

Zsuzsanna In Her Nurses Uniform



This is me in nurses uniform in 1944.

Well, the yellow star came, the school year ended, limitations on going out, we were ordered into the star house. My mother and I looked at lots of apartments, but couldn't find one place, until somebody from the building across the street, from 4 Garay Street, which was a star house, told my mother that they recognized my mother from sight and they'd offer us a room. We moved there. It was horrible. We had to throw everything together, and make an inventory of what we could bring with us, and it was a very short list. We took our beds and our personal things over. Cabinets, table, armchairs, no, but well the apartment there had furnishings. Even before that we had to hand in our radios, carpets as gifts from the Hungarian people to the Germans. [From April 1944, Jews could not be in possession of radio sets. (This was preceded by the obligatory submission of telephones) From April 7, Jewish travel was restricted, use of personal automobiles, motorcycles was forbidden, they could no longer travel by rail, taxi, or boat or public transportation. After the institution of the star houses, Jews were banned from leaving them were brought in: from the end of June 1944, these houses could only left during restricted hours.]

One advantage of the star house, was that in this apartment we met two young women, who worked in the Bethlen Square relief hospital. This relief hospital was established, because they took the building away from the Jewish Charity Hospital [This Chevra Kadisa Charity Hospital, its' building houses the Hospital of the National Neurological Surgery Institute today.] on Amerikai Road, and it was moved to the Bethlen Square Jewish school building. It was created with the purpose of treating Jews sick from the Kistarcsa Internment Camp [17] there. So it was a guarded building, there were armed guards. These two young women were nursing assistants, and in May of 1944, they took me and my sister there to work. [Braham: 'The modern, well-equipped Szabolcs

Street Jewish hospital was taken by the Germans in May 1944. After this the Jewish Council established two relief hospitals, one in the Wesselenyi Street Jewish Community School building, and the other on Bethlen Square, in a part of the OMZSA headquarters building. Since these hospitals were outside the ghetto, they could be used only with a special permit. They called the hospitals International Red Cross Central Relief Hospitals to protect them from the Arrow Cross. Within the ghetto there were smaller assistance units, which were also called Red Cross hospitals, but the Arrow Cross attacks couldn't take control of those outside the ghetto nor inside the ghetto. (For example, the Arrow Cross attacked on December 28, and for 24 hours held the Bethlen Square hospital under terror, then left taking 28 patients hostage with them. The hostages were later killed.)] This was important, because we didn't know anything and were afraid of everything. There was always some new news. That they're not taking ladies away, just girls. Quickly everybody had to get married in name. They only take those away who don't have work. Those who work, don't go. Once they even said they aren't taking those who get converted to Christianity. So that a priest even came to the air-raid cellar below the building, to give classes. That's how I know the New Testament so well. Not one of us wanted to Catholicize [sic], but it was interesting and we had the time for it.

So I got into the hospital at age sixteen, as the kind of a child whose only obligation to that point had been to study well. At home, the most I ever did was dry the already washed dishes. I wound up in a forty-bed ward, where there were sacks of hay and cots. The school gym had been converted. I ended up with the kind of nurse, who sat down to teach me what a hospital is and how to work. I experienced so unbelievably much benevolence in the hospital. My work was as difficult as it possibly could be, I hauled cauldrons, distributed food, collected dishes, washed them, emptied bedpans. But there was an atmosphere to the whole thing, a totally positive atmosphere. People were good to each other. Like sometime in July the nurse called me over, that the gentleman doctor L. needs to go to Elemer Street to look at patients, I should go with him, and take the blood pressure meter. I thought to myself, is the gentleman doctor's hand going to break if he carries it? But I didn't dare talk back, I took it. It later turned out that she sent me because an old man was dying in the ward, and they wanted to preserve me from when a person dies. In the middle of 1944. In the middle of the bombings and everything. It was important that I shouldn't see somebody die.

After the bombing, we moved to 76 Rakoczi Road, which was a corner house. To this point whoever could escape, did, so it was relatively easy to find a room in the star house. This house had two gates, one on Rakoczi Road, the other opened on Szovetseg Street. That's where [news of] the Horthy Proclamation [Horthy Proclamation] [19] reached us, which we were very glad for. We had already taken the star down from the house, when Szalasi came, and suddenly we look up and see they're massing people together in front of the house, and taking the Jews away. We decided then in one second that we were going to escape through the other gate. In that one dress we had on, without a star of course, we took Mother by each arm. I remember I was saying constantly, 'Mother, act like your child is telling you a delightful story. Don't go out with that despairing face.' We went to Hernad Street to my uncle the printer's Christian friend to ask whether he could help us or not. His wife told us in tears that they couldn't take us in. What do we do? There was still Bethlen Square. We went to the hospital, where naturally they took us in. They took my mother on as an assistant nurse. Where was there room? Well, in the contagious ward. Later the hospital got so full,

that they covered a little windowless closet space with blankets, and we slept there on the blankets.

In the beginning of January 1945, my father suddenly appeared in the hospital. Up to then we knew nothing about him. I already mentioned that in the maid's room, which had a double entrance on the stairwell and from the kitchen there was a entrance, from nearly the first minute lived a renter, a woman named Anna L. who worked in a 24 hour news and tobacco stand nearby. She was a very strait, soldierly, masculine-looking woman. She loved us, and this was mutual. When we went into the star house, an Arrow Cross couple moved into our apartment, but Anna stayed in the maid's room. As soon as the retreat started, my father escaped. He skipped out about the same way as Laszlo Tabi with the bucket. [Refers to the humorist Laszlo Tabi's sketch in which he describes that he escaped from the work service with two buckets, and if they asked him for ID, he said he was just going to the well for water.] He got a small hand car somewhere, on top of that was an old stove, as if he were taking it to a blacksmith, and he came to Pest. His clothes were quite acceptable as a worker's clothes, and he even grew a mustache. He tried to find some place in Pest. I don't know where he talked to Anna, probably at the tobacco stand, it suffices to say that Anna hid him in her room. He lived for about three months there and they never noticed. He wasn't even allowed to go piss in the day time. Then in January, he couldn't stand it any longer, and he went to the hospital.