Magdolna Palmai

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Interviewer: Zsuzsanna Lehotzky
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Magdolna Palmai told me about the changes of fortune in her life with energy, belying her age in the tiny dining room of her apartment, where she always received me for our meetings with warm coffee and cookies on the table. Colonial furniture, some family souvenirs and pictures which survived, and the paintings hanging on the wall make her apartment homey. Mrs. Palmai is tireless: she reads novels, goes to the theater, plays cards with her friends at weekends, cooks and bakes anytime at the request of her grandchildren, knits pullovers, and if needed, she helps in planting flowers. Her daughter and grandchildren are daily guests at her house, she is almost never alone.

My father, Farkas Fischer, was born in March 1878 in Opalyi, two kilometers away from Mateszalka. He married my mother in 1909; this was his second marriage. In his youth my father lived in Nagyvarad [today Oradea, Romania], too, but we didn't talk much about this. He perhaps completed six classes of elementary school, then he was a master tailor in Nyiregyhaza.

I know my grandparents' name from the marriage certificate of my parents. My father's father was called Ignac Fischer, my grandmother Julianna Weisz. When my parents got married in 1909 neither of them were still alive. [According to the marriage certificate of the parents - see photo no. 17 in template - only the maternal grandmother had passed away by then.] It is written in the same document that my maternal grandfather's name was Izsak Friedman, his wife was Regina Gluck. My mother's parents lived in Kotaj, my father's parents, I think, lived in Opalyi. I know hardly anything about them, not even their occupation. The only picture of my grandfather I got back from the USA, because all they had was lost in the Shoah. Based on the picture, this grandfather of mine, my mother's father, was religious for sure, because in the picture he looks like a rabbi. But I don't know what his occupation was. This wasn't a topic at home.

My father had four siblings: Uncle Szroli and Uncle Jakab, Aunt Mali and Aunt Eszti [Eszter]. They all died in Auschwitz, except Aunt Eszti, who died in the USA. Aunt Eszter's husband was called Simon Silber. They had three sons, Adolf, Sandor and Jeno. My father's sister got to the USA in that one of her sons-they had emigrated long before the war - had Aunt Eszter and Uncle Simon taken to New York onboard the last ship in 1939. But it was too late then, they couldn't fit in there. Earlier they had been farmers in Nyirpazony, and when they got older they came to our place to Nyiregyhaza. We lived in the same house, they lived in that part of the house where later a Germanophile family lived, too. But Aunt Eszti and her husband went to their sons in vain, they couldn't get used to the USA, one can't get used to that lifestyle in Brooklyn as a pensioner. I kept in touch with Aunt Eszter's grandchildren. They were here, too. Sandor's daughter works as a medical researcher, as far as I know. Jeno has a son. Helen and Irving are Adolf's children. Helen died, but Irving still lives. Helen was of my age, Irving is three or four years younger. Irving lives in Cleveland, of course he also has grandchildren, just like I do.

I was once on holiday at my father's other brother, Uncle Szroli's place. Then they took me along to count melons, but I don't know if the land was their own, or they only rented the land they farmed. Melons had to be counted the following way: when the fruit was not ripe yet one scratched its peel and put a number on it or some sign, so that if someone else sold it on the market one would know where it was stolen from. Uncle Szroli had horses and cows; they sold the milk and cottage cheese in Mateszalka. They lived in a small village near Mateszalka, I don't think that there was a synagogue, they weren't very religious, just like the majority of the village. They had two daughters and a son, Sandor, who came back from Auschwitz, and then he immigrated to the USA. Erzsike and Ilona died in the concentration camp [in Auschwitz].

Jakab was supposedly a farm manager, I only have memories of the time when he was a pensioner. He had at least five children from his first marriage. Some of them immigrated to the USA, the ones who didn't died during forced labor. From his second marriage he had a daughter, Boske [Erzsebet]. His son from the first marriage, Miklos, immigrated to the USA, then he died in Paris. When the Prince of Wales, Edward, was here in the mid-1930s Miklos worked at the Kakukk Tavern as a waiter. They dressed him in herdsman's clothes because of the visit of the Prince, and they took his picture, and the newspaper Az Est [The Evening] published it with the title 'Miklos the herdsman gives a light to the Prince of Wales.' [Editor's note: The Evening was a political daily, published between 1910-1939, it was an afternoon paper, its editor was Andor Miklos; from 1919 it was called 'Az Est Lapok' - The Evening Paper.]. Boske died last year [2004] in the USA. She went overseas in 1956. She was of my age, she spent her holiday at our place many times, and I met her in the USA, too. We kept in touch very much with her. She was a strong, beautiful woman, just like an actress.

Out of Uncle Jakab's children born in his first marriage, Dezso died in forced labor. Ilona, Berta and Elzi lived in the USA until their death. At the age of 96 Margit is still doing well, she is extraordinarily fresh intellectually, and she speaks better Hungarian than many '56-ers.' [Editor's note: Hungarians who left Hungary during and after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.]

The husband of my father's sister Aunt Mali was Uncle Bence. I don't remember his last name. I didn't see them often, because they lived in Okorito and the family was deported from there, and in the end they also died in Auschwitz in 1944.

We usually spent our holiday at our relatives' because my mother got ill when I was born, her leg got ill, so my father regularly sent her to Felix- furdo [today Balie Felix, Romania]. This place is near Nagyvarad, but she also used to go to Pest to the Lukacs [spa in Buda] to cure herself. We visited my sister Annus in Vasarosnameny several times, and we went to Uncle Szroli's to Opalyi, too. We stayed there for one to two weeks; that was the holiday at that time.

My mother, Ilona Friedman, was born in 1885 in Kotaj. She probably completed six years of elementary school, I don't know exactly. At home she managed the household, she had a kosher kitchen. We always observed the holidays. We called one of her sisters Aunt Leni, her name was Leni Schaffer. Her husband died in World War I, so Aunt Leni remained alone with the five children, who were born two to three years apart: Herman was born around 1906, Farkas around 1909, and Sanyi [Sandor] was the youngest. Aunt Leni was older than my mother, she was probably born in 1881 in Kotaj. She was a housewife, so the children learned a trade early and started to work. My father helped them very much. The oldest son, Herman, learned the upholsterer trade; I was about

three years old when he was a young man already. I grabbed his finger, sat in his lap...I have such memories of him. Then they disappeared. They were all drafted into forced labor or deported to concentration camps, and nobody came home.

Aunt Leni's middle son Farkas had a son, whom I looked for after 1945. There were children left on the street near St. Stephen's Basilica, who had been collected from the streets. Farkas' child must have been around two to three years old at that time. I had some bread and lard, and I thought I would take it there. It was an awful sight, only the eyes of the children were alive, they couldn't tell their names. There were a couple of doctors and nurses there, but I didn't find Farkas' child, because they didn't know him. The personnel told me, that the Arrow Cross 1 men had come, and they had thrown the ill and dying children on the street just like garbage on a garbage heap...They were happy for the bread and lard, they cut it in small slices and gave it to them to eat.

Aunt Leni's youngest son Sandor was a stitcher, he was a beautiful boy. He joined up, then he was taken to Ukraine and he didn't come home. They were all charming, mere soul people; it was such a closely-knit family, which is rare nowadays. Rozsi was pretty with her long hair, her braids - she was the younger sister. Rezsi, her older sister contributed to the upkeep of the family as soon as she learned sewing. She married Miksa Klein, they opened a dressmaker's shop, and then they had a daughter, Agi. They also perished in Auschwitz.

My mother had three sisters and she was the middle child, Aunt Leni was the oldest and Aunt Teri the youngest. Aunt Teri [Terez] immigrated to the USA at a very young age. She was orphaned when my grandparents died. But I don't know anything about this story, because it happened 30 years before I was born. Then Aunt Teri got married, too, of course and she had two children. When I was there she wasn't alive anymore, unfortunately. She had a son and a daughter, I still keep in touch with her daughter. Her son looked exactly like my brother, and they were of the same age, too. When we first met I thought that my brother was coming towards me, they looked so much alike, but he didn't speak Hungarian.

Annus was my oldest sister, she was born in 1907. Jeno, who was born in 1910, was three years younger, Frida was born one year later, in 1911, then came Fanni in 1912, then Jolan in 1915. Imre was born at the end of World War I, in 1918, and I in 1921.

My father was an adorable man, he was highly respected in Nyiregyhaza, and he loved all his children very much. I think I was especially attached to him. There was an atmosphere of intimacy at home, which I tried to pass on in my family, too. There was 14 years difference between my oldest sister and I. This seems very much, but it is a lucky thing, too, because I learned very many things quite early. I could recite 'Szibinyáni Jank' [Janos Arany's poem] already when I was at nursery school, because while my sister learned it and repeated it out loud, I memorized it. And when she got stuck I helped her, which my other brothers and sisters laughed at, teasing me, 'Say it Magda! How does that go?'

There are things, which just remain in one's memory, like this poem for example: 'Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten, dass ich so traurig bin; Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten, das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.' [The quote is from the poem Lorelei (1827) by Heinrich Heine, German poet of Jewish origin.] I didn't remember who wrote it. I told one of my former colleagues, who had gone to a German school that I would really like to know who wrote it. Then he told me that Lenau had. [Lenau, Nikolaus (1802- 1850): Austrian poet.]. This is just like many other things, it really remains

in the memory for decades.

My father made suits from fashion journals. He ordered the material from Budapest, and those who came in looked in the fashion magazine, or told him what else they wanted, what cut, and they got it. The customers paid a deposit, and my poor father lost money on it many times, because many didn't pay or they paid by installments. When later he couldn't have employees because of the anti-Jewish laws 2, he worked with an apprentice and one of us had to help him out while we were at home. [Editor's note: The 2nd and 3rd anti-Jewish laws only prohibited the employment of non-Jewish domestic servants, and they regulated the number of Jews that could be employed, depending on the size of a factory or workshop.] Then the boys were drafted into forced labor, and the two older girls got married, and I was in Budapest from 1940, but one of us always helped our mother and father; we worked in the workshop.

My father was a genuine middle-class master tailor, he had relations with a textile warehouse in Nyiregyhaza and Pest, too. They sent the samples from Pest, small, square pieces of fabric, and my father bought some of these. If someone wanted a different material, then he showed the sample and ordered that material. The customer chose, and my father covered the costs, and they always sent the bill. It happened that the man who had to pay didn't show up. Once I had a man get really angry with me. This happened at the end of the 1930s. At that time my father was already alone in the shop, because my two brothers had been drafted. My father had sewed a suit for a wealthy young man. The young man came in and said, 'Fischer, is my suit ready?' Then I told him, 'Listen up, go out and come in again, and greet me, because even the cattle moos when it enters the stable. Secondly, for you I am not Fischer, but Miss Fischer, and thirdly, your suit will be ready after you pay your debt. And otherwise, there's the door, you can shut it from the outside.' My father was as white as a sheet: 'How dare you say such things?' I told him, 'Dad, what can we lose, if this man behaves like this?'

But I did this with others, too, with similar persons. Then they told my father that his daughter was a communist. At that time I didn't know what a communist was, but really I was always a rebel. And I saw of course that my father worked day and night. There was a big iron stove, this kind of stove can only be found at museums nowadays, and there was a massive, heavy iron, which they put on the live coal, and they only put its handle on when they took it out. It weighed at least 12 kilograms. My father ironed with that summer and winter, he almost pressed the material, and that's why the suit was so nice. I saw that he worked honestly - because nobody ever complained about him, and everyone still has good memories of him, and then a snotty like this came and dared to speak with him in such a tone, because he was the son of a wealthy merchant! So I told him that one could not behave like that with us.

We always had an apprentice. For example my father always farmed out trousers, because he had a trouser tailor. One of his apprentices immigrated to Paris, I don't really remember the other ones, because at that time I didn't usually go to the workshop. Then the anti-Jewish law came, and he couldn't have apprentices anymore.

We lived in a house in Nyiregyhaza. The Swabian houses in the surroundings of Pest are like that perhaps: a long, narrow L-shaped building, with a big back yard and garden. We didn't have a cellar, but a big pitfall, in which we kept the potatoes, we stored the vegetables in the pantry, in the way that we put them in sand and only their top could be seen. We put the eggs between corn

and barley, we had baskets and we put them in those. We always had at least one or two breadbaskets full of eggs. That's how we got ready for the winter. We baked bread in that we kneaded the dough at home, which we took to the baker's every week. We usually had our bread baked on Fridays, and we also took the challah there, which we kneaded and braided at home. So all of the girls learned how to knead dough.

At that time the shopping was done the following way: we went to the grocer, gave him the grocery list, which started with 20 kilograms of flour, out of which 6-7 kilograms were whole-wheat flour, and the rest white flour. We made the bread and challah out of this. Besides this, my mother always made cookies for the weekend. She always kneaded the dough, she was a very skillful housewife. I often got a telling off, because the dough was never round when I did it - I still can't roll the dough out nicely - and this was a big shame at that time. It sometimes occurred that our mother stuffed a goose, but this wasn't general practice. We grew some green beans, corn and fresh vegetables at home for the summer. And my father loved flowers, so the garden was full of flowers. I often go and look for the flowers that were his favorites, for example, the verbena.

We had many problems with the water. We had a well in the yard, but the water wasn't drinkable because of the alkaline soil, we could only use it to rinse clothes or to wash fruits and vegetables. We couldn't cook with it or put soap in it, because it became like curd. We carried the water from quite far away in cups and cans. We were children, and we had to close the can so that the water wouldn't be spilt by the time we got home. We collected rainwater for washing clothes, or we fetched water for that, too. Time by time a washwoman came to wash. But we all had to help, we boiled the clothes, too, and in the winter we hung the clothes out in the attic. But my mother only had an adult helper for the washing-day and big cleaning; otherwise there were we, the girls, who worked.

Most of the books I read at home I borrowed from the library. In the beginning we didn't have light in the evenings, it was only installed in the house later. We read near a kerosene lamp, but we played chess more often, because my father loved to play, so I also learned how to play in my childhood. My poor father kept telling me, 'Don't be hasty, think twice where to step, because you will be in life just like in chess, if you're hasty.' My dear father was such a special man. Father, friend, confidant, all together, which is really rare, and besides this he also had a sense of humor.

When I was already living here in Pest I bought a pair of high-heeled shoes, a smart topper, which was very fashionable at that time, and a big hat with a feather. I visited home in Nyiregyhaza, and I took a walk with him in these fashionable clothes, and one of my former teachers, Henrik Sztraky, who had also taught my sister, came and greeted me saying, 'Good afternoon, Madam!' My father burst out laughing, and said, 'You know that this wasn't because of you, but because of your dress, your shoes and your hat, don't you?'

At home we had a prayer book, I don't remember any other religious books. At elementary school I learned Hebrew already, to read and to write, too, we also learned to read the Bible [Old Testament], but unfortunately nothing of this stayed with me. And of course at secondary school we also had religious classes, because at that time every denomination had religious classes at school. Because the Jewish community supported the elementary school, only Jews went to my class.

My father rather sang instead of studying the Torah. He liked Hungarian folk songs and Jewish religious songs, too. He had a very nice voice. Once I was coming home, and I heard the neighbors say, 'I don't know where the radio is on, but they are singing so beautifully.' His favorite song was 'Zöld erd?ben, zöld mez?ben sétál egy madár' [In the green field, in the flat field/A bird promenades], he often sang this.

My brothers and sisters called me 'Einzig' or 'Liebling' [German for 'my only one' and 'darling,' respectively] at home. On Sundays my father told me after dinner, 'Come Einzig, let's take a walk.' And then they said, 'Of course, because Einzig is allowed to do anything.' Even though the dishes had to be washed I went for a walk, and by the time I got back usually someone had already done them instead of me. So they said many times that my father was partial to Einzig. In spite of this they all loved me very much. I got so much love that I can't even tell.

We observed Pesach and the high holidays. At these times, at Rosh Hashanah and before the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] my father took us to the other room one by one and blessed us. These blessings remained in me the most strongly; these are my nicest religious memories. At those times one felt such a spiritual calmness that probably only those Catholics can experience who go to the Pope for a blessing, but maybe not even those, because they do not get as close to the Pope as I got to my father at these times.

Sabbath was not really special, at those times my mother didn't cook, we only warmed up the food and my father went to the Orthodox synagogue in the morning. In Nyiregyhaza there was a Neolog and an Orthodox synagogue. When Uncle Simon Silber and his wife, my father's sister Aunt Eszti, lived with us, then my father and Uncle Simon always went to the Orthodox synagogue together. At holidays there was always meat-soup for lunch, and we loved fish, too. On Fridays my mother cooked fish jelly, we all loved that, too. We ate meat-soup, fried, cooked meat and chulent. But my mother often cooked paprika chicken, too. Otherwise these holidays were nice, because the family could be together.

My father had acquaintances at the Jewish community, I think he was a member of the Chevra Kaddisha, he helped those whose relatives had died. I think this is why he went to the synagogue daily. But he wasn't so religious to study the Torah and the Talmud at daytime. He went to the synagogue every morning, but my mother only went on the high holidays, and we the girls went very rarely, and the boys only had to go on holidays. But my mother had a kosher kitchen, and I think that my father was a really religious man.

On Saturdays and Sundays my father took me for a walk in Nyiregyhaza, at that time I was still a small girl, he put his hand on my shoulders, and I put my hand around his waist, as I could reach it, and that's how we walked next to each other. My father wasn't only a father, but a friend, too, and he replaced my mother somewhat, because she became very ill when I was born. My father had special shoes made for her, out of leather used to make gloves; she could only walk in those, but she still needed help. We did the shopping at the market with my father, we, the children went with him and we took the goods home, because after shopping he went to work at the dressmaker's shop. The workshop wasn't in our apartment, but up in the center of the city.

Lunch was at 1 o'clock sharp. By that time everyone had to be next to the table, and until then one could get home from school, too. The bocherim from the yeshivah came to 'eat days' and those boys who came from the country to the city to learn a trade. They lived at the master's or

somewhere else, but they didn't get board there. They did bring some food from home for breakfast and supper, but they didn't have lunch, so they ate lunch somewhere else every day. This is what was called 'to eat days,' namely to eat lunch somewhere else every day. There were always at least 12 people at the table at our place, because two to three people who 'ate days' came for lunch every day.

One of my childhood memories is that we had a very sweet nursery school teacher. The private nursery school where my parents enrolled me was of a very high standard, but it wasn't a Jewish denominational institution. They held classes for us, we recited poetry, and we played and danced. I can still see the teacher, the street, and the house with a garden - we played in the garden - and the rooms inside. It was at a nice place and very close to our apartment. It wasn't an expensive private nursery school, though everything is relative.

In Nyiregyhaza there were Orthodox and Neolog Jews. The elementary school functioned in the courtyard of the Neolog synagogue. We had brilliant teachers. The old teachers went to teach because they had a calling, and they had the children perform at their full potential. That was a different world. Aunt Szabin was the teacher; we learned German with her starting from the 1st grade of elementary school. Formerly churches supported the elementary schools, I don't remember any public schools in town. Our institution was very strict. By the time I completed the four classes of elementary school, I could read very well, and not only I but everyone...; we knew the multiplication table so well, that we could say it even if they woke us up from sleep, and we had to learn calligraphy, too. Nowadays children can't read and write in the eight-grade secondary school like we could after the four classes of elementary school.

Then middle school came, which was public. There was a high school in Nyiregyhaza, and there was a school of the Congregatio Jesu, too. [Editor's note: The sisterhood of the Congregatio Jesu was founded by the English Mary Ward in 1609. Its main aim was to spread and defend the faith and to educate young girls. Peter Pazmany invited the sisterhood of the Congregatio Jesu to Hungary in 1628. Their activity before 1950 was mainly teaching and education.] I could have gone to high school, because I would have only had to take a supplementary examination in French, but I went to the middle school because of financial matters. The high school wasn't as expensive as the school of the Congregatio Jesu.

While at middle school the monthly fee was 5 pengoes, at the school of the Congregatio Jesu it was 25. But at the school of the Congregatio Jesu education was of high standard: they taught English, French and German, too. The children of wealthy Catholic families went there, there were one or two whom they admitted for less or no fee, but mostly the daughters of wealthy Christian families went to the school of the Congregatio Jesu. There was great strictness at their institute in Nyiregyhaza, too, because nuns taught the different subjects. When they walked, the girls walked two by two in black stockings, navy-blue skirt and uniform shoes, but at that time we head to wear uniform hats at middle school, too. Our daily dress was a sailor-suit with a striped blouse, in the spring we wore a white and in the winter a navy-blue blouse for the holidays.

At middle school I only had to pay the 5 pengoes tuition in the first semester, because I was exempt for being diligent. My favorite subject was literature, they organized a literary society, too, and I had a teacher, Henrik Sztraky, who taught German, Hungarian and Geography. I still remember the poem that I learned at that time. Otherwise we performed everything, he made us

perform the stories. And at the literary society one could perform monologues, plays, and we were happy to go and see bigger plays, too. This teacher loved children so much! He inspired the students to go to the literary society, but another teacher directed that.

I still bless Henrik Sztraky because there aren't teachers like him anymore. He taught me many things. We performed the 'Erlkönig' by Goethe in German, in the Hungarian class we performed 'Sondi's two pages' [Janos Arany's ballad]. We performed everything, and that's why we remembered so many things. In the geography class he said: 'Geography is easy, because one can read everything from the map.' And he showed us that on the relief map one could see how high a mountain was, and where it was. On the political map one could see what bordered the country, at the towns one could see if there was a mine, and then one knew that the industry was developing. So he was a Zipser German from Temesvar [today Timisoara, Romania]. [Editor's note: He was a Saxon and not a Zipser German. Zipser Germans are a German-speaking ethnic group in northern Romania in the region of Maramures.] In World War I one of his lungs was injured, and he told us that he had to teach at a girls' school, because there was much trouble with boys. At that time there were separate schools for girls and boys.

I was a diligent pupil, but I didn't want to be a swot, I ran around with the others during breaks. Once I bumped into Sztraky. He looked at me, I hunched up, and he said: 'Even you, Brutus?' Henrik Sztraky didn't treat us like small children, but so that we would get through in life. And he taught literature in a way one could only adore.

In my childhood most of my friends were boys. I remember one girlfriend who was an only child. Her name was Ica Raducziner, her parents had a grocery shop in town. Ica had beautiful skin, and everyone kept asking her, 'Ica, how come your skin is so beautiful?' She answered, 'Because my mother bathes me in milk and butter.' She was a Jewish girl, but her family wasn't religious.

We still lived in the first apartment, I wasn't going to school yet, when a relative of Aunt Teri's came home and brought a huge car. At that time there were hardly any cars in the street. This relative picked up every child in the neighborhood and took us for a ride. After this the neighbors said, 'A rich American came to the Fischer's and took the entire street for a ride.' It was a huge car with an open top, as far as I remember, it was a real miracle.

At home I didn't really do any sports. The forest was close to us, we went there to play and to walk at weekends. I did some sports though, when my younger brother played soccer with the boys in the courtyard and they took me on the team. Otherwise physical education was important at school, they organized gymnastic competitions. When I was going to the 4th grade of middle school Aunt Eszti's granddaughter, Helen, came home from America, and there was a gymnastic competition at the end of the school year. When she visited me before her death she still mentioned it: 'Magdi, I remember your school, I was so envious because you had such a beautiful gymnastic competition, and you were all so beautiful, too.' Because in America everything was different in the education system, for example they went to the same class with the boys, and because of that they didn't have such an intimate circle of friends as we did.

I spent my free time at home or we danced and talked at my friends'. But I liked to read very much. Aunt Eszti was angry with me because of this, she said, 'You don't do anything, but only chase the flies away from your leg, instead of doing some work.' Reading wasn't important to her and that's why she was angry with me for reading so much. I really read a lot, and I kept this habit later, too. I

liked Jokai and Mikszath, the classics, the philosophers, Kant, Spinoza 3, and theology. [Editor's note: Mor Jokai (1825 -1904) was a Hungarian dramatist and novelist. He was a great romancer, and his novels are widely known and popular among Hungarians. Kalman Mikszath (1847-1910) was a great Hungarian novelist and politician. Many of his novels contained social commentary and satire, and towards the end of his life they became increasingly critical of the aristocracy and the burden that he believed it placed on Hungarian society.] I remember a book, the last name of the author was Gyarfas perhaps. I don't remember exactly the contents, but it was about something like how to learn to pray in a Jewish way, and how to attain faith.

We were going to middle school when one of my friends told me, 'Let's go to swing!' I asked where. 'On the beard of the Jew,' she answered. This was my first encounter with anti-Semitism, but at that time I felt differently about this, of course. One could rather feel this from the newspapers. I was always the one, as the youngest, who brought the Esti Kurir [Evening Courier, a liberal daily, published in the afternoons] for my brother, which was a radical newspaper. At that time I already used to read newspapers, I started reading from a very young age, from when I learned how to read. Arrow Cross men already existed, and it happened that they were locked up because they ran too many riots in the street. But regardless of this the streets rang with: 'Long live Szalasi 4 and Hitler, let's hit the Jews with pizzles.'

At some stage I wanted to be a philosopher. Besides Henrik Sztraky I had another very good teacher, a young rabbi, who taught at high school. This teacher held presentations at the study circle for those young people who were interested in philosophy in the building of the high school; he gave private lessons, as you would say today. He spoke about Kant, Spinoza, and he acquainted us with other philosophers, too. He told us to learn German, because Kant could only be read in the original. In this period I was going to middle school and I wasn't 14 yet, but in former times children were more mature than the 20-year-olds nowadays.

Later, I must have been around 18-19, I learned English with another company in Nyiregyhaza. In that time one could only learn English and French at high school or at the school of the Congregatio Jesu, only in the school system. It was 1939, and the numerus clausus 5 had also been applied, so we could only learn foreign languages as autodidacts. An engineer took on to teach us. He had emigrated earlier, but he came back to Hungary. At that time one couldn't immigrate to the USA anymore, because there was a quota 6, and this man thought that he could help us if we learned English from him somehow. He kept telling us that the future was going to be emigration. He taught us for free in the building of the Jewish elementary school, so mainly Jews participated in these classes.

In the 1930s there was a pilot training unit. At that time many anti- Semitic caricatures were published in the newspapers, they pictured the Jews with a long, crooked nose and always with a beard. At that time the beard wasn't really fashionable, maybe it was because of that. But an officeholder grew nice big sideburns, I think it might have been the sub- prefect. The air-force officers didn't recognize him and beat him, because they thought he was a Jew. So these young soldiers, into whom they hammered the anti-Jewish laws at the training, provoked on the streets already in the 1930s.

At the end of the 1930s I had to learn a civil trade. I said at home that in our family everyone sewed and I hated it and didn't want to become a seamstress. My father told me, 'Why not, you

could even become a dental technician. That is very good, though it's a trade for men, you would be the first woman, it's not sure that they would admit you.' They didn't admit me. So I went to learn the milliner trade, but I was a milliner's apprentice only for half a day. We dressed very nicely in my family, but I must say, that I only had a new coat, when I went to Pest, and from my first salary I bought myself material. Until then they always adjusted someone's used coat to fit me.

There was a milliner in Nyiregyhaza, who said, 'Come, Mr. Fischer, send your daughter here.' At that time the milliner's trade prospered, it was very fashionable to wear hats. I went in one morning, I wore a light black velvet dress with a white embroidered organdy apron. The boss said, 'Go and clean the stove with the other apprentice.' And she also told us to bring the wood inside because it was raining. They gave me a white coat and we went out to the courtyard. It rained outside, we cleaned the stove, then brought the wood inside. The morning went by and I went home for lunch. My father asked me what I had done. I told him, crying, what we had done. He told me then that I wasn't going to go anywhere and I was going to stay at home. I didn't go to the milliner's anymore, but my father didn't go to tell her either. On the next day or two days later the milliner came to ask why I hadn't come back that afternoon. My father told her that he hadn't sent her daughter to become a maid, but to learn a trade. This is where my story of a milliner's apprenticeship ended.

I went to learn sewing after all, at a salon, where actresses and other famous persons, countesses, had their dresses made in the summer. They fitted the dresses of a countess on me. But I hated sewing very much. The other thing was that we had to deliver the dresses to the customer, and there they always gave some tip, which I was ashamed to accept. I was ashamed to deliver the dress home.

Later I went to Pest. Because in former times they usually taught the apprentices, and in the meantime they took advantage of them for free, and when they would have had to pay them they let them go to try their luck. So I came to Pest in 1940. At first I worked at different dressmaker's shops as a seamstress. But because I was young, one of my brothers and sisters was always there with me, I was never alone. Once my younger brother was in Pest, but he was drafted into forced labor, then my older sister Fanni, who immigrated to the USA later. Then I was together with my older sister Jolan, who is still alive. I lived together with the other ones, but not with Jolan, because at that time I already lived with someone, and it wasn't possible for more of us to live in that rented room. So she lived on a different street.

I had friends in Pest who had been excluded from the university because of the anti-Jewish laws. In order to earn money many of them went to the baker's and delivered the croissants and rolls in big baskets on their back, because they didn't get another job. They were excluded because only a certain percent of the students could be Jewish. So these former students made a living this way. How humiliating it was, and they had to be happy to get a little change this way.

As I have told you I had six brothers and sisters, but we loved each other very much. And as time went by the youngest family members also arrived: my oldest sister Annus [Anna] had three children: Tibor, Agnes and Marta. My other older sister Frida married a widower who already had two children, and they had two children together. Zoli [Zoltan] was the oldest, his sister was Eva, and Frida's own children were Erzsi and Magda. Zoli was 13 and Magda perhaps three when they were deported from Mateszalka...Annus, Frida, their children and our parents all died in Auschwitz.

Anna got married; she was already a bride when they sent her to the cemetery, to her mother's grave. Because they told her then that not our mother had given birth to her, but my father's first wife. Annus was two years old when her mother died, and she only found out as an adult that not our mother had given birth to her. But she couldn't even imagine having another mother, other brothers and sisters. As I grew up I resembled my older sister Annus the most. When I once visited her in Vasarosnameny they asked me on the street if I was Mrs. Klein's sister, because I looked just like her. I had an old picture of Annus, in which she must have been about 16 years old. At that age I looked almost like her.

Annus's children weren't only beautiful, but Tibor was so clever, that he sent puzzles to children's magazines at the age of ten.

My brothers, Jeno and Imre learned the tailor trade. Jeno was in Paris for a couple of years, but in 1939 he came back. After returning from forced labor, he managed an independent tailor's in Nyiregyhaza. The workshop was in the center of the town, but from the 1950s he couldn't keep it anymore, and even though he remained independent all his life, he couldn't have employees because of the nationalization 7. So from then on he worked alone. In the 1950s, after the nationalization, my other brother Imre worked as a merchant.

We all wanted to become either a seamstress or a tailor. Fanni did this, too, only she did it in the USA. After the liberation in 1945 she didn't come home from Auschwitz because she thought that nobody from the family was alive. That's why she left. First she got to one of the sons of my father's sister Eszti in Brooklyn. In Feldafing [today Germany] they asked after the liberation if anyone had relatives in the USA, and she said she did. [Feldafing, which is not far from Munich, and which was originally the summer camp of the Hitlerjugend, opened its gates to the survivors who had been liberated from concentration camps on 1st May 1945.] But Fanni didn't really like being at Aunt Eszti's son. This was partly because the Jews in the USA simply couldn't believe what had happened. They thought that people made things up, because nobody in his right senses would believe what the Germans had done. And Fanni was in very bad health, and maybe they were afraid that she would infect the family. So my mother's sister Aunt Teri, who lived in Los Angeles, said that she would be pleased to have her, so in the end she went there. And when she got back on her feet, she got settled in Los Angeles, she made ties.

When she got old and sick I told her that she had three choices: to employ someone to look after her, to go to a rest home or come home. I gave her a deadline until she had to think about this. Then she went to a rest home for a week, and she realized that she didn't want that, even though she had her own room, and there were club activities. But she didn't want to employ someone, because she didn't want to live with a perfect stranger. So I went to her in the USA and she agreed to come home from Los Angeles. We brought her home in 2000, and from then on she lived here with us. She was so energetic when we arrived, but then she started to forget things.

One night she had a heart attack, so we took her to the Janos Hospital. But there she fell off the bed and broke her head, all her face was black. She died in one and a half months, in 2001. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery in Rakoskeresztur. My husband was also buried there. But she was very happy before that at home, because we had been on good terms since our childhood. We could always count on each other in everything.

Once in 1943 she fell very ill, and got to the hospital. I worked, but as soon as I found out what had happened to her, I rushed to see her. I didn't write to my parents about Fancsi [Fanni] being ill, but we wrote a letter as if everything was in order, and she signed that she was doing well. She was in the hospital for a month or six weeks with pneumonia and pleurisy. She was very ill, and after that she grew weak. But in the circle of friends - I got to know these young people among the social democratic youth - there was a doctor, Otto Arato, who later became the head physician of the Sports Hospital. He worked with his father, because his father was also a doctor; they did their surgery together, in the middle there was the lounge, and in one room worked his father, and in the other one he did. At that time there was a head physician at the National Social Insurance Institute, whom Otto Arato knew well. He told me to hand in the papers, and that they would try to send Fanni to a sanatorium. I didn't dare to write to my parents that she was ill, even though she had been in the hospital for one and a half months. I worked, because one had to live off something, and in the meantime I arranged for her a place to go. In the end they took her to a sanatorium. She had been there for quite a while when I wrote to my parents that there was a problem. They were quite angry at what this snotty girl - this was me - had done again, that I had tried to act on my own again.

Then Fanni had to go home, because the front was approaching and they vacated the sanatorium. She was deported to Auschwitz at that time with my other family members. She told me later that at the forced labor camp they repaired rails, worked at the railway and they didn't have any food. She ate raw beets, and everything they found on the fields. She told me that she wasn't that hungry, but she rather wanted to sleep all the time. Once she asked the guard to let her sleep for ten minutes to gather some strength, and the guard was nice and let her rest for ten minutes. Then she continued to work. I am sure that Fanni was cheerful at that time, too, and she could raise people's spirits. In the USA her house was always full of guests, they came to get advice from her, and also because she could bake well. If it was needed, if the neighbors had some kind of celebration, she baked for them, too, with pleasure, so they loved her very much.

Both my brothers were at her place in America for a year, because she wanted them to stay there, but homesickness brought them back. Later both of my brothers got married, but neither Imre, nor Jeno, nor Fanni had any children. Only Jolan has a daughter. My brothers' wives weren't Jewish. Both Jeno and Imre lived in a very good marriage with their Christian wives, but neither of them had any children. Time went by, and later one thinks twice about it. I didn't want to have any children either, because I didn't want them to go through what my generation had gone through. But my husband really wanted to have children, and I don't regret having a daughter either.

In our house in Nyiregyhaza there was a separate one-bedroom-apartment with a kitchen, and there lived a Germanophile family. When my parents hadn't been deported yet, the man said that if all the Jews were like Mr. Fischer, then the Jews wouldn't be deported. They set aside a big chest full with things for us, when my parents were deported, but I only got back one box of material. After the war when they came back and I met them, the woman was honest enough to tell me that really they had taken everything, but they had been evacuated to Germany and they lived of those things there.

When I came to Pest I made many new friends. I still have a girlfriend whom I met at that time, even though that's more than 60 years ago. I lived in Budapest from 1940 until 1945. I became a member of the youth department of the Social Democratic Party here. They organized literary

evenings, as well as matinees for the workers, where they invited leftist actors to hold cultural performances. I heard Hilda Gobbi and Tamas Major [both famous Hungarian actors] there, who recited poems written by Attila Jozsef and Ady. [Editor's note: Attila, Jozsef (1905-1937) was one of the most outstanding Hungarian poets of the 20th century. He committed suicide at the age of 32. Endre Ady (1877-1919) was a Hungarian poet, one of the most important poets not only in the 20th century but in Hungarian literature in general.] -This happened in 1941-1942, when many poems by Attila Jozsef were banned, like the one entitled 'Tell me what lies in store for a man' or 'Mother.' But there were also poems by Ady or Petofi 8 that could not be recited, because they praised the working class. The programs had to be reported, but there were always some people from the police there, and when the actors started to recite the banned poems they intervened immediately.

Many from among our company, the members of the social democratic youth movement, became leading politicians later. But at that time we listened to Anna Kethly at the Vasas House, and often went to the theater, too, to the cheap performances for the workers. We saw 'The Diary of a Madman' with Varkonyi at that time, which was a miracle. [Editor's note: Zoltan Varkonyi (1912-1979): Hungarian actor, director, theater director. He adapted for the stage many classical Hungarian novels.]. We loved the way he acted. I used to take trips with this company at weekends or when we were free. We often went to God, to Frank Mountain, there was the Gazdagret Housing Estate built, we went on trips to the Ram precipice and to the Zsiros Mountain, wherever we could go without money. There were about 20-30 of us in this company.

I went to Professor Ferenc Merei with my friends from the university. Since they had been excluded from the university because of the numerus clausus, they continued their studies this way. Professor Merei lived on Klotild Street 10, in the 1940s, and we went to his place for cramming courses. [Ferenc Merei (1909-1986) graduated from the University of Sorbonne, then he returned to Hungary where he mainly worked as a pedagogue and clinical psychologist.] Literature, psychology, politics - we talked about everything. Professor Geza Hegedus [Hungarian writer] was there, too. I can still remember the way we sat at Merei's, Geza Hegedus put up a blackboard and said, that if the police came we had to say that we were learning graphology, the letter 'g' in graphology - and he wrote a 'g' - and showed us how, for example, a criminal would write the letter. So this was the conspiracy. It was a wonderful period. We had to leave the apartment one by one, first we looked outside if there was a policeman there or someone else. There were 10-15 of us at these meetings. The lectures went on for two to three years, until 1942 or 1943, but in 1944 we didn't meet at Merei's anymore, that's for sure.

In Budapest I lived in a room, with a very nice Jewish family, I was at home when I found out that my parents had been deported. It was published in the newspapers from where they were deporting people. They deported all the Jews from Ujpest. At that time Laszlo Endre was the sub-prefect in Ujpest. They put the white flag up there and in Nyiregyhaza, too, because they had cleared the town from Jews. This was in the newspapers, the Jewish community knew it, and of course the news spread among people, too. That's how I also found out that my parents had been deported. And from the fact that my sister and I wrote a letter and sent it to Nyiregyhaza, and we didn't get an answer. So I wrote to one of my acquaintances there, to see about this thing...I cried very much when I found out that they had been deported.

The man at whose place we lived was a violinist, and I remember that he rebuked me, 'Nobody cares that you are crying.' Perhaps he didn't want to hurt my feelings, but make me stronger this

way, but from then on it was as if my tears had dried up forever; I couldn't cry about anything. Simply not even a tear came out of my eyes for many years. When I was in Auschwitz in 1965 and through the big glass wall I saw the hair, the suitcases, the shoes, the showcase in which they had put the children's wooden shoes and children's shirts, the lamp, which they had made out of human skin, I got a crying fit. We were coming home from Zakopane [today Poland] after a two-week holiday. Everyone was shocked, and those who were more closely affected cried, but I couldn't stop. I haven't been to Auschwitz since then and I will not go anymore. Those pictures are still alive in me.

I had an uncle, my father's cousin, Marton Fischer, who had a Readymade Factory with 20 employees on Kiraly Street 34. My uncle found out somehow that one of his workers sympathized with the partisans and gave him a piece of material. This happened already in 1944, after the Arrow Cross takeover 9. They took my uncle, who was 70 years old at that time, to Svabhegy, to the Majestic Hotel, which didn't function as a hotel but as a lock-up, where they interrogated and kept people. Of course we didn't know where Uncle Marton had disappeared to. One of our acquaintances brought us a card from him, in which he asked us to bring him a pair of trousers, because the one he had been wearing got damaged. Nobody dared to go up, at that time we had to wear a yellow star already, but in the end I took on the task. They sent him bread and bacon, and the trousers he had asked for.

The building was L-shaped. As I was going to the back part of the building, where my uncle was kept, the prisoners shouted names and addresses from every window for me to notify their relatives. These people had been caught on the street or at their workplace, and their families didn't know anything about them. But I could only remembered three addresses. They had captured the driver of the Turkish embassy, too, so I went to Dembinszky Street and I told his mother and sister that he was being kept in the Majestic. Another prisoner was called Cerna and he sent me to the Co- operative of the Tailors. And I went to another place, to Arena Street to a lawyer, to tell him that his son was being kept on Svabhegy, but he didn't care.

My 70-year-old Uncle Marton's trousers got damaged, because the policemen beat him at the interrogatory. I gave him the packages and I left. I met him for the last time then, after this he disappeared.

From the summer of 1944 until the fall we cleared away the ruins 10, for which we got a little salary. We couldn't buy many things from our salary, but we could buy bread and a couple of small things. At that time they had imposed a curfew on Jews, but we could walk in the town this way. And of course any money came in handy, because we had no income. At that time we lived like this. The center for the clearing away of ruins was on Andrassy Street 105; before the building was bombed nuns had lived there.

In the summer of 1944 I found out from an Arrow Cross boy, with whom we cleared the ruins away at the Vazsonyi Villa, what had been going on at Szent Istvan Avenue 2 [an infamous Arrow Cross house in 1944], where they took those whom they caught in the street. It was such a world at that time, we worked together with this Arrow Cross boy. He was a young man, he didn't have any trade yet, so he got a job with the bricklayers. He said that in the house on Szent Istvan Avenue the wall was bloody, then he brought a golden cigarette case. I asked him how he could smoke from that. He said 'with difficulty.'

At night the Arrow Cross men made raids. Once we were sleeping in one of the ruined houses with Klari, with whom we worked together on the clearing away of the ruins, and with whom we were together later in forced labor. We couldn't turn the light on, we looked for pieces of parquet in which there weren't any nails, to put under our head as a pillow. We lay in one corner, so that in case there was a proof shot, and it lit up the place, they wouldn't see that we were sleeping there. We could stay there for a couple of nights, then the foreman told us that they couldn't hide us any longer, the ruin clearing was stopped, the front was approaching, so we had to leave. This happened after September 1944, but before 15th October. [In the summer of 1944 the army granted asylum to many Jewish civilians, too: besides the forced laborers many Jewish men and women from Budapest worked at militarily important establishments and at the ruin clearing after the bombings. (Because of the growing shortage of manpower there were female forced laborers already in 1943, but they were only transferred under the supervision of the Labor Organization of the Ministry of Defense in 1944). It's possible that Magdolna Fischer also worked in such an organization at the ruin clearing before the Arrow Cross takeover.]

At that time I lived alone on Eotvos Street 32. My sister lived on Kertesz Street, in a room with a family. We had to join up for forced labor after 15th October. [Editor's note: After the Arrow Cross takeover in October 1944, approx. 10,000 women were drafted, organized into forced labor units and ordered to work in fortifications and to dig trenches. At the beginning of November, when Soviet troops initiated another offensive against the capital, those who survived the inhuman treatment and conditions were taken to a brick-yard in North Budapest, together with Jewish women who had been given special mobilization orders a few days earlier. From here they were directed on foot toward Hegyeshalom at the Austrian border, handed over to the Germans who ordered them to build the "Eastern wall" defending Vienna.] We went together with Jolan to the KISOK estate 11, so that we wouldn't be separated from each other in forced labor.

When in 1944 the Germans came in, after the Arrow Cross takeover in October, they gathered Jewish women from age 15 to 45 and deported everyone for forced labor. We had to leave quickly, so the neighbors gave clothes to one of us, some food to the other, whatever we needed, and there was one from whom we got a backpack. On the KISOK estate they assigned everyone to companies, I was assigned to company no. 45. We went on foot from there to the Fay farm in Maglod. We got a shovel and a spade, which we took with us on the road.

Later when I was in Beregszasz [today Ukraine] for 14 years after the war, I thought many times about visiting Magda Dickmann. She was appointed as the company commander. Once Magda's friend - who was underground by the way, he was hiding from the police and the Arrow Cross men - got dressed as an officer and collected the packages from the acquaintances that remained at home, and he brought it to the Fay ranch with two forced laborers. They told us to line up when they arrived. I found it strange that many were smiling during the line-up, because this wasn't customary. I found out later that this whole action was a trick. The officer's uniform of the boy was needed only for the role, to fool our guards, and to meet the acquaintances, to deliver messages and food. This boy wasn't a partisan.

One didn't have to be a leftist in order to hate the war and the state of affairs. I knew a Jewish lawyer who hated the left as much as he hated Hitler. He told me the first time, because he could listen to the foreign radio stations, 'You don't know anything, they kill the Jews with gas.' And he also said, 'I hope the Russians don't come, because that would be even worse than Hitler.' This

happened in 1944 when my parents had already been deported.

In Maglod we dug trenches and roadblocks. You can imagine what those roadblocks were like. Our accommodation on the farm was a bigger stable with straw on the ground, where we lay in four rows. There was a little woman there, who once said, 'Don't cry, we will tell our grandchildren: one upon a time when grandmother was a soldier...'

During forced labor we went on foot, many times we even had to march 40 kilometers. One evening we arrived at a factory, where they had taken off everything, only the iron mounts were left there. I don't remember exactly where this building was, perhaps in Alag. In our company there was a woman, who didn't have anyone to leave her 13-year-old daughter with, so she took her along. We hid the children, though we didn't have to hide her that much, because nobody cared that there was another Jew. Late at night we were very hungry and tired, we lay exhausted after the march, packed like sardines on the concrete floor of the hall in the cold of October. We huddled up together on the floor, to warm each other up, because we hardly had any clothing anymore.

Once a former opera singer called Erzsi started to sing the 'Yiddishe Mame.' The echo of that in the hall was something miraculous. Once the door opened and there stood the gendarme, a first lieutenant, and he was crying. He said, 'How can this be done to women? How?' And he asked us what we needed. And that night he had so much food brought with a truck, we hadn't seen that much food in our life before - bread, bacon, marmalade and margarine. The gendarmes gave everyone as much as one wanted. He asked how he could help each of us. I told him that I wanted to wash in warm water, because it was awful that one couldn't wash. So he told the guards that those who wanted could go and wash in turns. We could only wash in the presence of the guards, of course, but I can't tell you what that meant for us. Everyone got a demobilization paper from him, so that we would be allowed to go back to our apartments. This gendarme officer told us already in Alag, 'Look, I can't help you, I can only say that they are changing the cadre. Our men will take you from here to Budapest - I think the Petofi Bridge was still standing at that time, we crossed that - after the bridge the Arrow Cross men take over the company.' He told us to watch out, and that those who could should run away, and that we should be careful and use back roads because the Germans were still at the Royal. He told us not to take main roads, but walk on secondary roads.

So from Alag we went on foot with the gendarmes until we reached the capital, and when the company arrived at the Petofi Bridge, where the Arrow Cross men would have taken us over, some of us ran away. No soul was on the streets. We walked on the side streets, and we arrived at Harsfa Street, behind the Royal. The Germans were packing already at that time. It might have been six of us there together and we were terribly scared about what would happen if the Germans caught us. But they didn't care about us, because the Russians were already in Vecses at that time and the Germans were running away. [Editor's note: around 6th November 1944 there were already street fights in Vecses between the Soviet troops and the Germans.]

We made use of the demobilization papers because we went to Eotvos Street 32, where I had lived earlier, and even though the janitor was an Arrow Cross man and didn't want to let us in, the demobilization papers convinced him after all. The forced labor lasted until 6th December 1944. This is written in the demobilization papers, too. [Editor's note: In the demobilization papers it states that she did military service between 23rd October and 6th November 1944.]

Then I went to visit the grandchildren of my lost uncle, Marton Fischer, on Kiraly Street 34, where they caught me during a raid, at an identity check, and took me to the police station on Mozsar Street. There they took from one everything that could be taken. Teenager Arrow Cross men bossed about the police superintendent. The police superintendent and the police officers told us to hide everything, because there was going to be a body search, too. Then they took us over to Teleki Street 10 from there, to a screening center. There I was so sick for the first time in my life that I just lay on a table, where we were packed like sardines, and I didn't really know about anything. I don't know what the matter was with me, I had a fever and I was hungry and exhausted. I remember that the police officers had told us earlier to run away, because they were going to gather us, take us to Gonyu on foot and from there to Germany by ship. [Editor's note: The Arrow Cross men drove about 30,000 Jews from Budapest and 50,000 forced laborers to the western border between 6th November and the end of November. One of the night stops of many of these death marches was Gonyu where they accommodated the Jews on anchored barges. Many fell into the Danube because of exhaustion, others were driven into the water by the Arrow Cross men.]. Then I got better and they took us to the brickworks in Obuda.

While we were in forced labor a friend of mine from Nyiregyhaza, who wasn't Jewish, sent me a Swiss free-pass, a Schutzpass 12, by mail, issued in my name, to my address on Eotvos Street. After the anti-Jewish laws this man became a Strohmann 13 in a big shoe factory. He was a good man, he helped many of us. Of course, I only found this out after the liberation, when we met, because he visited me. I found the free-pass when I demobilized from forced labor and went to Eotvos Street 32. From then on I kept it on me all the time, I got out of the brickworks in Obuda with that in a day. We typed my sister's name on it, too, so Jolan could stay with me.

I'd rather not say anything about the brickworks, because it was horrible...Very many of us were up in the dryer, I remember round holes, everyone relieved herself there...I said that I would leave that place, I would rather want to be killed. But we didn't have to run away from here, because they said that those who had a free-pass could just leave. This happened in December 1944, before Christmas, Budapest was already besieged.

From there they took us to Pozsonyi Street 33/b, to the Swiss protected house, from where we all had to leave before Christmas, because that became an Arrow Cross house, too. 80 of us went to Pozsonyi Street 20 from here, which was a Swedish protected house. They didn't let us go up in the apartments, the refuge was very overcrowded. My sister and I found a place to sit in a laundry room, next to the toilet. This happened perhaps on Christmas Eve. We spent the night sitting there, we didn't have any food, and we didn't get anything either. In the morning I couldn't stand up, I was so chilled through, my legs were completely stiff. Then I decided to go out on the street, even if I was going to be shot, because I couldn't stand it anymore.

The air-raid shelter commander told us that the Jews from Hollan Street had been deported, and that there were empty houses. He spoke about Hollan Street 47 or 49. He said, 'Go there, there is a Jewish organization on the corner of Csanady Street. They can help you, and 80 people can be taken there. In those houses there is still lighting and you'll find other things, too.' There was a curfew at that time because of the siege, but I left, what could I lose? On Csanady Street they asked me how I could prove that I was Jewish; because everyone tried to save his own skin. So I told him, that I couldn't prove that I was Jewish because I was from Nyiregyhaza. A man asked me if I knew a Friedman boy from Nyiregyhaza. I said, 'the young one?' Because the one I knew was of

my age. Then they said it was okay.

This was my certificate of being Jewish. They could only give me an address, because the open order of the Arrow Cross men was needed in order for them to let us go into these houses. So I went to Pozsonyi Street 33/b, which was already an Arrow Cross house at that time. I told them that there were 80 Jews on the street and that they needed to be accommodated, because there was already a siege in Budapest. I got a lame Arrow Cross escort, who went with us to the house on Hollan Street. But the janitor didn't let us in, and he asked for another stamp on the open order, so I went back again and asked for the stamp. In the end we stayed on Hollan Street for a couple of days. But one morning they rang and a policeman came and told us to vacate the house, because Jews could not be at a couple of hundred meters away from the Danube. So we got to the ghetto on Akacfa Street. There was bombing at Klauzal Square, so we couldn't go there, there were so many ruins on the street. It was dangerous too, the proof shots were continuous. An 18-year-old girlfriend of mine had lived there. Once she went upstairs to get water, and she died because of a proof shot.

From the ghetto we ran away to my sister's former boss, whose salon called Style Dress Salon was in the Harris Passage. Jolan worked there at the beginning of the 1940s. The owner told us to come back at 5 in the afternoon, after hours. There was a fitting room surrounded by curtains, there they put down the dog's pillow, and we could sleep there. They told us to watch out, to not let the 'water' out, to hold everything back, because the air raid shelter was under us, people hid there during the night. She was a lady, a charming woman, otherwise she would have never opened the salon, but while we were there she always came to open up.

So we could stay there for a few days. She sent us bean soup in the evening, I will never forget, I have never eaten anything so delicious in my life. She said that my sister and I had to be accommodated somewhere, but it didn't work out. She gave me an address, where I had to go as a refugee from Transylvania 14. She told me, 'Magda, listen up, go, one can't tell that you are Jewish. There is an ad that they are looking for a domestic help, go there.' She sent me to Fehervari Street. It was the one- bedroom apartment of an Arrow Cross man who lay in bed, he didn't only want a domestic help, of course, but... While we were talking someone rang and he told me to answer the door. He asked me where I was from. I told him that I was from Nyiregyhaza. Nyiregyhaza was already under occupation at that time. In the meantime I opened the door and a woman came in, the Arrow Cross man measured her with his eyes and told her that the job had been taken. The woman left, and the man told me, 'I won't employ a Jew.' So he employed me. Of course, I didn't go to work for him, but I was so stupid and honest that I sent him a card in which I wrote to him not to wait for me, because I wouldn't come. I was ready to give notice even to such a man.

We had to leave from the Harris Passage, because someone hid in the next shop too, and a nun took the Germans there. So because we didn't have any other choice, we went back to the ghetto. There were so many dead persons in the ghetto, so that they didn't have room for the bodies. They piled up the bodies in one part of the cellar. There was a pharmacy on the corner of Dob Street and Kaluzal Square, which had been emptied, its windows and doors had been shot out... I saw there for the first time bodies piled up like a woodpile. The room was full with bodies: hundreds, thousands, men and women put on top of each other. It was horrible...Then on 18th January 1945 we were liberated. The fence was at the synagogue and everyone went there. I said that I would kiss the first Russian soldier I saw. So the first soldier was a small man with a sooty face.

We were liberated though, but we didn't have anywhere to go. My former rented room on Eotvos Street 32 had been bombed. A couple lived on Keleti Karoly Street, it was a very wealthy Jewish family. When they had to leave their apartment on Keleti Karoly Street, because that wasn't a Jewish house, they moved to Eotvos Street 29, to a six-bedroom apartment. We met them on Pozsonyi Street 33/b, in the protected house. We went over to Pozsonyi Street 20 together with them, then to Hollan Street. Their paralytic mother was with them, I took care of them along with my sister. We went together to the ghetto, too. [Editor's note: After the war they moved back to the apartment on Eotvos Street].

First they didn't want to receive us into their house, but then they realized that we were young and we could help them, because they could use us as maids. I lived in the maid's room with my sister. We could only heat by going to the ruins where we gathered some chips. Once our host came along, and he saw a Russian soldier there with a loaf of bread under his arm. He told me to go there and tell him 'chleb' [Russian for bread]. I went up to him and said 'chleb.' Then he showed me to go with him to 'spat' [Russian for sleep and sleep with someone], and then he would give me the bread. I went back and told our host what the soldier had told me. He was indignant with me and said, 'How clumsy you are, Magda!' I asked him why he didn't send his wife.

My sister Jolan could sew underwear and man's shirts very well. In the hallway near the apartment there were Transylvanian refugees who had robbed the shops and had a lot of material, and of course many other things. Jolan sewed them shirts on a sewing machine, which the Sz. family had borrowed from the neighbors. My sister sewed the shirts quickly, and for that she got a plate of cooked pasta from the Transylvanians, from which she gave to the Sz. family, too, because we divided the food into five.

Our host's wife Vilma wanted to go back to Pannonia Street, where she had left some things with some relatives or acquaintances. She said that Magda - namely I - should go with her. At that time one couldn't walk alone in the streets, because Buda had not been occupied yet, and they kept shooting and there were soldiers everywhere. So Magda was stupid enough to come along. Three drunken Russian soldiers came, and they kept pushing me on the street. My host's wife got scared, turned around and ran home, then at home she said that the Russians had caught me.

The Russians were mongoloid, dirty, full with gunpowder. They dragged me away to the barricade, which was perhaps at the Pest bridgehead of the Margit Bridge. Two soldiers lagged behind, and the other one kept pushing me and telling me to wait, the Germans were 'kaputt' [German for finished, knocked out]. At the beginning of Pozsonyi Street there were small shops, they started to shoot in Buda, and the Russian threw me into one of the shops, stood in front of me and shot back from there. I was scared about what he might have wanted. We walked round the barricade and went to the place where the terminus of tram no. 2 is today. There were stairs there, and one had to go downstairs to their headquarters. He told me and tried to explain to me with signs to stand there because he would come back immediately.

While he went down I took to my heels and ran to our accommodation. I could hardly go upstairs. Of course the janitor came after me and told me that I should clean myself downstairs, where the Russians were, but if I was 'nice' to him, then I wouldn't have to clean myself and that I would also get some bread. I told him to go to hell. This man was called Varga. But I had to go downstairs to clean myself after all, because he said that if I didn't go he would send the Russian soldiers

upstairs.

From the bathtub onwards everything was full with garbage, dung and vomit. I couldn't stand the sight, so I went upstairs to the apartment. But because I didn't do what the janitor had asked, he sent some Russians after me in the evening. But by that time my sister and our hosts had hid me, so that the soldiers would not take me with them. After this we got on the first train with my girlfriend's sister Eva with a backpack, and we set off for Nyiregyhaza on the top of the car. This might have happened at the beginning of February.

First we only went to Szolnok, we got off there. But then I was already cautious, I put on a navy-blue coat, my forehead was covered, and I put a shawl on my head. I looked like an old hag. We entered somewhere and an old woman received us; she was happy that there was someone who came from Pest and brought news. A Russian colonel came in after us, but the woman knew him and she knew that he was a decent man. First this soldier called me 'babuska' [Russian for grandmother], but then he realized of course that I wasn't a 'babuska,' but a young girl.

From Szolnok we set off for Debrecen, then Nyiregyhaza. In Nyiregyhaza I didn't find anyone. My brothers had not come home yet at that time, and there was no news of them. The journey from Pest to Nyiregyhaza lasted for six days on the top of the train. When I arrived home I went to the neighbors' immediately. Of course they weren't waiting for me, they didn't know I was going to arrive. My mother's towels and dishtowels with initials were hung up in the kitchen, our dishes that we used for Pesach, because then we always used porcelain dishes, our Pesach wine jug, a typical pink Czech jug, were all on the table. They didn't say anything, but I wouldn't have asked them to return anything anyway.

I went to our apartment, it was empty, the Russians had used it as a bath, as a disinfecting room, the parquet was torn up, they carried the water off there, there were pipes and holes everywhere in the walls. The yard and the garden had been dug, but not the Russians had dug it. Of course everyone blamed it on someone else. A neighbor said that my brother's clothes and coats were at the other neighbor's - they lived opposite us. The neighbor opposite us said that everything was at the ones who had sent me to their place. After this I thought that I shouldn't care about what the situation was like. At that time none of my relatives were home yet, none of my brothers. I didn't have a home, I didn't have anything...beautiful life.

After a couple of days I came back to Budapest, because I couldn't stay in Nyiregyhaza anymore. In Budapest at least my sister Jolan was waiting for me. In Nyiregyhaza I got help from the returned forced laborers, and our hosts from Pest had given me some money to buy whatever I could. At that time I weighed 44 kilograms. I brought to Pest 40 kilograms on my back and in my hands: flour, bread, and lard. But the train did not come into Budapest but stopped near it and I had to walk, because they asked for two kilograms of flour to take my luggage home. Two kilograms of flour...that was worth very much at that time! I don't know how long I might have walked. When I arrived in the house I couldn't go upstairs, I waited for an acquaintance to come down so that I could send word for someone to come downstairs to get me, because I couldn't go on. Of course our hosts were not moved at all when I got home, that I brought so many things.

But after a while I couldn't stay in Pest anymore either, so I said that I wouldn't stay, and went back to Nyiregyhaza. We were raised to be honest, we were all almost stupidly honest. Our hosts wanted to go to the country for a while to 'put on some weight.' Next to our place there lived the widow of

a mailman, and she said that she would look after the entire family with pleasure. So my sister arranged for them to come there, and she pampered them there, too.

After the liberation we stayed in Nyiregyhaza with Jolan, in Aunt Leni's apartment, which was inhabitable. They had taken the furniture of course, only the walls were intact, but they collected the abandoned furniture at the Jewish Council in Nyiregyhaza, and there we got a couple of pieces of furniture. There was a man who had come home from forced labor, he supported us, he found a couple of my aunt's and cousin's things and we got these back. We did get a bed, but we slept without a mattress, so we put a broomstick as support, a pallet on top of it, and we lay on this. Since my sister and I slept in the same bed, we were always afraid that if one of us turned around, both of us would fall. This is how we started our life over.

In Nyiregyhaza we were waiting for my brother to get home, because in the meantime we got news that my older brother was alive and on his way home. We waited, then both my brothers arrived, and then in 1945 my future husband also came home.

I met Sandor in 1942, and that's a story in itself. First we met at my mother's sister's, at Aunt Leni's, because Sandor's younger sister was learning to sew with Aunt Leni's daughter Rezsi, who had a dressmaker's shop already at that time. I was visiting home, I traveled home from Pest, and on Saturday afternoon I went over to talk to Aunt Leni. And Sandor was just visiting his sister. He was a very handsome boy, he didn't even say a word to me, he just kept looking at me, he didn't take his eyes off me. This was on Saturday, then on Sunday he asked my father for my hand in a letter. My father said, 'Why are you fooling around, my daughter?' I told him in vain that I had witnesses, that I hadn't said a word. Then I returned to Pest alone, because I was only in Nyiregyhaza temporarily. Sandor stayed in Nyiregyhaza, his sister and he lived with one of his uncles. From then on he went to my father to court for me, and wrote me letters. Then he had to join up for forced labor in Szaszregen [today Reghin, Romania], where he got a day's leave once to go home to Subcarpathia 15, to Nagybereg [today Berehi, Ukraine]. He and his family and brothers and sisters were deported to Auschwitz at that time.

When he came back in 1945 we got married, but that wasn't that simple either, because we couldn't get married in Nyiregyhaza, as Sandor didn't have any papers. Then we heard news from Nagybereg, that there they would marry us in three days, because the secretary there had been his classmate. So we had our civil marriage in Nagybereg. But here at home in Nyiregyhaza a Jewish rabbi married us. We had our wedding at the synagogue because Joli wanted it, I didn't. At that time there weren't any decent rabbis, everyone had been deported, but they did find a young rabbi. In August 1945 nobody was home yet. On the other hand after the Shoah, after they had exterminated my family, I didn't really think it made any sense to get married at the synagogue.

My husband was called Sandor Palmai, this is a magyarized name from Goldman, but let's stick with the Palmai. He was born in Borsova [today Ukraine] in 1922. This is Subcarpathia today, at that time it belonged to Czechoslovakia 16. You know that joke about Uncle Kohn, who writes his biography: 'I was born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, I lived in Czechoslovakia, I worked in Hungary, and I retired in the Soviet Union.' They ask him: Uncle Kohn, you have been to many places, then! He says: 'Me, dear? I have never left Munkachevo.'

Sandor was liberated from Gleiwitz 17 in February or March 1945. He worked at a carriage and wagon works where he learned to weld. He welded iron rings illegally for the German workers, and

for that he got food, which he took to his father risking his life; they were in the same Lager [German for camp], but worked at different places.

My husband's mother tongue was Hungarian of course, but he also spoke Czech, Ukrainian, Russian and German. He completed four classes of middle school and he was a tailor. He died in Budapest in 1995. He had a brother and two sisters. The mother and the sisters didn't return from Auschwitz, so I never met them. His brother lives in America. Otherwise it wasn't a religious family.

Ironically we lived 14 years in the Soviet Union. My husband's neighbor in Nagybereg got a letter saying that his sister was on her way home from Bergen-Belsen, and because of that on 30th August 1945 we went to Nagybereg from Budapest. And while we waited there, they closed the border and annexed Nagybereg to the Soviet Union. Because in the summer of 1945 Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union made an agreement, that they would hand over a part of the former Czechoslovakia to the Soviets 18. Those who were Czechoslovakian citizens before, automatically became Soviet citizens. I could have become a Soviet citizen at that time at once, but I didn't want to, because I wanted to come home to Hungary. In the end that's how I became homeless and my husband a Soviet citizen, because he was born in Czechoslovakia so he got the new citizenship automatically. But we didn't know anything about this at the time when we were in Nagybereg, everything came out later. My husband and his family became Russian citizens, because before that they weren't Hungarian, but Czechoslovakian citizens. And I became homeless.

When in 1939 the new anti-Jewish law was issued, my father had a citizenship certificate made for all his children. And when in 1945 they closed the border, I sent this document to the Hungarian embassy in Moscow, to ask for a passport. At that time Gyula Szekfu was the ambassador. [Gyula Szekfu (1883-1955): historian, university professor, member of the Hungarian Scientific Academy, after World War II the first Hungarian envoy, then ambassador in Moscow.] They sent my passport from the embassy by return, but the Soviet authorities withdrew it at once. I didn't have a paper certifying my citizenship, I didn't have a passport - that's how I became homeless, and if someone is homeless she is under the supervision of the police almost permanently, they check her, and she has to renew her official papers every three months. Nobody asked if I had enough money for that, because this cost money, of course. I couldn't leave the territory of Beregszasz [today Ukraine] without authorization of the police, but they didn't give me a police authorization... At that time I had no idea, but slowly I realized that Subcarpathia was no man's land, from where everyone who could, had run away earlier.

Since we starved very much during the war, I fell ill because of vitamin deficiency. Pinpoint sized wounds appeared on different spots on my leg and my sole. But I could only go to a doctor in Beregszasz, who had just come home from Auschwitz. He was a very nice man. We didn't have money, but my father-in-law threshed, so he had flour, and so we brought the doctor a kilogram of flour in place of a fee, which was a big thing at that time. But there it was also a problem to get to the doctor's. My husband said that we would go by carriage. But who had a carriage? So he borrowed a carriage from one place, a horse from another place, a driver's seat from the third, and they showed him how to drive the carriage, and that's how we went to the doctor's. The doctor said that I had vitamin deficiency because of privation.

As there weren't any jobs in Nagybereg, I told my husband that I wouldn't stay in the village, that I had no business there. In 1946 we moved to Beregszasz, we lived there from then on. And my father-in-law also sold the house and bought one in Beregszasz, and when he could leave, he emigrated to his other son's in America, and he died there in the 1970s.

I went to the Soviet authorities many times to get a visa. Since we lived close to the border, I always had to cross Csap [today Chop, Ukraine], and they fined me every time, because I didn't have a passport. But who cared? One got used to fooling the authorities during the war. I didn't get a passport. Later they told me to take up the Soviet citizenship, and then I could come home to Hungary. So I became a Soviet citizen. In December 1955 I could travel home for a month, to my brothers. I went back to Beregszasz in January 1956. During this time I lost 15 kilograms, because I knew that I had no choice but go back to the Soviet Union. I was in a terrible state of mind.

At first I couldn't find a job in Beregszasz either, because I didn't speak Russian. Then I learned typewriting, and I did paperwork at a geologist association, and I worked there for a while, until they went to do research in the mountains. Then I worked at the clothes factory. Because in the Soviet Union one couldn't work independently, but did have to work somewhere, in the end my husband also came to this clothes factory, as a quality controller. But he also sewed at different co-operatives - he took whatever job came his way.

While I lived in Subcarpathia I didn't get close to my colleagues. I remained an outsider a little bit. Maybe because I was always precocious, and I also had other problems. And I was so homesick, I can't tell you! One is walking along the street, a scent enters his nostrils, and in his mind's eyes he sees the family house, smells the scent of the garden, sees his parents, brothers and sister... And then you think that your inner self will split in two, the pain is so strong, as if your heart is going to break, and then one learns to cry without tears.

After I completed the four classes of middle school, I learned a trade, and I graduated from high school only later in Beregszasz, then in Budapest I graduated in library studies. In Subcarpathia I started to work as a seamstress, then I was a librarian and a club leader, too. By that time I had learned Russian so that I translated smaller plays in Hungarian, and we performed these in the country, too. But since I was homeless, I didn't have a citizenship and I wasn't a party member either. Once a personnel clerk, a military officer who had been a prison commander, knocked on the window of his office and told me: 'Come and sign the book, the 'prikaz' because you are dismissed. Your successor will be a Komsomol [19] member and you have to teach him.' I had nothing to lose, so I answered, 'We aren't in the prison!' The point is that I tried everything in vain, I had to hand over my job. The personnel clerk told me that I either handed over my job, or I would be imprisoned. So simply I asked what I had done, when the chief accountant called me in and told me, 'Listen to me Magda, I mean good to you. Try to hand over this thing, otherwise you will really be imprisoned.'

I learned what the difference between a chair and a kitchen stool is. That's why I would have been imprisoned. When the workers came to the club to see the performance they brought the stools on which they sat at the production line instead of the armchairs, because they could stand on those to see the stage in the club better. So they exchanged many kitchen stools for chairs. But those were all left on the territory of the factory, all over the place. The chief accountant told me that I had taken over a certain number of chairs, but in my inventory there were fewer chairs than

originally, the rest were stools. There was a big difference in price between the two, and this difference appeared as a missing amount, and for that I could be imprisoned...This is only a fine nuance of the state of affairs there.

My daughter was born in 1947. In the Soviet Union they wrote her nationality in the birth certificate. They wrote 'yevrei' [Russian for Jew]. This means that she is of Jewish nationality. I didn't raise her according to the religion but she knew that she was Jewish. We couldn't celebrate the holidays there, though there were some who went to the synagogue, but very few. We had no contact with the Jewish community, there wasn't any religious life. Sometimes, at holidays people went to the synagogue, but I didn't go then either, I didn't have anyone to go with. Frankly speaking, I was on bad terms with God after 1944. I said what a God that is who exterminates my family.

I didn't have to tell my daughter what had happened with the relatives, because in Beregszasz everyone had the same fate. I had a girlfriend who was deported at the age of 14, she got home at the age of 15, and when she was 16 they married her off, because she didn't have anyone. Then she had a child, one year older than my daughter, so they were raised together. The boy went to a Russian school. The children started saying nasty things about him being a Jew, so he slapped one of them in the face, then told him: 'Go to the principal, and tell him that I beat you, but tell him also why I did so.' It was such a world there.

My brother Jeno visited us in Beregszasz, because he got an entry permit. He was among the first who dared to come, or rather who was allowed to come to the Soviet Union. Earlier he had been a big democrat, and when he saw that here people still had to stay in line for bread and sugar he said aloud, 'I can't imagine why people have to stand in line for bread in a state, which had gained victory over the Germans.' I begged him to be quiet, because there were three kinds of people there: those who were, who are and who will be. He asked what that meant. I told him, 'Those who have been in prison, those who are in prison, and those who will be in prison.' He replied, 'Don't talk nonsense!'

Once he went to the hairdresser's and started to talk with the barber. He asked him how much he earned in a month. The man said that he earned 300 rubles. 'And how much does a kilogram of bread cost?' - my brother asked. 'Three rubles.' 'And how much is the rent?' 'A hundred rubles.' 'And what do you live off?' Then the man told him not to ask, because everyone lived as they could. Then I told my brother not to say such things, because I was going to get in trouble because of him.

If a foreigner came to the Soviet Union he had to report to the police. I took Jeno to report. What hypocrites the policemen were! They told me, 'Why did you bring the guest here, you could have arranged this registration yourself.' Of course there was not a word of truth in it.

Later we took a trip with my brother on the plateau of a truck, and we went up to the mountains, to the surroundings of Korosmezo [today Yasinia, Ukraine]. It was a beautiful place at that time, too, but they didn't let foreigners go there. Once they told me that a poor man came home from prison - from the 'tyurma,' as they said. And the poor thing jumped into the lake to swim, and he died. My brother said that an ex-convict who spent 15 years in prison must have committed a capital crime, and he was surprised that people still felt sorry for him. He didn't understand the compassion. Then I told him again about 'those who were and those who will be,' which he could not comprehend, he simply didn't believe it. At home they thought that only I lived among such difficult circumstances,

but when Jeno was at my place he saw that others were also struggling. My brothers helped me very much, they gave forints to someone whose son studied in Budapest, and his family helped us there. That's why I think that Russian people have a soul. In my difficult situation I got more help from the simple Russian people, than from my own kind. This is my experience.

Out of the salary, the 300 rubles one could not make a living, so everyone did something. My husband also took on home industry. But unfortunately there were people for whom he sewed the suit, and when they would have had to pay they said, 'Be happy that I don't report you to the police.' Because he should have had a trade license for the home industry, but what can one do with a two-hour trade?'

Once while my husband was working I was pushing my daughter in a pushcart in front of the house, because they had sent the excise officers, who came to check whether he worked on the black market or not. I was walking outside, my husband was working inside, and the excise officer came, and I didn't want my husband to be caught. I asked him to take care of the child until I brought him some tea. And I left him with my daughter and told Sandor to pack up his things because this man was coming. I remember such incidents...Later he told our friends laughing that I had left our daughter with the excise officer until he had packed away his things.

There was a furniture factory in Beregszasz. The boiler broke, it had to be welded, but nobody took on the job, because one had to climb into the boiler. My husband wasn't fat at that time, he looked at it and he took it on. But they could pay only in kind, with wood chips. For the welding we got so much wood that we had enough for the winter. We weren't desperate, because there always turned up some barter business.

A dairy factory also operated there, the butter, the sour cream and the cottage cheese was divine, I don't know with what kind of technique they made them. One of the managers needed something to be sewed. She didn't have any money either. What did she bring? A kilogram of butter. How? So that she put on a loose blouse and she hid the butter underneath it. There wasn't anything in her hands, so it looked as if she hadn't brought anything. Some did this, some did that, and everyone did what he could.

Poverty, like everything else, is relative. I never had that much flour, lard and sugar than at that time, because one could get everything, but everything was corrupt. The entire system was corrupt. They fixed the norm in the mill and the loss of material during the milling of the wheat, so that the real loss was much less. This way they stole bags full of flour for those who were close to the fire, sold it to the acquaintances or shopkeepers, and we also got it this way from the black market.

In Subcarpathia I never had less than 10 kilograms of flour at home, I always had at least five to six kilograms of lard and the same amount of sugar. We didn't starve, it would be an exaggeration to say so. Everyone looked for the back door. There was a joke at that time, which goes like this: they ask Hruscsov what he lived off, because one could not live off his salary. He said, 'work during the day and don't sleep during the night.' That was the answer. Everyone had some pickings. But the merchants prospered the most because of the black market. For example, the goods: they either sold children's shoes or men's shoes, people stood in line whether they needed it or not, because they could pass it on with extra charge immediately. That's why I couldn't understand the 1956 events 20, because when I came home in 1955 I saw the abundance of goods that was here. In

Subcarpathia we lived from hand to mouth, so it was incomprehensible for me why people revolted here, when in the Soviet Union they sentenced people to 25 years of prison for as small things as a joke about Stalin.

After October 1956 an agreement about uniting families was concluded between the two states, so in 1959 my daughter and I could move home, then I came home, to Nyiregyhaza, to my two brothers, as a Hungarian citizen. The journey home was also great, because the frontier guards didn't want to let us cross the border, because my daughter didn't have Hungarian citizenship, only a birth certificate that she was Jewish and was born in Beregszasz. In my passport it was written: plus one person. But they didn't want to let her in at the border. They said that my daughter wasn't Hungarian, so they would send her back. My husband couldn't come with us because he was a Soviet citizen.

At that time Bela Biszku was the Minister of the Interior. [Bela Biszku (1921): ironworker assistant, party functionary, minister of the interior. Chief responsible of the reckoning after the 1956 revolution. From 1962 the overseer of all armed forces and justice. He was relieved of all his offices because of his intrigues against Kadar in 1978-ban]. I knew that he had some relative in a village close to Beregszasz, a three-year-old boy who kept saying that he was going to become Minister of the Interior when he grew up. So at the border the guards harassed me and I was stranded on the outer rail for two days, because they pushed our train out. We stood on the rails between the two borders, and the legs of the child were swollen, it was a very hot August. She lay and slept on the seat in the train, then the Russian soldier came up on the train during the night and he started looking for something, then the officer came there, too, and I told him that the child was sleeping. Then the officer told the soldier to stop and get off the train...Then I came over to the Hungarian border - that was at dawn already, and they started looking at what I had brought, and play jokes on me that they wouldn't let the child in, because she had no citizenship, she was only one person in plus, and they wanted to send her back...When one is tired, and spends days in a car without any food or anything, and it is hot, and the child is sick... I told the frontier guard, 'Listen up, do you know who Bela Biszku is?' I said that he could call him or I could call him, saying that his niece had arrived. I was bluffing, but it worked. They put us on the first train in that moment and we were free to go.

Although I had sent a telegram from Beregszasz to my two brothers about when we would arrive, they didn't receive the notification. We arrived in Nyiregyhaza at dawn without a nickel, in a sweat suit, with swollen feet and swollen knees, with a handbag, in which we couldn't bring anything, because we had to leave everything at the border because of clearing through customs. At that time there were still hansom-cabs in the town, taxis weren't customary yet. I got a hansom-cab and we went home. Since the car hadn't arrived for days, my daughter wore my brother's clothes, because there weren't other clothes. That's how we got back to Hungary after 14 years.

When I arrived in Budapest in 1959 many of my old friends didn't want to recognize me when I asked them for help, because they were in high offices. I didn't tell them many nice things about the Soviet years: they didn't believe that they imprisoned people for insignificant matters in the Soviet Union, that there was such big poverty and corruption. The first thing they asked me was why I had come home. And they didn't help me. But I would have told more serious stories in vain, nobody would have believed me, because incomprehensible things happened in the Soviet Union.

Next to us lived a Hungarian man from Subcarpathia who worked in the Russian army as an interpreter. He used to go to Austria, and he lined his pocket there: he brought food, carpets, paintings, everything, and of course the provision was good at the army, too. He met a young Ukrainian woman, who was studying to become an accountant. She became pregnant, so the man wanted to get rid of her. He went to the KGB 21 and reported her to them, saying that she was a spy, and the evidence for this was that she had learned German. They took her in for an interrogation, and they kept her there for three days. Then it turned out of course that she wasn't a spy. And after all this she married the interpreter and gave birth to the child. I heard this story because I found the midwife for the delivery, and right before that she told me everything, so that if she died someone else would know it, too... I was shocked when she told me all this and the most incomprehensible for me was how she could marry this man after all this. Later everything seemed fine in the family from the outside, the interpreter became president of a kolkhoz 22, they moved to the country and lived there, and had a few children.

I couldn't tell anyone either that when they let me home for a month in 1955, after I returned my husband didn't come home once. I went to the police to report to them that he was missing, and he was in the lock-up. They interrogated him, asked where my sheepskin coat and the other things were from. They locked him up then because they said he was a speculator. He spent 24 hours in the lock-up because of this.

My husband could only come a year after I came home to Hungary because he was a Russian citizen, we had to apply for uniting the family again. Since I was working, but lived in a rented room with my daughter, my two brothers took it on officially to provide her with everything, because they had a house and possessions. I wanted to go to Budapest instead of Nyiregyhaza because everyone was here, my friends, my acquaintances, and when I went home they told me in Nyiregyhaza that I could go to the country to teach Russian. But I wasn't really interested in that.

In 1959 Jeno and I went to the Jewish community, because we had been told that there were old people who rather went to rest homes and left their apartments to the Jewish community. We thought that it might be possible for me to register for one of these apartments as a tenant, or to buy it, and then part of the money for the apartment would have gone to the Jewish community. So the Jewish community knew about this, I didn't come up with the idea, the secretary of that time confirmed it, too. So we went there with my brother.

There we met the president - perhaps that was his position - I told him that I had just come from Beregszasz, from the Soviet Union, after 14 years, and my brother told him that he would pay for the apartment. This man stood up and said, 'I object to this, I am not a horse dealer!' Then I became very angry and I said, 'How quickly you forgot Auschwitz!' I didn't tell him many nice things, that's for sure. He climbed down a little, and told my brother to take his sister along, because she was in a very bad state of mind. I answered him that I wasn't in a bad state of mind, but that he wasn't human. And I left.

Then he went to his poor secretary, who was called Uncle Keller, and tore a strip off him for letting us in. That's why I say that I didn't get much from the Jewish community. Not many of my good memories are connected with my kind, besides my father, my family of the time and my immediate milieu. It was for nothing that my father was a good observant Jewish man. It was horrible that one came home after 14 years and got this from others. I can't forget as long as I live. After this I didn't

really want to go to the Jewish community. What would you have said? You wouldn't have taken even a step. I didn't take even a step either.

By the time one grows old one becomes wise. Nothing is interesting, only that the family be together. And I am really very lucky, because my husband was a good man, he loved his child, and my daughter adored her father, and we get along well with the present family, too.

When I came home to Hungary I got to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. That was heaven for me. They employed 2,000 people, then this number kept going down. Everyone had a code number. Based on this we had to fill out some tests, and that way they dismissed the people. But I got among the first 10. We had to take on three shifts many times, because when the materials came in after the census [the 1960 census], those had to be processed, there was no getting away from it. First we coded, then we punched, then they put the data in the computer. My bosses had compiled an aid, from which we encoded, and we had to help in this, we made tables for the questions. It occurred that the boss told us, 'Listen up, I don't care if you do it now or during the night, but this and this plan has to be on my desk by 8 in the morning.' Then ten of us put our heads together, and we had the material on his desk on time.

At the Hungarian Central Statistical Office there were some who had been rebuked for something in 1956, but of course they didn't get too big a punishment, since they could work in the office. I had a colleague, who had just graduated from high school, and an agricultural engineer, who was almost of retirement age also worked with us - so there were people of all sorts, rank and age there. At the finance department they employed a girl from the Teleki family, who was a very nice woman. The three years while I was there was the nicest period of my life. When I left, my colleagues bid farewell to me with a poem, and they made me a certificate of merit. In 1961 they wrote me a congratulatory poem for my name day. [Editor's note: In Hungary it is a custom that everyone has a name day on a certain day of the year, and that is usually celebrated just like birthdays. At some places the name day is considered even more important than someone's birthday.]

It happened once that I was the Russian interpreter of a Bulgarian for a month, then they wrote me another poem for my name day. This is why I liked being here, though we had to work hard: if it was necessary we counted day and night, because the data of the census had to be processed in a year. When the first volume was published we organized a big celebration.

I was at the Hungarian Central Statistical Office until 1962. I got to the Institute of Party History because they were looking for a librarian, and the husband of our personnel manager was the director of the library there, and he told me about the job. But I thought about it for half a year, whether to accept the job or not, I oscillated, because I liked it very much at the office. Since the data processing comes to an end after a while, I left. At the Institute of Party History I was a librarian for 16 years. I continued my studies there, I got my librarian degree at that time.

When I started to work at the institute and had to introduce myself, the director of the library took me to the big boss, who didn't like me from the beginning, simply because it wasn't him who had brought me there, and because he wasn't on good terms with the director. So I started off with a bad report from the start, and he made me feel it in everything. That's why I didn't like it there, because I was an 'inferior citizen' in his eyes.

Here in Pest we were quite badly off, we got a rented room through acquaintances first. A family with four children received us in their two- bedroom apartment with a maid's room on Kiraly Street. They were very nice people. Their oldest child was of the same age as my daughter. This was a single-story apartment, the small room was so small that we couldn't put anything into it. I lived there at first with my daughter, then with my husband. The room wasn't bigger than six to eight square meters. There was room for a small iron stove, a couch and a chair-bed there. We had the firewood brought up, and they piled it up near the stove. There was so little room left that when my daughter slept and kicked, the wood fell down. Then we closed that part and we slept together on the one-man couch.

The child went to the Bajza Street middle school. In Beregszasz my daughter had gone to a Russian school for two years, and when we already knew that we were going to come home I transferred her to the Hungarian school. Beregszasz was almost completely Hungarian, but I usually say that Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians, Hungarians, in one word, everyone lived there. Slowly people got used to each other, but quarrels among the nationalities also occurred. But not loudly. For example Hungarians standing in line said, 'these dirty Russians take everything.' The Russians were mostly military officers, because civilians couldn't really live close to the border, unless they worked in the army, not everyone was allowed to come there. But the Russians were also narrow-minded: they couldn't mix with Hungarians, with nobody, because everyone was suspect.

Julcsika, who had received us into her apartment, was a real 'mom.' She was a charming person, whom the children also adored. She told them everything so jokingly, but she was still strict with them. She considered us family members. When she baked something she brought some for us, too. The truth is that they had heard about the family, that the Fischer family was decent, because they were also from Szabolcs County. They also accepted my daughter as if she was their own child. Julcsi was a tall, shapely woman, a warmhearted mother. We still got together long after we moved out from there. They invited us for all the family and other celebrations. They were Humans, with a capital H. I usually say that the shirt of the happy man is not worn in castles, but in the home of common men.

We lived like that for more than a year, and in the meantime Sandor also arrived from the Soviet Union. The poor thing burst into tears when he saw where we lived. Because we didn't have enough room. My husband got a job as an interpreter with the Soviet army in Matyasfold.

At that time everyone was screened, so Sandor's boss also came to see where the interpreter and his family lived. He was shocked to see where we lived, and he left no stone unturned so that we could move out as soon as possible. And so we got an apartment at the Russian colony, in an old house on Gorkij Avenue. One entered a big round hall; everything was tiled with beautiful tiles all around. This huge hall opened to another room, but its entrance was from the courtyard, which we could close. Sometime the kitchen must have been in the basement and they must have brought the food up by elevator. There was a small recess, from where the lift had been taken out, and that became my pantry. We separated the bathroom and a kitchen with a cardboard wall. Earlier, the room must have been a salon, the windows facing the courtyard. So this is what we got as an apartment. Then we had a tile stove made, we separated the bathroom and the living room with a curtain. We lived there for two years.

After a certain time the Russians handed over this building, because they got apartments somewhere else, and they had to vacate the colony. My husband's boss was very nice because he told us that they had another apartment on Lumumba Street, today Rona Street, a one-room-apartment. So we would have accepted the one-room-apartment, but there wasn't enough room for the three beds - the two adult beds and the child's bed, though we were happy that there was a tile stove, too. A room and a kitchenette. It would have been good of course, but after our big room we weren't that happy, because even though that had been a three and a half-meter high barn, we liked it because there was enough room for us. Then the man who had discussed things with the borough council of the 6th district told us that there was a two-bedroom-apartment next to us, and that they would allocate it to us if the Russians handed over the one-bedroom-apartment on Lumumba Street and the room where we lived at that time. In the end it didn't work out, because a relative of Istvan Dobi got that two-room-apartment. [Istvan Dobi (1898-1968): minister, prime minister, member of the Presidential Council.]

So we had to vacate the old building and they rushed us to leave. Besides us perhaps another family lived in the house. But we said that we could not go on the street. Then my husband's boss went to the Housing Department of the Metropolitan Council and told them about our case. After this we got a two-bedroom-apartment with a hall on Dozsa Gyorgy Street. They built two stories on an old house, and we were its first inhabitants in 1964.

My husband worked as an interpreter for quite a while, and then he went on visits to the scenes of accidents where Russian soldiers were also involved. It occurred that they called him during the night. Once there was a casualty, and he had to go in to the dissection room. Then he said that he would rather die than continue this work, so he quit being a military interpreter. He went to the 1st May Garment Factory, they employed him as a quality controller and interpreter, there were fashion shows abroad, which he organized, so they traveled all over the Soviet Union. Moscow, Leningrad, Georgia, Abkhazia, Saratov, I can't recount all the places they went to. My husband also participated at price negotiations, he made many acquaintances. There was an artist who also illustrated books, they became very good friends, and I became a friend with him, too, this was a friendship that lasted for years. This man painted, too. They lived next to the railway station in Kiev in a first-story apartment, the upper story was the artist's. There was a circular corridor, and everyone had a room. I got two paintings from this painter.

But I also went on business to Moscow. I went very often, we made bibliographies, and we collected for example Gyorgy Lukacs' articles, which he wrote in the exile and which were published in Russian magazines. [Gyorgy Lukacs (1885-1971): philosopher, aesthete.] I was at the partner institution for weeks, and I could do research on the Hungarian connections.

In the 1970s one couldn't speak about many things in the Soviet Union. One couldn't do research on many things either. For example anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union during the 1950s was a taboo topic. At the time when the doctor trials 23 happened in Leningrad we still lived in Subcarpathia. The denouncement of the trial, the executions, were impeded by Stalin's death. The doctors were charged with having killed politicians. They were already arrested. At that time I worked at the garment factory where they called a meeting, and the director, who was also Jewish, had to say that the Zionist politicians wanted to kill the politician called XY and others, too. After this being a 'jivrej,' i.e. a Jew, meant being the enemy. This was undisguised anti-Semitism.

Yevtushenko has a poem, the 'Babi Yar' 24. It is about the Jews whom they made dig their own grave and they shot them in the grave in Ukraine. The mass grave is in Babi Yar [today Ukraine]. Hruscsov didn't like this poem and rebuked Yevtushenko for it, who was already a famous poet at that time, he was internationally known, and that's why Hruscsov didn't dare to take any actions against him. [Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933): Russian poet, whose name was chiefly made known through his poems dealing with public issues. He could travel across the world already from 1960.]

In the 1970s, when I already worked at the Institute of Party History as a librarian we used to go to Balatonaliga in the summer. We lived in a hut, but we were happy for that, too. In the room the beds were above each other, at the window there was a table, which could be bent down, and there was a wardrobe. We were happy with everything. In the stone building the 'gentlemen' lived, but this is so everywhere, even nowadays, there is a nomenclature everywhere. There was Aliga I and Aliga II. Kadar 25 and the diplomatic guests from abroad spent the holiday on Aliga II. My daughter had a classmate whose family had immigrated to Hungary from Spain. She was an interpreter, but she came over to Aliga I every evening and we sat together on the landing stage and had good talks.

While I worked, my colleagues and I used to go to work out in the gym of the old party college, where there was a pool, too. After working out we went for a swim. In the dressing room of the swimming pool we had to leave our workplace admission card, so not anyone could enter. With this admission card we could also go to the café of the institute, the doctor's office, we could make use of the services with it so to speak. So after exercising, five or six of us went over to swim, but among the six of us we only used three lanes, in the 6th lane Comrade Losonczi swam, and the two guards sat in the small pool. [Pal Losonczy (1919-2005): politician, member of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party between 1957-1989, also member of the Political Committee between 1975-1987.] Nothing special happened. Then on the next day we were told that Comrade Losonczi sent word to us, that if he respected the appointment, we should also do so: namely if he swam, nobody else should go to the swimming pool.

For many years I didn't envy anyone for anything, only a grave in the cemetery, so that I could go to my parents' grave and mourn for them. I wished I could have buried them with due respect, I wished they would have died as humans. I can't forgive either the Germans or the Hungarians of that time for this. Perhaps I am the one to blame, but I will never forget this.

We buried my husband at the Jewish cemetery in 1995. In our soul we remain Jews in any case. If you like it or not, the stigma is on you: a leopard cannot change its spots. And something else: if they bury someone at the Jewish cemetery, they don't throw him out in ten years, it doesn't happen that you look for the grave and you can't find it.

One couldn't defend oneself against anti-Semitism. This happened in the 1960s, 1970s: my husband had a friend, a high-ranking military officer. We went to a coffee bar for a coffee. We were sitting there, he and his wife, my husband and I, the four of us. The waitress, a short, round young woman came there. And then the officer, the 'friend' said: 'What a good rif she would be.' [Editor's note: In the Polish ghettos the German occupants distributed bars of soap with the inscription 'Rif.' The Jews in the ghetto interpreted it as 'Rein jüdisches Fett', that is, 'pure Jewish fat,' and that is why the belief that the Germans made soap out of Jewish bodies spread. In reality RIF stands for 'Reichstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung'.] He said that smiling, to me, whose parents had been

deported. Then I replied to him in German: 'Rein jüdisches Fett.' And the officer just laughed. I was shocked. From then on I couldn't be nice to him, and then our friendship slowly died. He was a charming, nice, funny, helpful man, he just didn't notice that the number from Auschwitz was on my husband's hand. He meant what he said as a joke, but one couldn't have hurt me more with a knife than with this sentence.

If someone wants to know anything about the Holocaust he should read Dr. Nyiszli's book, which he published in 1947. [Editor's note: Dr. Miklos Nyiszli: Dr. Mengele boncolóorvosa voltam az auschwitz-i krematóriumban (I was Dr Mengele's dissector in the Auschwitz crematorium). Budapest, 2003, Magyar Lajos Foundation.] He was Mengele's immediate assistant. He was a doctor from Nagyvarad [today Romania], who wrote everything, it didn't need any commentary. He wrote about how he got to the camp from Nagyvarad, and when they got off the train Mengele asked who had studied in Germany, and a couple of them stepped forward and Mengele chose him. That's how he became Mengele's assistant. He wrote in his book that once they brought a man and his son. The father was a little bit bent and the son was a little bit lame. Mengele said that he wanted their skull by a set date, and he asked Dr. Nyiszli what kind of method he knew to get the bones as soon as possible...

I don't celebrate any holidays, but lately I light a candle. The truth is that I was on bad terms with God, I didn't observe anything. Then once I made a pledge because of something, and since then I have always lit a candle on Friday evenings. Fate wills it somehow that people are compelled to stick together. They get together at the synagogue or somewhere else. It happens the same way in America, too. Those who didn't know what religion was at home, go to the synagogue in America. They go there because we need a community to belong to wherever we are; they don't only get together because of religious life. One persuades the other to be religious. There is my sister, who wasn't really religious, but there she got into a company where they didn't do anything on Saturdays, so she did so as well, partly because she didn't want them to speak ill of her in case they visited her. So this is also formality, I think. In our heart of hearts all of us are Jewish of course...how should I put it...maybe I am a rebel, but I have been one all my life, and after all that we went through...

My sister Fanni, who survived Auschwitz, I visited for the first time in 1970, as soon as it was possible to go. Fanni's husband was from Transylvania, they met in the Lager after the liberation. Her husband followed her to America, one year later. The man got some kind of infection in the Lager, which ruined his lungs, so he couldn't do any difficult work later either. He was at the lung sanatorium many times. In the cold war the American propaganda prepared them so that in Budapest they didn't dare to look back in the street. They thought that there was misery and terror, and they were very afraid. Then of course they saw that we weren't living in such a misery, but decently, so they calmed down.

At the time when I traveled to Fanni to America, the colored imitation leather coat was very fashionable here at home. My husband often went to the Soviet Union as an interpreter and he brought me a mink cap, and I went to America dressed this way. When I came back the customs officers looked at everything very carefully. I was wearing the blue imitation leather coat, the gray mink cap, and there I got from one of my cousins a small beige mink scarf. The customs officer started to provoke me, that it was a leather coat...I opened the coat and told him, that he shouldn't underestimate our home industry, because on the label it said 'Elegant.' He didn't say a word, and

then asked about the cap. I took it off and it was written in it how many rubles it had cost. Then he asked about the collar. Then I said yes, I had got the collar as a present. After that he didn't ask anymore, he didn't even open my bag, I could go home.

This was my first visit. Then Fanni was here every other year, because at that time it wasn't really possible to go abroad. They gave one a visa for one month, depending on where one worked. If someone was a party member he didn't get the exit visa right away, but was screened first. But usually I had no problems. Later, from the 1980s I went to America several times a year. Once Fanni fell off the stairs. I told her that I could only go if she sent me a telegram, because then I could get the visa within 24 hours. Then I went there for a month, but first I was screened.

They stole my youth; the reason for this is partly the anti-Semitism of the 1940s, on the other hand the 14 years while I was a fugitive after the war. I could only live a complete life during the Kadar regime 26. So for me, they blame the past 40 years in vain, because that's when I got human dignity. I wasn't exposed to humiliation, I could be a human, I could learn. In that period I could do the work that I liked: bibliography, librarian work. I could go on a holiday for the first time in my life.

In 1965 the institute had the opportunity for an organized holiday exchange or SZOT-holiday. 27: Warsaw, Krakow, Zakopane, two weeks' travel. I thought that I wouldn't go for sure, then someone said that there were six applicants, and that they should put my name in the hat, too. So they did and they drew it. So I went on a holiday for the first time in 1956, to Zakopane. I was in Auschwitz at that time...Then the institute had a holiday home on Dobogoko, we used to go there, and sometimes we could also take the grandchild along. The period between 1959 and 1978 was the nicest period of my life. I retired in 1978.

But I didn't live with a blindfold on my eyes in the 1960s, 1970s. An article was published, perhaps in the Kortars [Literary Critical Magazine] about the local petty monarchs. It was about that there were still some who were privileged. Judit Fenakel [(1936), writer, journalist] wrote the article, in which she asked the question that if this was so then what the difference was between the old lords, the petty monarchs and the party secretaries, the first secretaries who had their own circle of followers and privileges. She got in trouble because of her writing, as far as I remember she was banned, she couldn't publish anything for a while.

We weren't demanding as pensioners either. I learned - there is a Russian proverb - that 'one should have only 1 kopeck more than one needs,' and I stuck to this. I was frugal, and though my husband was a little bit liberal, he gave me his salary, and he only kept a little allowance for himself. He didn't care how I economized the money, that was my business. He liked to bring me presents, for example beautiful bouquets. They say in German: Schöngeist - he was a 'bel esprit.' And he adored our daughter, too. He often went to Moscow, and because he knew that I liked and collected books, and there Hungarian publications, dictionaries were available for cheap, he brought me books from there as a present many times. I have a dedication from him: 'to my skillful, beloved wife.' I don't know after how many years he wrote this, but we lived together for 50 years. He died in March 1995, and in August we would have been married for 50 years. And that is that. There are few marriages like this nowadays, that couples remain together for so long.

I don't have many Jewish friends. I don't know, maybe I am the odd one out, or simply it happened so... Only one of my maidenhood friends still lives. There were three sisters, two of whom have unfortunately already died. They were the ones who helped me when I got back from the Soviet

Union in 1959. I got to know the girls at the beginning of the 1940s at the social democratic youth department, when I went to Pest. They lived on Visegrad Street, there was one of the organizations of the young social democrats there. Someone took me there and we met there, and so we became and stayed friends until the end of our lives. They also helped when I worked at the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, and we lived with my daughter in that small room about which I have already told you. Those who did their job well at the census department could take home files for control. I also got a tricycle full of files - in one file there were the particulars of 300 people - and I had to check that. I couldn't even put the files down in the room, because there was so little room there. A girl and her husband told me that they had a very old friend - I knew her, too - who had gone on holiday and their apartment was empty, so they let me live there with my daughter during the summer. I didn't move in of course, I only worked there, but that was enough, because I could work more comfortably there.

I think that in my life I valued myself and others, I tried to keep hope in difficult situation, and I didn't give up, because one mustn't, and I tried to remain human even in the most difficult circumstances.

Glossary

1 Arrow Cross Party

The most extreme of the Hungarian fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The party consisted of several groups, though the name is now commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc Szalasi and Kalman Hubay in 1938. Following the Nazi pattern, the party promised not only the establishment of a fascist-type system including social reforms, but also the 'solution of the Jewish question'. The party's uniform consisted of a green shirt and a badge with a set of crossed arrows, a Hungarian version of the swastika, on it. On 15th October 1944, when Governor Horthy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the war, the Arrow Cross seized power with military help from the Germans. The Arrow Cross government ordered general mobilization and enforced a regime of terror which, though directed chiefly against the Jews, also inflicted heavy suffering on the Hungarians. It was responsible for the deportation and death of tens of thousands of Jews. After the Soviet army liberated the whole of Hungary by early April 1945, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross ministers were brought to trial and executed.

2 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary

Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6 percent, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law

prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

3 Spinoza, Baruch (1632-1677)

Dutch philosopher of Portuguese-Jewish origin. An independent thinker, he declined offers of academic posts and pursued his individual philosophical inquiry instead. He read the mathematical and philosophical works of Descartes but unlike Descartes did not see a separation between God, mind and matter. Ethics, considered Spinoza's major work, was published in 1677.

4 Szalasi, Ferenc (1897-1946)

The leader of the extreme right Arrow- Cross movement, the movement of the Hungarian fascists. The various fascist parties united in the Arrow-Cross Party under his leadership in 1940. Helped by the Germans who had occupied Hungary on 19th March 1944, he launched a coup d'etat on 15th October 1944 and introduced a fascist terror in the country. After World War II, he was sentenced to death by the Hungarian People's Court and executed.

5 Numerus clausus in Hungary

The general meaning of the term is restriction of admission to secondary school or university for economic and/or political reasons. The Numerus Clausus Act passed in Hungary in 1920 was the first anti-Jewish Law in Europe. It regulated the admission of students to higher educational institutions by stating that aside from the applicants' national loyalty and moral reliability, their origin had to be taken into account as well. The number of students of the various ethnic and national minorities had to correspond to their proportion in the population of Hungary. After the introduction of this act the number of students of Jewish origin at Hungarian universities declined dramatically.

6 Immigration to America (USA)

The immigration policy of the USA before WWI was based on the principle of open gates regardless of the restrictions, because the growth of the industry demanded cheap manpower. The war, the failure of the economical situation, the fluctuant loyalty of the immigrants and the fear of European revolutions favored the anti- immigration program of the American nationalists. The congress passed the Quota Act in 1921, which put an end to the period of immigration without any restrictions. The Immigration Restriction Act, which was passed in 1924, resulted in the further lowering of the immigration quota. The laws mainly affected Southern and Eastern Europeans. The Quota of National Origin aggravated the restrictions even further (1927). Based on this 150 thousand Europeans were allowed to immigrate each year. 55% of the frame could be claimed by England and the Netherlands, 15% by Germany and Austria, and the remaining 30% by other European countries. The new immigration policy also rated the Hungarians among the undesirable immigrants. The 1921 law allowed 5747 Hungarian immigrants, the 1924 law 473. From 1929 the quota was raised to 869.

7 Nationalization in Hungary

Elimination of private ownership and the establishment of centralized state control was the focus of social and economic restructuring after 1945. The process began with multilateral discussions and pacts among parties, and ended with unilateral and radical steps taken by the MKP (Hungarian Communist Party), realizing its power. The series of steps began in 1945 in line with the agrarian reform (nationalization of forests, model farms, fish-hatcheries and reed processing plants). Mines and related plants were taken over by the state next (May 1946). In December 1946 the five biggest industrial factories, as well as the electricity works followed, and in fall 1947 the big banks and their stock were also nationalized. The retail of goods under state monopoly (salt, matches, yeast, tobacco) followed later that year. In March 1948 the factories with more than 100 employees and, after the show trials, the foreign owned Hungarian plants were nationalized. Finally, in December 1949 all enterprises having more than 10 employees were taken over by decree.

8 Petofi, Sandor (1823-1949)

Outstanding Hungarian poet who expressed the sentiments and way of thinking of the folk in his poetry. He was contributor and editor of various publications in Pest. Petofi organized and led a circle of young radical intellectuals and writers and participated in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence as a leading revolutionary. His poem, The National Song, became the anthem of the Revolution. He joined the Hungarian army as captain in the fall of 1848 and he went to fight in Transylvania at the beginning of 1849. During his time in the army in Transylvania he wrote military reports and inspiring and glorifying poems. He disappeared in 1849.

9 Arrow Cross takeover

After the failure of the attempt to break-away (see: Horthy's proclamation) on 15th October 1944, Horthy abdicated, revoked his proclamation and appointed the leader of the Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, as prime minister. With his abdication the position of head of state became vacant. The National Council, composed of the highest public dignitaries, delegated the position to Szalasi, as "national leader," a decision approved by both houses of Parliament in the absence of a majority of members. Szalasi ordered general mobilization in territories not yet occupied by the Soviets, increased the country's war contribution to Germany, and after Adolf Eichmann's return, they renewed the program of the extermination of the Hungarian Jewry.

10 The bombing of Budapest

The first bomb attack during WWII hit Budapest on 4-5th, and then on 9-10th September 1942, which was carried out by Soviet long-range bombers that took off from the environs of Moscow. The first bomb attack against Budapest was planned for 2nd February 1944, but postponed because of bad weather, and thus only took place on 3rd April. 450 bombers and 157 scouting airplanes of the American air-force, which took off in South-Italy attacked the Ferencvaros railway station and the airplane factory. Besides the bombings of the Americans during the day, the English air-arm carried out night attacks. On 13th April, 535 American planes attacked Budapest again; their target was the airplane factory and the airport.

From the end of August the Soviet and Romanian air force also bombed Hungary; they carried out intensive attacks against the railway stations and railway bridges in Budapest between 1st and

21st September. The aim of the synchronized allied action was to bomb Hungary out of the war. After this only the Red Army bombed Budapest. After the first attack on 3rd April 1944 they ordered the evacuation of the endangered. There is no exact data available, but the estimated number of those who left Budapest and its environs is between 2000 and 3000.

The bomb attacks aimed at the annihilation of the war infrastructure (airports, railroads, oil refineries), but besides this many civilians fell victims. Budapest was attacked 34 times, and the number of victims was about 3000.

11 KISOK estate

The KISOK (Kozepfoku Iskolak Sportkoreinek Orszagos Kozpontja - National Center for High School Athletics) estate originally hosted the competitions and championships of high school pupils and the 'levente' (militant and compulsory youth organization) members from all over Hungary. The KISOK estate is situated in the 14th district of Budapest and was built at the intersection of Mexikoi boulevard, Erzsebet kiralyne and Columbus streets, in the late 1920s. According to the Szalasi-government's mobilization decree all Jewish women between 15-45 had to be registered at the KISOK estate for "defense work" by October 23, 1944. All the Jewish women, those who showed up at the KISOK estate, along with those captured in police raids (approx. 20,000 people) first spent a week digging ramparts around Budapest, and were then deported on foot to the German camps, Lichtenworth and Ravensbruck.

12 Schutzpass (free-pass)

Document emitted by the diplomatic missions of neutral countries, which guaranteed its owner the protection of the given country. Theoretically this document exempted the Jews from several duties such as wearing the yellow star. Most of the free-passes were emitted by the Swiss and Swedish Consulates in Budapest. The Swiss consul Karl Lutz asked for 7,000 emigration permits in April 1944. The emission of the Swedish Schutzpass for Hungarian Jews started with Raoul Wallenberg's assignment as consul in Hungary. Free-passes used to be emitted also by Spain, Portugal and the Vatican. Although the number of free-passes was maximized to 15,600 in fall 1944, the real number of free-passes in circulation was much higher: 40-70,000 emitted by Switzerland, 7-10,000 by Sweden, 3,000 by Spain, not to mention the fake ones. Beginning in mid- November 1944 and citing as a reason the high number and the falsification of passes, Arrow Cross groups started to also carry off those people who had a pass. During raids of Jewish houses, Arrow Cross groups shot all the tenants into the Danube.

13 Strohmann system

sometimes called the Aladar system; Jewish business owners were forced to take on Christian partners in their companies, giving them a stake in the business. Sometimes Christians would take on this role out of friendship and not for profits. This system came into being because of the anti-Jewish laws, which strongly restricted the economic options of Jewish entrepreneurs. In accordance with this law, a number of Jewish business licenses were revoked and no new licenses were issued. The Strohmann system insured a degree of survival for some Jewish businesses for varying lengths of time.

14 Transylvania

Geographical and historic area (103 000 sq. kilometre) in Romania. It is located between the Carpathian Mountain range and the Serbian, Hungarian and Ukrainian border. Today's Transylvania is made up of four main regions: Banat, Crisana, Maramures and the historic Transylvanian territory. In 1526 at the Mohacs battle medieval Hungary fell apart; the central part of the country was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, while in the Eastern part the autonomous Transylvanian Principality was founded. Nominally Transylvanian belonged to the Ottoman Porte; the Sultan had a veto on electing the Prince, however in reality Transylvania maintained independent foreign as well as internal policy. The Transylvanian princes maintained the policy of religious freedom (first time in Europe) and recognized three nationalities: Hungarian, Szekler and Saxon (Transylvanian German). After the treaty of Karlowitz (1699) Transylvania and Hungary fell under the Habsburgs and the province was re-annexed to Hungary in 1867 as part of the Austrian-Hungarian compromise (Ausgleich). Transylvania was characterized by specific ethno-religious diversity. The Transylvanian princes were in favor of the Reformation in the 16th and 17th century and as a result Transylvania became a stronghold of the different protestant churches (Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, etc.). During the Counter- Reformation and the long Habsburg supremacy the Catholic Church also gained significant power. Transylvania's Romanian population was also divided between the Eastern Orthodox and the Uniate Church (Greek Catholic). After the reception of the Jewish Religion by the Hungarian Parliament (1895) Jewish became a recognized religions in the country, which accelerated the ongoing Jewish assimilation in Transylvania as well as elsewhere in Hungary. After World War I Transylvania was given to Romania by the Trianon Treaty (1920). In 1920 Transylvania's population was 5,2 million, of which 3 million were Romanian, 1,4 million Hungarian, 510,000 Germans and 180,000 Jews. According to the Second Vienna Dictate its northern part was annexed to Hungary in 1940. After World War II the entire region was enclosed to Romania by the Paris Peace Treaty. According to the last Romanian census (2002) Hungarians make 19% of the total population, and there are only several thousand Jews and Germans left. Despite the decrease of the Hungarian, German and Jewish element, Transylvania still preserves some of its multiethnic and multi-confessional tradition.

15 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

16 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)

The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

17 Gleiwitz III

A satellite labor camp in Auschwitz, set up alongside an industrial factory, Gleiwitzer Hutte, manufacturing weapons, munitions and railway wheels. The camp operated from July 1944 until January 1945; around 600 prisoners worked there.

18 The Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty

In this treaty, signed on 8th May 1944, the Soviet Union obliged itself to hand over the occupied territories of former Czechoslovakia to the representatives of the emigrant government from London. However, this did not happen. The Communist Party of Ukraine in Subcarpathia announced at its statutory meeting in November 1944 that the territory could only unite with the Soviet Union, and shortly after the People's Council Zakarpatszka Ukrajina prohibited the communication with the Czechoslovakian authorities, and the Czechoslovakian representatives left the territory in January 1945. The Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty signed on the 29th June 1945 could only acknowledge the facts.

19 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

20 1956

Refers to the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union

withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November, and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

21 KGB

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991. 22 Kolkhoz: In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

23 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

24 Babi Yar

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

25 Kadar, Janos (1912-1989)

Communist politician, who supported the intervention of the Soviet troops in Hungary to crush the Revolution of 1956, and was installed as party leader (First Secretary, 1956-1988) and Prime Minister (1956-58) after that. Greater freedom of expression was allowed from 1959 onwards, and when Kadar held the premiership for the second term (1961-65), he took positive measures of reconciliation and cautious liberalization. Thanks to his efforts the Hungarian People's Republic became the most liberal regime in the Soviet block in the 1960s and 70s. In 1988 he was edged out and had the purely titular post of President of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP). Kadar remains one of the most controversial political figures in 20th century Hungarian history.

26 Kadar regime (1956-1988)

The communist government, led by Janos Kadar (1912-1989), lasting from the 1956 uprising until shortly before the fall of communism in Hungary. Although Kadar supported Soviet rule, and in 1958 had Imre Nagy and other members of the 1956 uprising executed, he also ushered in a gradual liberalization of social and economic policies. This led Hungary to become one of the freest and most modern of the Eastern bloc countries. In 1962 he carried out a purge of former Stalinists.

11 SZOT-holiday vouchers (SZOT = National Council of Trade Unions)

The state ensured vacation for those who worked in the state socialism, or at least it tried to keep up the appearance of doing so. The bigger factories, ministries had their own summer resort, while the smaller factories and companies got holiday vouchers based on the number of staff at the holiday resorts owned by the Trade Union. The vacation was a right, a privilege and the means of blackmailing the worker (the employee) at the same time. There were vouchers of different classes. Partly the quality of the place, the time of the voucher (high season, low season), and partly the number of persons (one person, married couples and people with child/family) determined the value of the voucher. The most valuable was the family voucher for high season at the Balaton. One had to pay a symbolic amount of money for it; formally that was the price of the holiday, but in reality the one who got the voucher got manifold the paid amount (accommodation of good quality and full board). There was a big fight for the vouchers because this was the only possibility to go on a holiday for most people. There were some SZOT vouchers available to foreign countries, too (socialist countries, of course). (Source: Kozak, Gyula: Labjegyzetek A hatvanas evek Magyarorszaga monografiahoz /Manuscript/) ---------- 27