

Ivan Pasternak

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My name is Ivan Pasternak, I'm from Bratislava, and I was born during the Holocaust. My mother and me survived; my father died in Dachau. I was hiding with my mother with the help of the Habel family from Devinska Nova Ves near Bratislava. Grandmother Fanus Habel, Ludvicek, Ilonka, Jozinko and children from Devinska Nova Ves helped us. The grandmother always knew in advance about the fascist roundups. When it was announced for Devinska Nova Ves, we had to move to Lamac to her relatives. And when the roundup was expected in Lamac, we moved back to Devinska Nova Ves. The roundups happened very often. They were looking for Jews. I wonder if it was due to my mother's upbringing or if it was God's will, but I never cried on such dangerous occasions. After the Holocaust we visited this family for the first and unfortunately last time in 1947. The grandmother got ill; the children moved to various places. We are still in correspondence with them.

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Family background

My parents come from Presov. My mother's maiden name was Preisova. My grandmother was Helena Preisova, nee Rotmanova. My grandfather was called Eliezer Preis. We have a menorah at home with the engraving Eliezer Preis. Their three daughters Katarina, Nely and my mother Marta attended school on Konstantinova Street in Presov. My mother was born in August 1916. My grandparents lived in a house with a nice verandah on Sabinovska Street. The eldest daughter, Katarina, liked to sit there in a wicker-chair reading novels. My mother used to tell her: Don't read so much, your eyes will get bad. Now, that she is 80, she is partially blind.

The head teacher of my mother and her sisters was Ms. Bednarova, who was a nun and a good friend of our family. The nuns were prosecuted later, in the communist era, and they were forced to move from Presov to Bacs near Dunajska Streda. I saw Ms. Bednarova when she was over 70 on the occasion of the visit of my aunt Nely, who lived in Nairobi, Kenya. My uncle Sani Gellert and Aunt Nely lived in Nairobi during World War II. They could save their lives thanks to businessman Bata [1](#). He could see that the situation

in Central Europe wasn't good for Jews so he decided to send them to his branch in Nairobi. My aunt and her daughter were cooking for the workers in the Bata factory and this way earned money to survive the war. My uncle Sani fought in the Czechoslovak Army in Egypt. All the family survived and after the war a son, Andrew, was born, my cousin, who lives in London.

Our family has always been keen on sports. I have photos of both my mother's sisters at a Presov swimming pool near the Torysa river. The Jewish youth, members of the Maccabi [2](#) association, used to meet there. Both sisters and their husbands liked to go for long walks. Both husbands graduated from Charles University in Prague and then became doctors in Zlin. They used to play tennis in Zlin.

During the war

Sad memories are connected with the early 1940s. The eldest sister, Katarina, who lived in Kosino, which was part of Hungary then, came to visit her parents. They didn't know that this was to be their last encounter. My grandparents died in the Holocaust. They were deported in 1942 and perished in Auschwitz in 1945.

My father's family was called Pasternak. They were forwarding agents but they were very keen on giving their children the best education possible. My father's best friend was an English teacher. My grandmother was Rozalia Pasternakova, nee Grossmanova; she died in 1944. My grandfather was called Emanuel Pasternak. In June 1941 the whole family was still in Presov. They lived on 14, Kovacska Street. I have a picture of the whole family in the backyard of the house. My parents are sitting on the bench. My father's younger brother Vojtech Pasternak is there with his wife Etela. At that time he was a soldier with the Czechoslovak Army in Ruthenia [see Subcarpathia] [3](#). I didn't know his brother Zoli; he died in the Holocaust. William Pasternak, my father's other brother, was a high military officer. He was a representative of the Jewish community in Presov and a deputy of the Presov council. He had a son, Tomas, my cousin, who died along with his father and my father in Dachau in 1945. Members of the family, who escaped deportation for a certain while, had a special exemption for 'economically important Jews'.

Presov was the first town where Jews had to be specially marked. They had to wear white strips even before the rule about wearing yellow star came into effect. I have a photo of my father that was taken for the registration in police archives.

My parents Teodor Pasternak and Marta Pasternakova, nee Preisova, got married on 1st January 1940. The wedding was held in a Neolog [4](#) synagogue on Konstantinova Street in Presov. Their friends Edita and Pali Fraenkl got married on 26th January 1941. The Fraenkl family survived the Holocaust by

escaping to Hungary. Once they were hiding in Gzongzos, when Horthy [5](#) groups were doing a roundup searching for Jews. The Fraenkls were hiding in the loft and when the soldiers came to the fifth floor the whistles ordered the soldiers to leave. More than 50 Jews were arrested and deported from that house only. The Fraenkls had two children: Jancsi, who was born in December 1945 and Elzi, who followed five years later. Their son Jancsi is still a member of the Presov Jewish community.

My parents were very sociable people. The Jewish social life in Presov was quite rich. The Jewish youth used to meet at a place where a swimming pool was built later. They established a Jewish association called Fortuna. They organized trips, social events and religious ceremonies in Presov.

The Maccabi association organized trips on the river Torysa, to the High Tatras and also abroad. My father used to plan the trips. Already in 1926 Maccabi had over 50 members interested in tourism. They were mostly men, but also about ten women. Most of my parents' friends, for example the Gellert family, didn't survive the Holocaust.

My father was an eager football player. He played for Maccabi Presov. This was a strong team; on 31st May 1924 the Maccabi football club won 2:1 over Torokves in Presov. Torokves played in the National Football League, whereas the Maccabi players were all amateurs. The football team was based in a working class district nicknamed Mexico Platz [Mexico Square].

Post-war

My mother and me survived and came back to Presov after the war. Our return was a bit delayed because the trains only started running in June or July twice a week from Bratislava to Zilina. In Zilina we had to wait for a day for a train from Zilina to Kosice and from there we continued on a horse carriage to Presov.

I graduated from university and stayed in Bratislava. I'm a teacher. My mother lived here too; she died a while ago. I'm married, my wife's name is Zuzka. She is a doctor and she is Jewish. We have two sons, Teodor and Peter, who are both single.

Glossary

1 Bata, Tomas (1876-1932)

Czech industrialist. From a small shoemaking business, he built up the largest leather factory in Europe in 1928, producing 75,000 pairs of shoes a day. His son took over the business after his father's death in a plane crash in 1932, turned the village of Zlin,

where the factory was, into an industrial center and provided lots of Czechs with jobs. He expanded the business to Canada in 1939, took a hundred Czech workers along with him, and thus saved them from becoming victims of the Nazi regime.

2 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

3 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.

4 Neolog Jewry

Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed

at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

5 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)

Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944.

Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon peace treaty - on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI - which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy. When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.