

Stepan Neuman With His School Friend



This is me, Stepan Neuman (on the right) with my school friend. We were photographed for the memory on the bank of the Uzh River before I went to study in Budapest. This photo was taken in Uzhgorod in 1939, it was kept in our house in Uzhgorod during World War II.

My father believed health to be one of the two most important things in life. He said that a Jew had to be strong and healthy and be able to make his way in our hard life. Very hard life. My father was a great mountain skier, mountaineer, and hiker and trained my brother and me to this way of life.

I finished school in 1938. I was good at drawing and my father dreamed of me becoming an architect. Before Subcarpathia was transferred to Hungary [Hungary actually occupied Subcarpathia] I managed to get all excellent marks at the entrance exams to the Architecture Faculty of the Construction College in Presov, a Slovakian town, and was admitted. There had been no open fascism in Slovakia. However, I didn't get a chance to study in the college. Germans invaded Czechia and Slovakia became an ally of Germany and I, being a Jew, was not allowed to study.

A construction company admitted me as an apprentice. Its owner was a Jew. My father thought it would be good for me to work in construction and see with my own eyes how a drawing turned into a building. I was even paid a little. However, this job was a temporary way out of this situation. I needed to learn a profession enabling me to have a decent life.

In Hungary the persecution of Jews began and anti-Jewish laws were introduced. There was one escape - forged documents that a person had adopted Christianity [but only until 1941]. My father

decided that I could become a lithographer. There was a polygraphist factory called 'Palas' in Budapest where they employed lithographer apprentices. Only hereditary Christians could become apprentices, i.e., there were to be at least two generations after somebody adopted Christianity. I don't know how my father did it, but he got me forged documents. My new birth certificate indicated that my mother and father were Christian.

I went to Budapest. However, I didn't care about lithography and I became an apprentice in the Lendvai Brothers Company, manufacturing household chemical goods. There were three Lendvai brothers, Jews, very rich people. They had big capital, three chemical enterprises.

I learned production of household chemical goods for four years. I studied production of chemical dry saltery goods, cosmetic goods, cleaning, lacquer goods, antiseptics, materials for tree sprays, and paints and ink. We were also taught the basics of management: how to sell the goods besides manufacturing them.