meat to go with the potatoes, because she bought a quarter kilogram of meat, and it had to serve the three of us. She was a very economizing and thrifty person till the day she died. When there was no need for us to be so thrifty any more because we were living better, even then it was in her blood. It went back to her childhood, when there were four of them children to be

cared for. We had to live very frugally, and it became part of her essence to always think about tomorrow.

After she had us, my mother didn't work. But then the Domestic Combed Yarn and Textile Works where she'd worked as a young woman took her back. She had earlier worked in their city office, but then, in 1936, she had to go all the way out to Soroksári út, where the factory was located. She was what we'd call today the secretary of the German manager. She wrote his letters and kept everything in order around him. I remember that her monthly salary was two hundred pengős, which didn't half cover our expenses, so we moved from our three-room apartment to a two-room apartment. First we moved to Szív utca in the sixth district, then a couple of years later to Szondi utca, because my mother's younger brother lived there. Meanwhile my grandmother died and grandfather moved in with his son. My mother rented a two-room apartment two blocks down the street, at Szondi utca 46/c. I think she was hoping that this way there'd always be someone looking after us. We had lunch at my mother's sister-in-law, who was a dental technician, and who worked at home. She fed the whole family, her father-in-law as well as us. She cooked every day because she worked at home. I don't know whether my mother paid her for it, but at least we had something warm to eat every day around noon, and in the evening my mother cooked for us. She died in the 1970s, I think, and she was one of my mother's best friends. They were on the best of terms until her death. We loved her very much.

While my mother worked at the Domestic Combed Yarn and Textile Works she could buy material, textiles, at a discount, and we were able to afford it, but not later, of course, when she had to stop working. My father had life insurance that the public guardianship authority [then the Superintending Authority for Minors] put in reserve when my father died, but when she needed it to buy us winter coats, for instance, or wanted to send us on summer vacation, mother could request some of that money. That's how she supplemented her scant income. When the Jewish laws were passed, the first Jewish law did not pertain to my mother and her job, because she was just a low-paid clerk. They were after the big fish. They fired company managers and others with big salaries. They were the first to go. But then the second Jewish law, in 1942, I think, pertained to my mother as well, and she was fired.29 She then got work with an undergarment salon as an outworker. She brought home the sewing. She hemmed the bottoms of slips and nightgowns, and we helped her. They paid her by the piece, so when we had time and we didn't have to be in school, my sister and I chipped in. These were very difficult years.

My mother had a younger sister, Sári, who became very well to do. It's very interesting. She didn't even finish sixth grade, but she had a good mind for business. When she left school she couldn't have been more than thirteen, and she went to study commerce first hand from an old lady who had a stationery store. If I'm not mistaken, it was located in Szondi utca. She had to choose an easy profession because she had a bad heart. Scarlet fever had left her with a bad mitral valve which got worse with time, and she died young. But she learned the trade. She was very good at it and very sweet. The owner of this shop got to like Sári very much. She lived alone, and when she died, she left Sári her shop. Sári turned this small shop into a big business, and eventually she rented a space on the corner of Szondi utca and Szív utca where besides running a retail business, she also started a wholesale business, and instead of just selling paper and writing utensils, she sold paper bags and wrapping paper and stuff like that to industrial concerns and other shops, and she even made them there, in her shop. The smell of the glue that the young girls and women who

worked there used to glue together the bags is still in my nostrils. She employed about ten women as well as a machine operator who worked the paper cutter. Later my grandfather worked there as well, as supervisor. Also, when a customer came in, he handed back the change and was in charge of the till. But the shop catered mostly to wholesale, not retailer customers. The fruit sellers and the butchers, they all bought their bags at my aunt's. I was there a lot myself because I liked watching them glue the bags together. I even cadged them to let me help.

My aunt was very well-to-do and she loved her family very much. She was mostly the one who dressed us, because my mother didn't have money. Whatever nice clothes we had that wasn't an old dress of mother's that was altered or a piece of clothing or shoes my sister had outgrown, we got all of that from her. She gave us new wardrobes for our birthday and Christmas. We got our best summer clothes from her for Easter.

Sári formed a partnership with a woman called Mrs. Gyula Erdős who invested in the business, so they enlarged the store and the paper bag gluing workshop, and they bought a house together on Amerikai út. Actually, it was more like a villa, a nice and big gentrified villa. They bought it fifty-fifty, but with the understanding that my mother could move in there. They looked after the shop, and my mother looked after the housekeeping. There was also a maid, but my mother did the cooking and the shopping, and the maid did the cleaning and helped with wherever was necessary. I wasn't living there then because I was away at the school [in Szentendre], but my sister went to school from there. This didn't last long. I came back home from Szentendre in June, 1942 and spent the summer there, and in the fall my aunt died. My mother was on very bad terms with my aunt's friend. They didn't like each other. And then the question of what to do with me came up. I had finished higher elementary school and was fourteen. One of my most beautiful memories from when I was young is when I took home an excellent report card from Szentendre. Even my Bible class teacher relented and gave me top marks for Bible studies and conduct, too, if I remember well. It was the first time in my life that I got such excellent marks, but this was due to the fact that it was my last report card. And by coincidence I went home on my fourteenth birthday, and there was a large bouquet of jasmine from the garden on the table in my mother's room. I remember that I got beautiful presents, because most of them were from my aunt. I can still see the jasmine blossoms falling on my presents, and I remember that when I moved here, into this place – it was the first time I had a home with a garden – the first thing I did was to plant jasmine.

My mother got married for the second time in 1944. Her second husband was an interesting fellow. I know a lot more about him. His name was Antal Schiller. He was a Jewish man from Győr. He was a complete atheist, he never bothered with stuff [religion], and he knew how to make the best of things. He was easy-going and a bit rash, but very talented, a so-called self-made man. He also came from an unschooled family, and he didn't achieve what he achieved because of his schooling, but because he was interested in things. He was appraiser and auctioneer for the Ernst Museum.30 I can't tell you how highly respect he was in his profession. And he acquired his knowledge of carpets, porcelain and furniture on his own, without any schooling. He even went to Brazil to learn about merchandising art.

When he and my mother met, we lived in Fillér utca. The apartment in Fillér utca, as I've mentioned before, had a room-and-a-half with a hall that my mother bought from her compensation when she was fired from the Domestic Combed Yarn and Textile Works after the

second Jewish law was passed. She lived there until, in wake of the German occupation, she had to move into a yellow-star house at Dohány utca 16-18. Antal Schiller also lived in the same Fillér utca house with a similar room and a hall apartment with his wife and daughter. His daughter was five years older than I, and was already married. Schiller's wife died of cancer in February 1944. Actually, we got to know them in the basement in April, and then also in the summer.31 We young people got together in a group and played cards, chatted, and sang. His daughter was also there with them, and we got the older people to befriend each other. My parents gradually felt a certain sympathy for each other. They were the same age, in their early fifties. It turned into real love so much so that when we had to move into a yellow-star house in Dohány utca, they came with us. Then in September [of 1944] they got married, but I don't know the particulars.

Their marriage was a love match. My mother had been a widow for eight years by then, and though she had gentleman friends, she wasn't planning to get married again. Even with two small children, several men wanted to marry her. She was an attractive and quick-witted woman, but she always said she wouldn't bring a stepfather into our home. I remember two of the men who wanted to marry her. One of them played up to us a great deal, saying, girls, talk your mother into it. I remember because at Christmas he asked us what we'd like. He wanted to give us a present. I don't know what my sister asked for, but I asked for a book of poems by Kosztolányi. I wanted it very much, and I still have it. But we didn't like him, and my mother wouldn't give in, and didn't marry him. But then with Antal Schiller it was really a love match. We loved him very much. We called him daddy, and my children called him granddad.

It was Sunday when the German occupation began. I was just heading home from school across Margaret Bridge. Traffic stopped in the middle of the bridge to make room for the armoured vehicles and motorcycles crossing it. Anyway, they got into an altercation with the tram driver, and two German officers and a Hungarian gendarme got on the tram that I was on and asked for our IDs. I only had my student's tram pass with me, so I showed them. They asked where I go to school. I said I was going to the Reformed gymnasium, because I knew by then what was going on. So I made it home. They let us go from school telling us that we must go straight home, because the Germans have occupied Hungary.

The next day they caught my sister on the street, and we never saw her again. We later found out that she had been taken to the internment camp at Kistarcsa, because a Hungarian policeman brought us a letter from her. I even remember the circumstances. My mother and I were sitting at the table for our Sunday midday meal when the bell rang and I opened the door. I saw a policeman standing there. I got terribly frightened, but he said to let him in because he'd brought a letter from my sister. We had him sit down and I remember that my mother asked him to join us, but he declined. He was a very nice man. My sister wrote this letter on a tiny piece of paper in minuscule handwriting. She used such a small piece of paper so the policeman shouldn't get into trouble. She was first taken to the central transit prison in Mosonyi utca.32 From there she was taken to the Margit körút prison, and from there to Kistarcsa. Because of the Jewish laws she wasn't allowed to design clothing any more, so she went to work in a textile factory on the Újpest Quai. She was paid twenty-five pengős a week, which helped contribute to our daily budget, though not much. They were hiding partisans who had come over from Slovakia in the basement of the factory. I know this from her. That's when I first heard about that certain Auschwitz Protocol. We're not sure, but my sister was taken away from there, or else, from that area. Maybe this had something to do with it.

My second husband, Gábor Révész's aunt, Margit Révész, who was a well-known child psychiatrist and had a children's sanatorium in Zugliget, was friends with the doctor of the prison on Margit körút, and she found out that my sister is being held there. By the way, Margit Révész's sanatorium catered to the retarded children of well-to-do bourgeois families.33 Once we were able to send a package through her, but then we lost track of what happened to my sister, except that we later learned that she had been deported to Auschwitz. We got a postcard from her, written in German. It contained a stereotyped text in her own handwriting, in German. It said that she's fine and everything is OK. The stamp on the envelope said Waldsee, which was the cover-name for Auschwitz. In 1944, they made people who were taken there to write these letters to calm everyone. Later, when they took the Jews from the countryside there by the tens of thousands, they didn't place so much emphasis any more on letting people know. Of course, there was no one to write to, anyway, because they were all taken away. Needless to say, my mother searched for us through the Hungarian Red Cross. Once she received a letter from a woman doctor, who described what had happened to my sister. They were on a forced march from Auschwitz towards Hannover. My sister was not in a bad physical state, but her spirit was broken and she gave up the struggle. When they reached Malchow, my sister didn't want to go on. Those that stayed behind were shot. This is how we found out that she died in May 1945.

The Hungarian Jews didn't really believe that the horrors of Auschwitz could touch them. They didn't think either that Horthy, the Hungarian regent who had Jewish friends, would take an appreciable part in it. Of course, the Germans didn't ask him. Also, the Hungarian Jews had an idealized picture of him. He wasn't like what the Hungarian Jews thought, because he wasn't about to put himself in danger, like the Danish king, who said that the Jews living in Denmark are his subjects and he won't let them be taken away. Unfortunately, of course, they weren't spared either. Horthy stood by and watched the extermination of the Jews and communists without any legal basis. As a result, the bloody massacres of the Southlands went unpunished, along with the people of Újvidék [Novi Sad, Serbia].

I stopped going to school in the middle of March. The decree ordering Jews to wear a yellow star was followed a couple of weeks later by the decree making the Jews move into so-called yellow star houses. At Fillér utca 21, where we lived, there were five or six other Jewish families. They all moved to the same house in Dohány utca 16-18, because one of the families had relatives there. The apartments in Dohány utca were all spacious four and five room flats. We moved into a room in one of the four-room apartments. The four rooms were each occupied by a whole family. I lived in one of these with my mother. It wasn't so bad, except for the kitchen, because four households had to share it. It wasn't so bad for me at all because there were a lot of young people in the house and we got to know each other down in the bomb shelter [basement]. We had fun, we played cards and parlour games. In the apartment next to ours, right next door to us, lived three sisters who weren't Jewish. We were on very good terms with them. They had a fancy leather goods shop in the Inner City. After the liberation, when I came home, I visited them in the shop a couple of times. They were three exceptionally nice women, three old maids. Every morning they came over and asked us if we needed anything or if we needed anything done, because we weren't allowed out on the street except for between eleven and one in the afternoon, since there was a curfew on Jews.34 They had taken away our radios by then, and also our bicycles, for the army. The cars, provided anyone owned one, had been taken away earlier. Still, we got news because some people

listened to Moscow and London.35 We were also informed about certain things through our Catholic connections, for example, about the state of the front. Also, we received news from the Hungarian newspapers. We were hoping that the Soviet troops would reach us in time, because we knew by then that they had taken away all the Jews from the countryside, and we also knew that Horthy had worked out some agreement that they wouldn't take away the Jews from Budapest. Anyway, that's the kind of news that was spreading around. I don't know how much of it was true, but during the summer we got a more liberal government.36 After the German occupation, a staunchly Germany-oriented, fascist-type government led by Döme Sztójay came to power, but sometime during the summer this government was replaced by the so-called Lakatos government, which was a lot more liberal. This brought a favourable change. The Soviet troops were already on Hungarian soil and we could be pretty sure that we were out of danger. In September 1944 my mother married again, which indicates how optimistic we were.

Then came October 15. That was the day of the Horthy Proclamation, when the Governor wanted to negotiate a separate peace in that absolutely dilettante political way of his. He thought that the Germans would be kind enough and leave, as if that were only to be expected from Hitler and the Germans in general. The next day Horthy was no longer the regent, and that same day, October 15, the Arrow Cross Party, which had been waiting in the wings, took over the government, and Szálasi sprang into action. That's when the deportation of Budapest's Jews began.37 The camp at Auschwitz had been liberated sometime in January 1944, so we couldn't be taken there.38 There weren't enough wagons by then. The Jews from the countryside were transported by cattle cars, but we walked on foot all the way to Austria. We had to walk twenty to twenty-five kilometres a day. Those who couldn't make it were shot. I survived because I was young and had warm clothes and sturdy boots. About fifty of us left together from the same house, and I know that only six of us made it back.

The Arrow Cross took over on October 15, and by the next day there were various limiting degrees issued, for example, that every Jewish who in the spirit of the Nürenberg laws is considered Jewish must show up for labour service, including women between the ages of sixteen and fifty. I had just turned sixteen, so the law applied to me, too.39 . Luckily, my mother was older. Men had to go into labour service if they were between sixteen and sixty years of age. My stepfather was also exempt, because he was working in a German ammunitions factory.40 They ended up going from Dohány utca to the Ernst Museum, where the superintendent hid them, but they later ended up back in the ghetto, from where they were then liberated.

I made up my mind to make my escape and not be called up. Margit Révész, who had the children's sanatorium in Zugliget, supplied me with false papers. She saved a lot of people in the same way, by giving them false papers, including my husband's entire family, who lived in Békéscsaba. I was given the papers of one of the nurses. I know all the particulars of this Márta Jolán Ábrahám to this day, because I had to learn it by heart. The papers were hidden inside the sole of my shoe so I could take them out of needed. My future husband escaped from forced labor and moved into this children's sanatorium of his aunt's, up into the attic. He was hoping to make it until the liberation, thanks to his false papers. He went everywhere under the name of Gábor Nagy, and he came to us and told me not to join up but go to his aunt's to work, maybe. We agreed that on October 23, when I was supposed to join up, I wouldn't go to the sports stadium but go out to Zugliget to Aunt Margit, with whom we were on loving terms. But there was a concierge at Dohány

utca 16-18, who was a Nazi. She collected us on the morning of October 23, and she said that she'd accompany us and hand us over [to the gendarmes] one by one at the sports stadium. She warned us that if anybody tried to escape, the rest of their families – for instance, in my case, my mother – would come to no good. So I didn't escape. I didn't use the false papers. Later the People's Tribunal sentenced this woman to death. I heard about it in Sweden.

For the first two weeks I was digging trenches in Isaszeg–Szentgyörgypuszta. These were no good for anything except for the Soviet soldiers to piss into when they got there, because the tanks rolled over them like you wouldn't believe. And then they started us off for Germany along the road to Bács, which was horrible, because we usually had to sleep out in the open or the bottom of a boat. In Gönyű, for instance, in the bottom of a tugboat,41 and in Komárom, on the horse market square. It was November by then, and the conditions were terrible. Since I had false papers, every day I contemplated making my getaway. It wasn't all that preposterous, especially when we were sleeping out in the open. We marched without being counted, like a herd of cattle. The Hungarian soldiers who accompanied us weren't really hostile. It's the gendarmes who were vile. But they accompanied us only along certain stretches of the road.

The civilians who saw us weren't hostile either. Nobody laughed at us. The majority of the people were, if anything, indifferent rather than hostile, which depended in part on their experiences with the local Jews. There were one or two Jewish families in some of the smaller villages, and how the villagers saw them before the war made a lot of difference. I remember several instances when they helped us. Once took place just outside of Pest. We were crossing a village and a butcher came out of the shop in a big, bloody apron, and handed me a whole calf's liver. I happened to be marching on the outside of the column. We managed to hide it, and we ate from it almost the whole way. If we were able to light a fire out in the open, we cooked it. When we were very hungry, we sometimes ate it raw. We all had a dixie cup, because we thought we were going for forced labour. In the evening, when we got to a new place, they gave us something to eat. But I ate that liver for a whole week. The other touching episode occurred when we crossed the outskirts of Győr. There was a bakery on the housing estate where the workers of the Wagon Factory of Győr lived. There was a line of women in front of the bakery and they brought out big, two-kilo breads and threw them to us, catch as catch can. I was deeply touched, and I know that this was not an isolated incident. Mária Honti, my best friend, was from Szombathely. She was five years old when this column also passed through Szombathely, and she remembers that her mother, who was a devout Catholic, wrapped two or three portions of food in a kitchen towel and wanted to take it to the column, to give it to the people. The gendarme pushed her away saying that if she wants to join the column, she's welcome. In short, he threatened her. And her mother gave the bundle to Mária, saying that they won't push a child aside, and that's what happened.

In Komárom, my friend, who was two or three years older, and I sneaked away. We made up our minds every day to escape, but didn't have the strength. At night we slept or rested and waited for the hot soup, and that's the truth. In Komárom, where we slept on the horse market grounds, we had to get up very early because it was the weekly market and the locals came at five in the morning with their horses. There was a water hydrant, which played an important role. We washed our shoes, washed the mud off, made our appearance a bit more presentable unstitched the yellow star from our coats, and stepped out of line in the crowd and headed towards the Danube. We knew that we must head towards the Danube because on the way we'd spotted arrows that

indicated that the railroad station was near the river. We left our knapsacks behind on the horse market grounds, because they would have given us away. I took a bundle more or less the size of a briefcase with me with my father's blanket from the First World War, a black woollen blanket. My mother had packed it for me so I should have a warm blanket if I needed it. It was held together with a belt, so I took it along because I didn't know if we'd manage our escape, and I didn't want to be without a blanket in winter. When the railroad station came into sight – we were somewhere on the outskirts of town – I said to this girl, her name was Edit Láng, that I'm going to put the blanket down on a fence because I won't be needing it any more. And a boy of about six or seven saw it, and started shouting, deserters! This was a real traumatic experience. When I came home I thought a lot about what could have become of that boy. I felt no hate as such, but I would have liked to know what became of that boy. His family must have held views like that if he said what he said and ran for the gendarmes.

In less than ten minutes, we hadn't reached the station yet, but the gendarme was there on a bicycle. He took us to the gendarmerie barracks and the next day they put us in the next column. First they put us in a wagon somewhere near Vienna, I don't know where, and took us to Dachau. If you look on a map, you know that the second front was already approaching from the direction of Normandy, the British-American troops were advancing from the north, the Soviet troops were attacking from the east, so the Germans were wedged in. But they still busied themselves with us. We were in Dachau for two weeks, in a camp called Landsberg. Then they transferred us to another camp. It was called Seestall.42 We still wore our own clothing there, and from time to time, our food was acceptable, too. For instance, I remember how surprised we were that they gave us jam, which was commonly called "Hitler bacon", to go with the bread. It was a concentrated jam in a box. So things didn't seem so hopeless there. They gave us hot soup once a day and black coffee once a day, in the morning, with bread and something to go with it.

Everywhere – because I was in three camps – I asked after for my relatives from Csáktornya. The camp at Landsberg was for men. We were there as special guests. A man I spoke to there told me that there was a man from Csáktornya, and he'd tell this man that I was looking for him. And a second cousin of mine came to me – his name was Brauer – who survived the camp. We met again in the 1970s. I also saw Ilonka Ziegler, one of my cousins there, but she later died.

The beginning of December, they transferred us to Bergen-Belsen. On the way from Dachau to Bergen-Belsen, we made terribly wide detours. We could have traveller around the world in that time, I think. We were on the road for four or five days. Whenever the troop trains and the munitions transports passed, they made us wait. Once when this happened, we saw a sign saying Berlin. The transport was standing on an outer track on the outskirts of Berlin. It was day, but we stayed through the night. The unheated wagon was terrible. On the other hand, when night fell – it was a bright, moonlit night and the moon lit up Berlin's outskirts – we saw the bombed-out houses, street after street, with only the ghostly outer walls standing, and I can't describe what we felt. It was like the stage set for an opera. If it's all right to say that the sight was thoroughly gratifying, then that's what I say. The Germans got their share of the war, as a lesson to them, for starting this war and for all their cruelty, first and foremost on the Soviet front, but also in the hinterland, and for the terror they unleashed in the occupied countries, and I'm not thinking only of the Jews, but the crimes against humanity. I was glad that they were getting it back and were being destroyed in turn. I didn't know then what would happen to Dresden and many other German towns, but I felt

that if I were to die – though I didn't know yet what it was like to die of hunger, because back then that was just a remote and abstract possibility – I'd die happy. In Bergen-Belsen, of course, I realized that the possibility was very real indeed. And maybe, had the liberating troops come three days later, I wouldn't be alive today. But at the time I felt, I don't care, because the Germans were learning what war means, and you can't get away with a thing like that and go unpunished.

We learned the hard facts in Bergen-Belsen, because Dachau was nothing compared to it. For one thing, we didn't have to work in Dachau. We didn't have to do anything the whole day. We were cold, as far as that goes, but our food was adequate. You didn't die of hunger, and they didn't mistreat us, but we knew that this was not going to last. In Bergen-Belsen most people died of hunger and typhoid fever.

We didn't get our period in camp. They added something to our food. We didn't know this at the time, but later I learned that they put something in our food.43 In short, the men and women who ate from the cauldrons had no sexual problems. But they didn't all eat from there, naturally. The functionaries in the camp got special treatment. I mean the Jewish functionaries, the capos, the blockältestes, that's how they were called.44 More and more transports arrived, and they took everything away from them. They stuffed themselves full of sardines and Emmentaler cheese.

Bergen-Belsen was a gigantic camp complex where the individual sub-camps were closed off from each other with barbed wire fences. We ended up in the so-called Hungarian camp.45 Of course, there weren't just Hungarians there, though mostly Hungarians, of course. There were all sorts of other people there as well from the former Greater Hungary, and also, gypsies. I was with the Hungarians. There were hundreds of us in the barrack where I was put. It was a very long hall where there was nothing in the beds except for the boards. We had neither blankets, nor anything else. Our supplies were gone by then. Our shoes were in shreds, too. Few of us had good boots like me. Mine were still in one piece. There was a room to wash up. It consisted of a trough with a pipe running along above it with holes, and the water flowed from there. We got water from there when we needed to drink or maybe wanted to wash our hands, or wash up. Behind it was a long latrine, a platform made of planks with holes in it, where you could relieve yourself.

Northern Germany is very cold and windy. It has terrible climate. We were always hungry by then, because we only got something to eat once a day. It consisted of about one litre of soup that was mostly just liquid with some bits of turnip in it. If you were served from the top of the cauldron, you basically ended up with nothing in your soup. If you were lucky enough to get it from the bottom, it was thicker, and if you ended up with a piece of potato in your plate, let's say, you felt like you'd won the grand prize at the lottery. Also, at first six of us were given a piece of cube-shaped bread. It was black, which wouldn't have been a problem, except in contained some strange things, like sawdust, we thought. Later eight of us got one piece, then ten, and by the end twelve of us, which was basically just one slice. With the passing of time, we grew more and more hungry. We were famished. The flesh came off us. It was alarming. You had just one thought, to eat. The two most horrible things were the hunger and the cold, because we were always cold, needless to say.

We were taken there in early December, and I started working at a textile mill in January, where we wove detonating fuses for canons, narrow, approximately three centimetre wide and long fuses on one-man looms from a material like celluloid. It was very hard and we cut up our hands from rolling it. About fifty or sixty of us worked in one big hall. There was an iron stove in the middle of the hall,

because we needed someplace to warm our hands so we could use them. The woman who was the overseer in our barrack was a sixteen year old Polish girl. She was a terrible, cruel piece of goods, and not only with us, but even with her own mother, who was with her. If she didn't like something her mother did, she beat her with a whip. She had a whip made of leather straps, and wherever she went, if anyone was near her, regardless of what the person did, she beat her savagely. She was sadistic, a sixteen years old monster. I imagine she must have been in camp for years by then and lost all traces of her humanity. I might add, by way of an aside, that after the liberation the inmates lynched her and killed her. Unfortunately, I couldn't take part in it because I couldn't walk, whereas I'd have liked to. And they killed others, too, not just her. They tried to get away, but within a couple of days, they were caught. They tried to mingle with the deportees, but they were so conspicuous, they couldn't do it. For instance, this girl was so fat, it was not difficult finding her among the skeletons.

This girl took us to the Weberei factory, to the textile mill, every morning. She sat by the stove all day, while the rest of us worked. On the way, we had to cross a pine wood of newly planted pine. This is important to me because when the Northern-Bavarian state invited me to Germany on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation and we went to visit the camps in the area – including the camp museum in Bergen-Belsen – we passed through it. The camp is not there any more because the American troops burned it to the ground. I returned after fifty years and found huge, tall trees. Although I know how much a tree can grow in fifty years, I was looking for that fresh new pine wood that had been such an important part of my life. For example, when my foot froze and was full of puss, I washed it with tea made at the mill from pine nettles. We thought that it must contain some vitamin that would help. It didn't help, of course, but the hot compress felt good. Once when we were on our way to work, we passed a kitchen building with tall heaps of discarded potato skin and we all wanted to dig into it and take a handful, hoping that maybe we could cook it on the stove at the Weberei. I managed to take a handful a couple of times, but once I got a bullet in my arm from the guard tower because I stepped out of line. That wound on my arm didn't heal for months either. It got infected, of course, and I put a compress of pine nettle tea on that, too. It wasn't a severe wound, it just scraped my hand, but traces of it are still there today.

In the barrack where we lived, the number of bed boards decreased by the day. This happened because at the back of the barrack there was a separated-off space where that capo "lived", and she used the boards for firewood. This took place parallel with the reduction of the number of people in the barrack, because as people died, their beds remained empty. By the end, around April, there was nothing to the beds except their frames. They were completely stripped, and we lay on the pounded mud floor. It was terribly cold in February and March. I had a terrible experience then. One night they stole the shoes off my feet, so I was barefoot, and for three days walked in the snow with my feet wrapped in whatever rags I got from the others until I was able to put aside three days' rations of bread and traded it for a pair of shoes from the men's camp. They threw me the shoes over the wire fence and I threw back the bread. This is how I got a size seven man's shoe for my size three and a half feet. I had to fix them to my feet with strings and rags. It's interesting, but you couldn't see anyone there with a cold. I used to suffer from tonsillitis all the time, and also the croup, but except for typhoid fever, I wasn't sick in camp. These conventional illnesses were nonexistent, even though we wore no panties, because we had no underwear, yet we didn't get cystitis, for example. I heard several older people say, oh dear, what will become of

me, I have stomach ulcers. Well, their ulcers healed like you wouldn't believe. They had no problem with their stomachs. You should have seen them eat the turnip soup.

There was other food there, too, though rarely. We called it zupa. In German soup is suppe, but in the language of the camp, it turned into zupa. The food I'm referring to was the so-called brotezuppa, or bread soup, a thick concoction. They must've made it from dry bread. It was nourishing, and more filling, too. An hour after you ate it, you didn't feel like you haven't eaten anything. I ate food fit for humans just once there. This was on Christmas Eve, when they gave us cabbage. It wasn't so much like soup as a sort of cabbage cooked in roux, and I felt like I was in heaven. By home standards, it was just thin, empty cooked cabbage, though they had cooked meat in it, but the inmates didn't get any of that, unless a piece was left in the cabbage by accident. Still, I remember the taste to this day. I had something nice to eat one other time. When the new transports arrived, this Polish girl would invariable replenish her food supply. She had fine foods, and we always felt the nice smell. A couple of times I could tell that she was eating sardines and the like. I made up my mind that one night I would climb over the partition that she made for herself from planks. You could climb up by placing your feet between the slits in the planks. Once I actually climbed up. I couldn't look in because the planks went way up to the ceiling, but I reached in and pulled out something that felt like a cup. It had honey in it. Needless to say, I gobbled it up right then and there. It must've been half a cup. I hated honey all my life, and I still won't eat it, but at the time it was a gourmet's delight. I ate it and threw the cup away, go get rid of the evidence. She had so much, she never noticed.

The appel was the counting of the camp inmates every day. We set off for work at five in the morning, and two hours earlier, meaning at three or four at dawn, they made us stand on the so-called appelplatz, and took a head count of the entire camp. We had to stand there until the count was right. We had to stand ten in a line in the thin clothes we had in that cold weather. It was horrible. If you lay down on the floor, at least you could roll up, and your body touched the body of those in front of you and behind you, so we warmed each other up a bit. But standing there for two or even three hours, until the count was right, because with the Germans everything has to be just so, that was horrible. They put in the records the number of each inmate that had died that day. By the end of the winter, hundreds died every day. In short, the number of the living and the dead had to tally. The Germans kept meticulous records on us. Naturally, when we arrived, they recorded our names, too, but from then on we were just numbers. It's interesting that if, for instance, they ask me today what my number was, I first remember it in German, and I have to translate it into Hungarian, because wherever you went, you had to give them your number. The name was not important. To this day, first I remember the number 10851 in German. That was me.

As the front approached, our provisions went from bad to worse, of course, and in early April we began to hear the canons of the British-American troops. The SS kept telling us that they'd blow up the camp so we shouldn't put our hopes up, we're not going to be liberated. I had typhoid fever, which meant that I couldn't go to work for a couple of days. I lay sick in the barrack, on the bare ground. I had a very high fever and my body was covered with a rash. The high fever dulled my wits, but I survived. I recovered from it, and by the time I did so, the camp had practically fallen apart because the liberating troops were very close by then. The canon fire came very loud, we didn't go to work, there was no appel, and no provisions of any kind. We got nothing to eat. This lasted about three or four days. There was no water in the tap, and then we saw that the SS had

disappeared from camp and were replaced by the Wehrmacht soldiers – basically, they did not belong to those who believe in the Nazis, they were regular soldiers, just like the Hungarian soldiers – and they ignored us completely, which for all practical purposes meant that they didn't hurt us. By the way, there were Hungarian soldiers in the camp, too, but we didn't see them until the SS had gone. We later heard that the Hungarian soldiers had been orderlies in the SS camp, serving them and what have you. I even met a Hungarian soldier there, which played an important role in my life later. Suddenly one Sunday, it was April 15 – of course I didn't know this at the time because we didn't even know what month it was – the British-American tanks appeared. They crashed through the camp fence. We heard it and knew that it was over for us now, even though only a few people were still milling about in our barrack. Most of us had died. We slept so close at first, if somebody turned around at night, the entire row had to turn. Now this was finally a thing of the past. We all had our own comfortable space.

There were very few of us left, and those of us who could get to their feet went outside to see what was happening. I couldn't even stand up, but about an hour from the time they entered the camp, they gave us hot milk. They brought it in a so-called goulash-canon, a big cauldron. We couldn't believe our eyes. When they saw that those who were still alive were on the verge of starving to death, they wanted to give us something to eat right away. We were like skeletons and not like human beings at all. When I left home, I weighed sixty kilos, and two months after the liberation, when I'd already been given proper food regularly, I was still just twenty-eight kilos. I'd lost more than half of my weight, and on top of that I was in my sixteenth year, when you're still developing physically, when you're still growing. The first thing we got was hot, sweet milk. It gave a great many of us strong diarrhoea. Our digestion was completely off. An hour and a half or two hours later, they came with a big vehicle and everybody got two tins. Needless to say, we all fell on them. I remember to this day that these tins were closed so that you had to peel a metal strip off before you could open them. I looked to see what's inside, like we all did. The first ration that I opened had beans with smoked meat. There's no food harder to digest, but I thought, I'm going to eat this if it's the last thing I do. I can't not eat it. And I devoured it down just as it was, the beans and that big peace of smoked meat. And then I opened the second tin as well, thinking that since they gave it to me, I might as well eat it. I think that this was my great luck, because cocoa is good against diarrhoea. In short, it prevented what little there was inside me from coming out. Actually, most of the others died then, because not everyone was lucky enough to have cocoa in their second tin. Some had two tins of meat, and they ate it. Nobody had the strength of will not to touch it.

In a couple of days I got a bit stronger and could more and less stand, and I dragged myself out of the barrack. There were two steps leading up, and needless to say, I couldn't climb the steps, and then a Hungarian soldier came over to me to help me, and he said to me, wait, auntie, I'll help. This sentence was like looking into a mirror, because this soldier, who must've been thirty, let's say, took me, a sixteen year old girl, for an old lady. Next, with the help of interpreters, the British soldiers took the sick to hospital. I didn't want to go to hospital because it had horrible connotations for me. There was a hospital in the camp under the Germans, too, but nobody ever came out. In short, I wouldn't go to hospital. I thought I'd eat as much as I could instead. I wanted to go home. So I didn't go to hospital, and they took us away in trucks. They said they would burn the camp to the ground. They took us to an SS barracks a couple of kilometres away. The SS camp had two-storey buildings with rooms for two occupants and all kinds of comfort, and that's where

we were taken. The various nationalities were under various conditions there. Those that had been dragged away from Yugoslavia were taken home, because the Yugoslav government came to get them. Yugoslavia was on the side of the victorious powers, and they took home those who could walk. We were very well taken care of by then.

On May 8, Victory Day, there was a great big celebration with fireworks and music.46 In as many languages as there were nations in the camp, they announced that the war had ended, meaning in Europe, and that the Germans had capitulated. In short, there was a huge to-do. And I thought, surprised, the war is over only now? As far as I was concerned, it came to an end three weeks earlier, when we were liberated. It was so strange. That's when we realized that it was over for the others, too, most probably, meaning for those back home. I met there a former teacher of mine who was actually a Yugoslav citizen, a woman from Szabadka. She later married Prime Minister András Hegedüs. Her first name was Zsuzsa and she had been my home economics teacher in Budapest. She taught sewing. She lived in the Yugoslav barrack, and after the camp was liberated, she was made a camp administrator of some sort, and she talked me into going to Sweden, where they have a hospital. She said that I should go there for treatment and then go home, because I'm so weak, I wouldn't survive the journey home. And this is how I reached Sweden in late June.

A hospital train took us as far as Lübeck, where they transferred us to a hospital boat and took us to Stockholm. I can't express how wonderful it was the way the Swedes welcomed us. The boat anchored at Malmö, which was our first station on the boat journey. We wouldn't have had to stop there, but we were told that the people of Malmö wanted to welcome us. They found out that we were coming. I would imagine that we were not the first transport the Swedish Red Cross accepted in Sweden. Needless to say, they didn't let us off, because most of us couldn't even walk, and the people were not allowed on board, but we looked out of those round ship's windows, and there stood a bunch of women with bicycles, a hundred of them at least, carrying packages. They waited for us with cakes on big trays. The corpsmen who took care of us on board brought the cakes and fruits to our cabins. It was very touching. We saw these healthy, sun-tanned women in their light, flower-print dresses, full of vitality. That was the first time, really, that we saw peace face to face. The Swedes, of course, were not in the war, and they appreciated it. Everyone we came into contact with said that they wanted to repay us for their good fortune, for the fact that Sweden had not been at war for a hundred and twenty years. We were cared for by volunteer nurses, who offered to work for free. I stayed in touch with many of them for many years afterwards. I even visited them. I was in Sweden several times. Back then I was there for a year. That's how long it took for me to regain my health.

First I was in Stockholm, because when we arrived, it turned out that I also had diphtheria. I was taken to a children's hospital in Stockholm, because it was also a hospital for infectious diseases. I was alone in a room, because I couldn't be put with anyone. It took a week for them to wash the dirt layer off my feet. That layer was very thick. They finally sloughed each foot off with a peeling cream, then wrapped it in gauze, and when they took off the gauze the following day, the entire upper layer of dirt came off the top. And this after we were able to take showers in the SS camp after we were liberated. I showered regularly, but that dirt wouldn't come off. I suffered from a whole array of ailments. First of all, I had a scurvy-like vitamin deficiency, and I also had problems with my kidneys, and the beginnings of tuberculosis. I stayed in that hospital for infectious diseases in Stockholm for about three months, if my memory serves me right, between August and October

of 1945. Then they took me to Sigtuna, a small town about twenty kilometres from Stockholm. I was there until November, and then in late November 1945, I was taken to Ribbingelund, where for a short time I was in a sanatorium, in a rehabilitation centre. This was at the Ribbingelund colony, next to the city of Eskilstuna. On December 24, 1945 I had a very pleasant Christmas dinner there. It took about a year for me to gain back my original weight and be declared healthy. Needless to say, as it later turned out, I was far from healthy, because when I came home, I was in hospital two more times for a year. First I had bone tuberculosis, then kidney tuberculosis. Actually, I spent my life with the adverse effects of the illnesses I had picked up in camp.

The year we spent in Sweden was remarkable for how extraordinary kind they were to us. They treated us with so much love, I can't describe it. The Swedish government and the Swedish Red Cross gave me a full "dowry". When we arrived in Sweden, right away they took all those who could walk to a clothing warehouse and gave them summer and winter clothes, even ski boots, because almost everyone went about on skis in the winter. I didn't ski in the hospital, but I also had ski boots. I kept those boots and only parted with them not long ago. I gave them to a homeless person. We were given everything you can possibly imagine – winter coats, summer dresses, shoes, underwear. We were also given pocket money every week. If anybody wanted to buy chocolates or anything, they could. They didn't have to make do with whatever they got to eat. The food they gave us was more than satisfactory, but we were starved for sweets and for things you couldn't buy at home. While I was made to lie in bed for eight months, and also when I was at the sanatorium, which was packed with the former inmates of the camps, I was able to work. I was relatively strong and healthy. A merchant who dealt in children's apparel came to the hospital and asked who among us knew how to sew. I said that I could knit. In short, those of us who were qualified worked out of the hospital, and I made a respectable amount of money. Before I came home I bought so many things, I came back with three suitcases, and I had things sewn into my coat, too, because I couldn't be sure that they wouldn't take things away from me on the way back – material for dresses, material for coats. The lining of my coat was bulging inside. I brought coffee for a lot of people, and cocoa, chocolate – things that we didn't have back home, things we didn't even see for years, and certainly not in our circle, because if you were on the black market, that was different, the sky was the limit. My parents, of course, didn't have that sort of money.

It was thanks to a miracle and the game of chance that I found out in September 1945 that my mother, her husband and my future husband, with whom we were dating before the war, had survived. When I lay in the hospital for infectious diseases in Stockholm, they assigned a nurse to me. Maybe they did it so I'd have someone to talk to. She was an Austrian woman, so I could talk to her in German. I had my own nurse because I had several types of infection, and they didn't want the nurses carrying the infection to the other patients. She was a very nice woman, of aristocratic extraction, and at the time of the Anschluss, in short, when the Germans invaded Austria, they persecuted the aristocrats too, and this woman fled to Sweden. She must have been around forty. She knew a great deal about Hungary, because when she was young, she spent time in Budapest. She had a Hungarian acquaintance, and she brought me old Hungarian newspapers, "Színházi Élet" from before the war, for instance, so I'd have something to read, because I couldn't get out of bed. It took about three months before I could stand. This woman told me that there was something called the Raoul Wallenberg Committee of Sweden, and that they publish a newspaper which carries news from Hungary. She said she'd go there and bring me a paper like that – it was a

mimeographed paper – and she did, she brought me a whole bundle. That's how I knew what was happening in Hungary.

The Committee's address was at the top of the paper. We agreed with the nurse that I would write a letter [to them], because she asked at the post office and was told that there was no postal service between Sweden and Hungary, not in the summer of 1945, at any rate. So I wrote a letter to the Wallenberg Committee asking them if they knew of a way I could get a letter to Hungary, and I received a reply, signed by Mrs. József Markó, who wrote that although there was no contact by post, she could get my letter to Hungary via London with a diplomatic courier. She said I should write the letter, address it to whomever I want, leave the envelope open, put it inside another envelope and send it to her, and she would get it to London, but the diplomatic courier can take only open letters, so I mustn't seal it. I wrote a letter to Margit Révész. We were very close, she loved me very much, and I loved her. The fact that I later oriented my life toward psychology was in large part due to her. She saw that I had a feel for it, and later she played an appreciable part in me decided to study psychology. It influenced my whole life. Anyway, I wrote to this Aunt Margit and asked if she knew anything about my family and Gábor, my future husband. And three days later I received a letter from Mrs. József Markó. It turned out that she and Margit Révész were cousins. This was a complete coincidence. She wrote that she'd received news about Budapest and the family via Switzerland, and she knows that my [future] husband is alive and has moved in with his future mother-in-law. This is how I learned that my mother was also alive. From then on I had a veritable mother-daughter relationship with this Aunt Erzsi [Mrs. József Markó] until she died. I visited her several times in Sweden, because she never came back. Her husband died in forced labour, and she didn't have anyone. She had her adopted daughter join her. She still lives there, and I'm in regular contact with her. And not just her, but her three children as well. I also keep in touch with her grandchildren. They visit Hungary regularly.

The story of how I came back home involves Aunt Erzsi, who was working at the Hungarian embassy in Stockholm by then. She got me the airfare from Stockholm to Prague from some foundation. She said that I'd be able to make it home by train from Prague somehow. Anyway, I was able to get home from Prague to Budapest, except really by train, and not by airplane. They were bringing ten Hungarian soldiers home. They had also been taken from Bergen-Belsen to a hospital in Sweden, and since only I spoke a foreign language, German, I was appointed their transport leader, and I accompanied these boys all the way home. They came in handy in Prague, because I had a lot of luggage and other bags to carry by tram from the airport, and they were strong young men. When I saw the Danube from the train, that was the first big shock I had. This was somewhere near Komárom, because the trains had to make big detours. The bridges were down, so we couldn't come the usual way. We came in to the Eastern Railroad Station by passing all along the Danube Bend. Anyway, the train stopped at the shore of the Danube at the outer station near Komárom, by a watch-box. I stood by the window, crying. And then a track-watchman came over, because the tracks were by his house, and he said not to cry, and filled his cap with cherries he'd picked. And it was the end of May, and those cherries were so puny and watery, but he handed them up to me so I wouldn't cry.

Once I knew when the plane would be leaving from Stockholm, I sent home a telegram. I sent a telegram in which I said, I'm on the way home, I'm leaving Prague Friday night. I knew that my plane would be arriving in Prague Friday afternoon, and that we'd probably continue the journey

that night by train. I took it for granted that my family back home would know when I'd be arriving. I thought that the trains were running according to schedule. But there were no schedules. The trains ran at random. Only later did I learn what happened. My [future] husband went to the Eastern Railroad Station and asked, if someone leaves Prague Friday night, when would they be arriving? They told him not before Tuesday, because trains everywhere were stopping for twelve hours at a stretch, and it's not likely that my train would get in before Tuesday the earliest. Then he went to the Southern Railroad Station and asked again, and they said that the train might come in on Monday. Then my mother took her shopping bag, because she wanted to do some shopping at the Garay Square market, and then thought that she might as well go to the Western Railroad Station herself to ask, just to be on the safe side. This was on Saturday afternoon. She went to the Western Railroad Station and asked when the train from Prague would be coming in. And they said there's a train standing on one of the outer tracks that's come from Prague. However, they don't know when it left Prague, so she should wait a bit until they find out. Meanwhile, I got off the train. It was purely by chance that we met, because they were expecting me on Monday or Tuesday. I can't describe what it was like when I suddenly saw my mother.

I never considered staying there. My best friend, with whom we became friends in Sweden and who was a year younger than me and was in Bergen-Belsen with her mother, stayed behind with her mother, and I could have arranged for my future husband to join me there. He could have easily done it at the time, just as Aunt Erzsi had her daughter and son-in-law go to Sweden, but it never occurred to me. I have very strong ties to language and culture. I don't like to sound rueful, but this is my country. I don't think I could live anywhere else, I have such strong emotional ties to Hungary.

My sister, who died in camp at the age of eighteen, had a boyfriend she had dated for a long time, and my husband was friends with him. They were children in Sopron. He was four years old when they moved to Sopron. His father was transferred to the textile mill in Sopron, and my sister's friend also lived in Sopron. His mother worked in this textile mill, in the same place as my husband's father, and then both of them moved up to Pest. My husband's father passed away in 1937, and then his widowed mother brought him to Pest. He started school here. In short, when I was fifteen, he was nineteen. Once my sister's boyfriend came to visit her and brought him along, and that's how we met. We fell in love. After the war he waited for me so much, he moved in with my mother and my foster-father, and stayed there until I came back home. I was eighteen by then. I came home in May, and in July we were married.

When I got married, we had our own apartment. But when my mother started taking ill – she had high blood pressure and a bad heart – and she had to retire, we moved in together in Szász Károly utca, in Buda. I was expecting my second child by then. We traded two small apartments for a big, hundred and ten square meter, three and a half room apartment, and the six of us lived there together, my parents, my husband, myself, and the two children.

My husband was a textile worker. He studied at the middle school for the textile industry in Markó utca, here in Budapest before the war. After he graduated, he went to work in a factory in Újpest. He was a textile worker at the Herman Pollack und Söhne textile factory in Újpest. After the liberation the factories weren't working, not really, the textile factories didn't either, for lack of raw material. So he went to work for a small tradesman. The place was called the Székács Workshop

and it was in Lánchíd utca. He wove a two-meter long fabric for skirts from Australian wool that this small tradesman bought on the black market. He made beautiful things. When I came back home, he gave me two materials for dresses. He designed multi-coloured, square-patterned woollens. They were very beautiful, and one of a kind. He never made two that were alike. You can't buy anything like it today, of course. This went on until 1947. Then between 1948 and 1952 he finished the Károly Marx University of Economics. When he couldn't work there anymore, he went to work to a state owned company. This was the National Clothing Institute, where they made uniforms for the military, the police, and other uniforms as well. From there he went to the Ministry of Finance, and later to the Planning Office. He went into retirement from the Institute for Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. We were divorced in 1970.

I finished a year and a half at the faculty for industry of the Jewish gymnasium, and when I came home on May 16, 1946 – this was on a Saturday47, on Monday I went to the school, to my old class. My form-master was just giving a lesson. Needless to say, the class was much reduced in size. There had been forty of us, fifteen or sixteen girls, I think. Those from the countryside were all deported, and they didn't come back. Anyway, I visited my class and they greeted me with open arms. The principal, who was a horrible man and everyone was afraid of him because he was a very strict old man and a stickler for form, came into class when he heard that I'd come back, and he told me that the written final exams would start the following Tuesday, and that I should go sit at my former desk and he'd guarantee that I'd pass. And I said to him that I'm not sitting among these children with my hundred and twenty years. I told him that I was incapable, I couldn't sit down at a school desk. I felt that I was carrying such burdens that I simply couldn't, not to mention the fact that what could I do with a certificate when there's no knowledge behind it?

Next September I enrolled in the Workers' Gymnasium and graduated. Then I went to university to study philosophy and pedagogy at the ELTE BTK [Eötvös Lóránd University, Faculty of the Humanities]. I received my teacher's certificate in 1954, and from then on my life was on track, I think, because although our opportunities were limited in comparison to today's young people, our future was secure. We never had much, but we knew that we could make end meet. Meanwhile my husband had finished the university of economics in evening school, and we lived very well, except that my entire life my state of health prevented me from doing certain things. In 1948 I was in sanatorium with bone tuberculosis, and then again with kidney tuberculosis for a year. I lived a full life, because even during these times I wasn't idle, because when I was hospitalised with bone tuberculosis, I finished out the year in evening school. I studied in bed that whole year. I lay in a plaster cast for three months, but I kept abreast of the teaching material. I found the profession that is close to my heart. Until 1957 I was teaching assistant in the department of philosophy at ELTE. Then I taught lower level at the Hegedű utca general school until 1959, and from there I went to the Trefort Gymnasium, where I taught until I retired, and where I was vice principal from 1960 to 1988. Between 1989 and 1999 I was principal at the school run by the Autism Foundation.

I bore two children, Magda and Gábor, whom my husband and I put through school. Gábor was born in 1954 and he studied at the Károly Marx University of Economics for two years, then in 1974 he defected. He studied mathematics and philosophy in England, where he got a PhD in mathematics. He then went to live in America, in a city called Lawrence, for two years, where he taught mathematics. In 1987 he came back home and taught mathematics at the University of Miskolc in English and Hungarian. He died unexpectedly in 1997 in Budapest. He has one son, my

grandson Bálint Révész. I'm a second mother to him. He spends a lot of time here with me. He lives in Csillaghegy and studies at the Alternative Gymnasium for Economics. Magda was born in 1956 in Budapest. She's a social psychologist. She studied psychology at ELTE. Presently she's working for a child's welfare agency in Budapest. Her son Péter became a general practitioner. My relationship with my daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren is harmonious and loving. I can count on them no matter what, and they can count on me. I do what I can for them. Presently I live alone here in Csillaghegy. I love it here. It's the first home I've had where I have a yard with flowers at long last. I was always a leftist by inclination and still am. I love opera and animals.

When the war ended, I said there's one place on earth I'll never set foot in, and that's Germany. When my husband and I first went to England in 1967, we went by train, and we passed through Berlin. I held myself to my promise, and when we needed to transfer from one train to another, because the Hungarian train went only as far as Berlin, where we had to transfer to a German train that took us to Sassnitz, up north to the sea, where we got on a boat, I took the five steps I needed to take to cross the platform, and no more. I didn't go out to the city. Since we had a five-hour layover, my husband went to have a look around, but I refused.

Sometime in the early 1980s we at Trefort, my school, became sisters with a Germany gymnasium in Giessen48 Their choir came to Budapest, and we went to Germany to reciprocate the visit – our choir, the two music teachers, and someone from the school administration. It didn't even occur to me to go, even though I had very pleasant impressions of the German teachers. I thought that they were very pleasant people. When the question of who should go to Germany was raised, I was nominated, since I spoke German. I'm not going, I protested, because I have promised never to set foot in that country, and I am going to keep that promise. But they kept insisting, saying that I had to go because I speak German. Besides I'm not going of my own accord, it's work, it's my duty. And so I went, and the truth is that that's when I experienced my first serious change of heart with regard to the Germans. When we arrived in Giessen, we were all put up with the families of the children. The two music teachers stayed with the families of the two German music teacher, and I stayed at the home of the principal. I walked into their drawing room, where one of the walls was full of books. While I was waiting for dinner, I browsed through the book shelves, and with only a slight exaggeration, my own library looked back at me – the classics, the German and world literature, those books was also among my own books, including the German literature from between the two world wars, Thomas Mann, for instance, and also the great post-war writers, Lenz, Böll, max von der Grün, Günter Grass, and so on.49 In short all those who wrote about the German conscience, who wrote novels about such things.

That's when something began to give way inside me, the realization that here, among the Germans, there are many decent people, too. Meanwhile, we sat down to dinner. My host, who was perhaps one year older than me, opened a bottle of champagne. He drank a toast to me, I drank the champagne, and it went to my head. I'd been on the road all day, I drank the champagne on an empty stomach, and so it went to my head. If I had been sober I probably wouldn't have said anything, but I said to him that I'm not unequivocally happy that I had to come here, because I had promised myself that I would never set foot on German soil, and until now, I have kept that promise. And then I told him why. The principal and his wife turned ashen white. It was a terrible situation. And then my host got up and left the room. Needless to say, I had no idea where he was going. In no time at all he was back. He came back holding a small wooden box – it was pieced

together by hand – and handed it to me, telling me to open it. I took from it a letter written on birch-bark that had been rubbed smooth. It was dated October 5, 1944. This was my host's seventeenth birthday. He had written that letter to his mother. It said, I am seventeen years old today, but I cannot be with you. It was a farewell letter. He wrote that he was going to die soon, and that he thinks of his parents with love. Then he told me that he and his two brothers were taken to Northern Poland to do logging because his father was a Social Democrat printer and he wouldn't allow his sons to join the Hitler Jugend. He was otherwise a very religious Catholic. So basically to punish him, they took his three sons to a labour camp. His two older brothers died there and were buried there. He came home with tuberculosis and had to undergo surgery to remove one of his lungs. And I felt terribly ashamed that I had condemned prejudice against Jews, but at the same time I was guilty of the same thing, I was prejudiced against the Germans and boycotted Germany as such. At that moment I put this whole thing behind me once and for all.

When I was invited for the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps and I went with thirty-six former Hungarian deportees, I can't describe the way they greeted us, and the effort they made to prove to us that this is a new Germany. A new generation had grown up since then, who had been made to come face to face with Germany's Nazi past. They confronted their past in a way that Hungary, for example, never has. I visited the former concentration camps in that federal state. Needless to say, I was most affected by the camp at Bergen-Belsen, of which no traces remain. There's only a memorial park and the camp museum, where I found my name in the camp records. I looked for the number 10851, and I found my name. I saw the buildings and the SS barracks that now serve to house NATO soldiers. I saw the pine forest that we crossed every morning. I planted a stock of violets on one of the mass graves that my daughter and son-in-law handed to me when I started off.

I feel that it is my duty to pass on the horrors of war. I've been to the Trefort Gymnasium, my old school, where I spoke about these things to a class who were preparing to go on a class excursion to Poland and were going to stop at Auschwitz. I talked about the subject during a history class in my grandchild's school. I consider it very important that these children should know what happened and not be taken in by lies. I know that I am of Jewish extraction. My children and my grandchildren know it too. I'm not making a secret of it. In the fall of 2005, I took my children and grandchildren to Auschwitz. I have never felt that the non-Jews living around me were hostile to me, ever, or are hostile now. I feel no such thing, I never experienced any such thing. All the same, I am aware of the existence of anti-Semitism. When I came home, we had a regime in which people could not say bad things against the Jews. I know that it is customary and even fashionable to deride the decades that today they call communism, but there was no abusing the Jews back then. People may have felt that way, and maybe there were people who thought differently, but they never gave any tokens of it. I like to look for the good in people, and not the bad, and as I result, I don't experience the bad.

Translated by Judith Sollosy

Footnotes

1Pancsova - (Hung.; Serbian: Pancevo) was a municipal borough in County Torontál (royal tribunal, press and district court, royal notaryship, tax office, district administrator's headquarters). In 1850 its population was 11,000, in 1879 16,900, in 1891 17,900 (43% Serbian, 40% German, 11%

Hungarian, 2% Romanian, 1% Slovak, and 1% Croatian; according to religious affiliation the population was 44% Greek Orthodox, 38% Roman Catholic, 9% Lutheran, and 3% Israelite). At the end of the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th, the city had a public gymnasium (principal gymnasium), a higher elementary school, a public and Serbian upper girls' school, as well as a professional training school. After the Treaty of Trianon, it was awarded to the Serbian-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom. Today it is in Serbia.

2Csáktornya - administrative district seat in County Zala (Muraköz, today Medimurje, Croatia). In 1891 its population was 4,000, in 1910 5,200 (47% Hungarian, 46% Croatian, 5% German); it had several district-level administrative offices, schools (state teachers' school, higher elementary school for boys and also for girls, and professional training school; also several factories (champagne, liqueur and cognac factory, vinegar factory) as well as other public institutions, a lively grain and lumber industry, and cattle fairs. After the Treaty of Trianon, it was awarded to the Serbian-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom.

3Hahót was a village in County Zala. In 1891 it had a population of 1,200, by 1910 the number had grown to 2,200, and by1920 to 2,400.

4The interviewee's grandfather was born in 1863.

5As the documents among the photographs indicate, in 1902 the interviewee's grandmother was 41 years of age.

6In 1941, Hungarian troops occupied part of Yugoslavia.

7Graner is probably a reference to the ribbon and stocking factory owned by Henrik Graner Sr and Jr.

8In 1868 Frigyes Stühmer enlarged his small candy shop in Szentkirály utca, acquired modern machines, and founded his own candy and chocolate factory. The enterprise owned a distribution centre in Paris, a warehouse in Abbazia (Opatija, Croatia), and had branch shops in most towns of the country. It is the predecessor of today's Budapest Chocolate Factory.

9German was obligatory in higher elementary school with two or three German classes being held each week..

10The company, founded in the 1920s, domesticated a new branch of industry in Hungary, the manufacture of exceptionally fine, so-called combed yarn. It was one of the more than 400 companies that, formerly having had German interests, had to be relinquished to the Soviet Union in the spirit of the Potsdam Conference. In 1953 the Hungarian state bought it back. Its main office was located at Bécsi utca 5, while the factory proper was at Soroksári út 164.

11According to the marriage certificate, the interviewee's parents were married in 1924.

12Uncle Lakner's Children's Theatre, ran by Artúr Lakner (1893-1944), film script writer, writer and theatre manager, held performances for children first at the Royal Apolló (from 1926), then the Új Színház (from 1929), and the Vígszínház (between 1932 and 1938). After 1940 Lakner held children's performances at the Goldmark Hall, an auditorium in the building of the Jewish neolog community. He put on children's operettas, children's plays and children's cabarets, all performed

by children.

13The play, written by Artúr Lakner, tells the story of an introvert little girl and her father's new wife.

14This was in 1974, when the old National Theatre was gone from Blaha Lujza Square, having been demolished in 1965 to make way for the new metro – or so it was said by the authorities.

15Voluntary blood donation without compensation was part of an official movement in the 1950s, but the Hungarian Red Cross has been organizing free blood donations since 1939.

16In the Diaspora, the first two evenings of Passover are called the Seder.

17István Thomán (1862-1940), was a pianist who continued Franz Liszt's tradition. He was a renowned piano teacher who coached illustrious pianists such as Bartók and Dohnányi at the Music Academy.

18The Viennese Bösendorfer piano factory is one of Europe's oldest manufacturers of musical instruments. It began producing its sturdy Bösendorfer grand piano revered for its characteristic tonal quality in 1828.

19A play on suszter, Hungarian for shoemaker.

20In one of his papers Viktor Karády mentions that from the autumn of 1939 a ministerial decree called for a 6% quota in each class with respect to the new Jewish students. But as he ads, "Independently of this and prior to it, the doors of the middle schools operating under Church supervision (especially the supervision of the Catholic Church, which enjoyed a majority) were gradually closed to Jewish applicants." (Viktor Karády: Felekezetsajátos középiskolázási esélyek és a zsidó túliskolázás mérlege, in Zsidóság és társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek /1867–1945/, Replika Kör, Budapest, 2000.)

21The interviewee is referring to the Maria Theresa Girls' Gymnasium.

22Magda Szabó's widely read novel for young ladies (1970).

23In the Protestant Churches the deaconesses were originally nurses in Biblical sense. The deaconesses (also called Sisters), after a specified period of probationership, were awarded the blessing of the Church. They did not take vows, were allowed to keep freely in touch with their families, and remained in charge of their private fortunes. Their ties to the Mother House remained close: the Mother House disposed of their time and whereabouts, and in case of illness or old age, took care of their needs. They were free to marry. Besides nursing the sick, their activities included caring for children (in orphanages) and educating future teachers, as well as fulfilling various charitable and social (caring for the poor) offices. {In 1951 the government disbanded the deaconess establishments, but after the democratic changes of 1990, there has been a resurgence in some of their functions.

24Taking Bible classes became optional in 1949, pursuant to Decree No. 5 of the Presidential Council. In 1950 80% of elementary school children took Bible classes, in 1955 only 40%, in 1960 25%, and in 1965 only 10%.

25Until the 1946-47 school year, 1 was the highest grade, and 4 was the equivalent of a poor satisfactory. A 5 would have been a failing grade.

26For more on Mrs. Erdős and the house on Amerikai út, see below.

27The Mednyánszky family is one of the oldest aristocratic families of Upper Hungary.

28László Mednyánszky (1852-1919) was the most prolific painter of the turn of the century. Besides his landscapes, he is also celebrated for his so-called vagabond pictures. His models were mostly simple peasant boys, gypsies, drivers, soldiers, beggars and the dubious characters living on the outskirt of town.

29The second Jewish law was implemented in 1939 (Par. IV) and the third in 1941 (Par. XV). In 1942 further laws limited the rights of Jews.

30The Ernst Museum was founded by the art collector and writer on art Lajos Ernst (1872-1937) in order to make his collection of art and historical artefacts available to the public. The museum, which was designed by the architect Gyula Fodor (with the participation of Ödön Lechner, Elek Falus and József Rippl-Rónai) in the art nouveau style, opened its doors in 1912. The building had a movie house on the ground floor, the private collection open to the public was displayed one floor up, above it were two storeys of apartments for rent, and at the top there was a studio.

31The first bombing raid on Budapest was planned for February 2, 1944, but was postponed because of bad weather and did not take place until April 3. 450 bombers and 157 fighter planes of the American air forces launched from Southern Italy targeted the Ferencváros railroad station and the airplane factory. Besides the daytime attacks of the Americans, there were also night attacks by the British air force. On 1April 3 535 American planes attacked Budapest. Their targets were the airplane factory and the airport. On July 2 they launched another major aerial attack against Budapest. The targets included the Weiss Manfréd Works and the Shell Oil Refinery as well as the railway yard in Rákosmező and the western railway yard.

32The auxiliary transit station for apprehended and interned people was located in the building of the central police station in Mosonyi utca, in Budapest’s 8th district. The building is still used by the police today.

33Margit Révész (Mrs. József Hrabovszky, 1885-1956), was a physician and child psychologist. She founded her institution for handicapped and problem children (Institution for Handicapped Children, 12th district, Remete utca 18) in 1911. Later she lectured on experimental psychology at the College for Teachers of Handicapped Children. She also published several studies on child psychology and mentally deficient children.

34From the end of June 1944, the yellow star houses could be left only at times designated by the major or the chief constable. The Jews could not receive guests and were not allowed to converse with anyone from the windows looking out on the street.

35Both places had Hungarian broadcasts. Hitler’s propaganda was balanced by the BBC’s multi-lingual World Service (banned in the target countries). The Hungarian-language broadcast first went on the air four days after the outbreak of the Second World War. The clandestine broadcast of

Kossuth Radio, organized with the support of the Foreign Committee of the Communist Workers Party of the Soviet government, first went on the air on September 29 in Moscow. The anti-fascist, anti-war radio broadcast its programmes for a while from Ufa, the capital of Bashkiria. (Moscow Radio also had a Hungarian-language broadcast.) From 1942 until April 4, 1945 the broadcast were again switched to Moscow.

36On July 7, 1944 Regent Horthy Miklós ordered that “the deportation of the Jews to Germany” must stop. Besides the rapidly declining military situation, the immediate preliminaries of the decision were the following: after both Angelo Rotta, the Papal legate stationed in Budapest, and the American House of Representatives had independently appealed to him, on June 26, Pope Pius XII wrote an open letter to the Regent to save the lives of the Jews of Hungary. On the same day, in a message sent through the Swiss Embassy, the President of the United States warned the Regent that Hungary would be held responsible for any atrocities against the Jews (“The fate of Hungary will not be like that of other civilized nations… unless they put an end to the deportations”);on June 30, the Swedish king sent a warning to Horthy; on July 2, the Allied forces launched their biggest air strike against Budapest, and this time they didn’t just bomb the industrial districts, but the city itself. (Source: Randolph L. Braham: A népirtás politikája. A holokauszt Magyarországon, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2003; Frojimovics–Komoróczy–Pusztai–Strbik: A zsidó Budapest, II., pp. 520–540).

37After the Arrow Cross came into power, they began to move the Jews out of the yellow-star houses and into the Budapest ghetto.

38The camp was liberated by Soviet troops on January 27, 1945, but Himmler had ordered the susupension of the gassing in November 1944 and they began to destroy the evidence of the mass massacre of the Jews.

39According to Randolph L. Braham, the Jewish women of Budapest were called up to work repeatedly. On October 22, 1944 all women between 18 and 40 years of age – in short, those born between 1904 and 1926; on November 2, all women between the ages of 16 and 50 – in short, those born between 1906 and 1916 who knew how to sew; and on November 3 they ordered that the women between 16 and 40 years of age be put in the official records so they could be called up for “labour service related to national security”. See: Randolph L. Braham: A magyar Holocaust, Budapest, Gondolat/Wilmington, Blackburn International Inc., n.d.. /1988/.

40Even in peacetime, those working in an ammunitions factory could be forced to remain in its employ. Employees ordered to engage in defence work were placed under military command and were subject to trial by a military tribunal. They also had to abide by military discipline with respect to duties related to their work.

41According to a report by one of the heads of the International Red Cross, when they reached Gönyű some of the deportees on forced marches driven from Budapest towards Hegyeshalom slept on moored tugboats at night. Many were so exhausted and they fell into the icy waters of the Danube, while others were shot into the water by the Arrow Cross. (Jenő Lévai: Zsidósors Magyarországon, Budapest, 1948).

42At Landsberg am Lech, which was an auxiliary camp of the Kaufering sub-camp complex of the Dachau concentration camp, approximately 30,000 mostly Jewish forced labourers were working on the construction of an underground airplane factory. Seestall was also an auxiliary camp of Kaufering.

43There is no concrete evidence of the addition of tranquillisers (bromide) to the prisoners' food, though many people from various places swore that they were given bromide. But there was probably no need for bromide – the lack of food, the beatings, the extreme cold or hot weather, the lack of sleep, the strenuous workquickly depleted the prisoners' strength and broke their spirit of resistance.

44Some of the prisoners were charged with overseeing the other inmates or were given administrative work. They worked as room, block, and camp supervisors. In exchange for the work, the supervisors were granted certain privileges (better food, better bunk beds in the barracks, etc.). Those who remember them hold different views of their role. Many of the supervisors took advantage of their position, while others tried to protect the prisoners in their care.

45The Hungarian camp at Bergen-Belsen was set up in July 1944 to accommodate the more than 1,600 Hungarian Jews whom Himmler planned to exchange for money and goods. The inmates of the Hungarian camp wore civilian clothes with the Star of David on them and were not driven off to work.

46At 50 minutes past midnight on May 9 in Karlshorst, the eastern quarter of Berlin the meeting at which the Allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany and signed the treaty was concluded, thus bringing the Second World War in Europe to an end.

47The interviewee probably came home on May 18, since that fell on a Saturday.

48Giessen is in the German Federal State of Hesse.

49Sigfried Lenz (b. 1926) is a contemporary German writer who produces mostly novels, short stories, essays, plays and radio plays. Max von der Grün (1926-2005) is considered the writer of the German working class. In his novels, essays, and political articles he focuses, first and foremost, on the problems of the working man (for example, unemployment, the closing down of the mines), as well as Germany's National Socialist past and its effects on today.