

Janos Gottlieb With His Toys



The photo was taken in 1934, I was five years old then. I enjoyed playing with my teddy and my doll - that was it.

It was my father [Laszlo Gottlieb] who took the photo in the garden of our house in Nagybanya.

My father was a great photographer, he even had his own studio at home.

I was born in 1929 in Nagybanya. From the age of three I lived at my paternal grandparents.

My grandparents lived in a village somewhere near Nagybanya for a while, I was with them there too, then in Nagybanya.

But when I was five years old, my father took me with him, he rented a quite nice apartment, in a nice part, let's say, of Nagybanya, in a villa.

The owner was a woman from Kolozsvár, a widow, her family name was Herczeg.

The rent was quite high, but it was in the outskirts, the air was fine there.

My father always feared that I got tuberculosis or something like that. This was when I was five.

We had somebody who did the housekeeping; my father had a good salary, in those times this didn't mean a problem.

Later it was my step-mother who did the housekeeping. Well, it wasn't her who actually worked, but she gave out the tasks for everybody.

It wasn't her who did the cooking, we had a cook. This wasn't a problem.

My sole problem during my childhood was that I was orphan. Yet I didn't feel so motherless, because they behaved so nicely with me.

My father was not only a daddy, but a mom too. He looked after me in a very kind manner, not to speak about his parents, especially about my grandmother.

Later my second mother, whom I loved a lot, took care of me very gently too.

I called her by her name, Lili. I had a very beautiful childhood. The environment and the people were all very nice.

In fact I didn't get any particular Jewish education, I received a rather Hungarian education at home as well.

I didn't learn to speak Hebrew, I don't speak at all. Unfortunately. It's a good thing to know one more language, but that was it.

A visiting teacher taught me to read in Hebrew, but I never understood what I was reading.

He used to come to us when I was around eight years old until I became twelve, for three or four years, but only once in a week.

Everybody spoke Hungarian with me in the family.

My mother tongue is Hungarian, I didn't speak any other language until the age of five.

Later my father, who obviously had a German education, hired a fraulein for me, according to the customs of those times, and that's how I learnt German.

I think I was five, this was after my mother died. And I got to learn Romanian only when I was six and a half, when my father simply enrolled me to a Romanian school saying: 'You have to learn Romanian, because we live in Romania.'

And he was right. In Nagybanya there wasn't any Jewish school, only a cheder.

There was a Hungarian school belonging to the Calvinist church, but he didn't send me there.

So I finished primary school in the Romanian public school.

I finished four years of primary school in Romanian, one year of gymnasium, then in the 1940s Hungarians came in, and after that I learned in Hungarian, then at the university too.