

Erika Izsak

Erika Izsak

Budapest

Hungary

Interviewer: Dora Sardi

Date of interview: February 2001, completed in August 2005

[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the War](#)

[Post-war](#)

[Glossary](#)



My family background

All four of my paternal great-grandparents lived in Szatmar county, and they were all buried there. My maternal grandfather's parents were from Bihar county, and my grandmother's parents were from Upper Northern Hungary, from Gomor and Kishont counties. By the 1910s all families moved to Budapest.

The first one registered in the birth register of the Szatmar Jewish community is Mozes, the son of Iczik Izsak, artist and Eszter Katz, born on 30th July 1850. He was my grandfather. The ancestors, according to my father's older siblings, came from the surroundings of Strasbourg, France, or from the Netherlands, and not a very long time ago. In my childhood I took fancy in the idea that second or third cousins of mine lived somewhere in Western Europe.

Mozes Izsak became an assistant engineer, this was a kind of draftsman, and he worked in an engineer's office, according to the 'occupation' heading of the register. My grandmother's father was Jozsef Steiner, a restaurant owner, and he was probably wealthy. He must have had many children, but from among my grandmother's siblings I only knew Aunt Hermina, and I vaguely remember Aunt Zseni. The others weren't alive any more when I was a child, but my father kept in touch with many of his cousins, who had different occupations. Our family was quite big, but very closely knit. I have somewhat blurry memories from my childhood from the time we went to visit people; I didn't like it that I had to greet them loudly and answer mostly trivial questions. But I was already interested in apartments and furnishings as a child, and I definitely felt the difference between the wealthier relatives' modern apartment in Lipotvaros and the 8th or 9th district apartment of those who lived more modestly.

Mozes Izsak and his family lived in a quite big one-story house with a garden in Szatmar [Szatmarnemeti, today Satu Mare, Romania]. My grandmother Hani gave birth to eleven children, six of them reached adulthood. My father was the youngest. He was five years old when his father died at the age of 52. My grandmother moved from Szatmar to Pest with the smaller children at that time. They lived on Tisza Kalman Square, in quite modest circumstances.

The oldest boy, Ignac, namely Uncle Naci was 24 years older than my father. He had a stationer's shop and a rental library on Arena Avenue. The name of the company and the stamp was Szekely's library, because the previous owner was Tivadar Szekely, the husband of my father's cousin, Hermina Steiner. I really liked Aunt Hermina, because she had a small pension on the French Riviera in the 1920s, and she told me very much about the modern French life, and her light, French meals were an interesting thing in our traditional diet.

At that time small private rental libraries were quite common, they held a couple hundred, or a thousand volumes at the most. Some real literature, more bestsellers, thrillers, literature for the youth, something to read for those who lived in the neighborhood, especially for women. I wasn't really interested in the library, I had many books of my own since my childhood, but I was all the more interested in the stationer's shop. I loved the colored pencils of very many shades, and as clumsy as I was, I liked to draw very much, one could write all kinds of things in the copybooks of different sizes, with different covers and ruling. I got very many pressed pictures, too; I glued the colored paper pictures, glossy on one side, according to their many themes into albums. In the 1930s this was a usual hobby among elementary school pupils.

The most exciting was the period before the start of the school year. Right next to the shop there was a big middle school. On the first side street, on Abonyi, there was the girls' school of the Jewish community, and a couple steps from there was the boys' high school [see Jewish High School] [1](#). In the other direction, on Ajtosi Durer Street, the Szent Istvan High School wasn't far away either. Most of the students bought the textbooks, copybooks, writing and drawing utensils in Uncle Naci's shop. Uncle Naci was alone in his shop 49 weeks a year. In the two-three weeks before school started there were four or five helping hands: daughters-in-law, friends, and I, already from the time I was an elementary school pupil until the 5th grade of high school. It was especially exciting when I could serve my schoolmates.

Uncle Naci married his niece, the daughter of his mother Hani Steiner's brother, Jozsef. She was called Ilus. She didn't help, she didn't have the time. She was a bank clerk, the managing clerk of a small private bank. She was a smart woman, authoritative even with her tall, pretty appearance, and even more so with all her brains and firmness. The family respected her as mater familias until the end of her life, and asked her opinion for every important decision. They didn't have any children because of being relatives. However, their apartment - three quite small rooms, a maid's room, offices - on Alpar Street in the 7th district, with featureless middle-class furnishing, was almost always full with the children from the family.

Ilus's sister Marcsa [Maria Krausz, nee Steiner], who became a widow early and was also my father's cousin, lived with them. For a while her two sons also stayed there with her. The younger one, Laszlo Krausz [he later magyarised his name to Krasznai] immigrated to Palestine 'by accident' at the end of the 1930s, because he got a job on a ship in Bulgaria, which was headed there. He joined the British army, then came home in 1945. The older son, Dezso Krausz [Krasznai], took part in the labor movement, he was liberated in Dachau [2](#). I got the first Attila Jozsef volume from him. [Attila Jozsef (1905-1937) was one of the most outstanding Hungarian poets of the 20th century. He committed suicide at the age of 32.] I also heard about the poetry reciting evenings of Tamas Major [Tamas Major (1910-1986), Hungarian actor, director, theatre director] and Hilda Gobbi [Hilda Gobbi (1913-1988), excellent Hungarian actress] from him. So Aunt Marcsa managed the household, they didn't really have a constant household employee, rather a day-woman, before

the war. Aunt Ilus and her family weren't kosher, but they observed Sabbath to some extent. Aunt Marcsa lit a candle on Friday evening, and as far as I remember the shop was closed on Saturday.

Before I went to school I often slept at Aunt Ilus's place for one, two or more days, because, as the only small child of our large family at the time – my niece Vera was still very small then –, and as the only descendant having the last name of Izsak, they loved me very much and were very much attached to me. I loved them, too, but their apartment seemed a little bit strange, gloomy and inhospitable to me. Still I liked being there. The most interesting thing was that I could go to the Garay marketplace with Aunt Marcsa. I got a small basket with a handle, which looked just like the ones the adults had, I could shop with that, too. Today, I keep my medicines in this small basket, which is more than 70 years old by now.

My uncle Dr. Ede Izsak was the only person in his generation of the family who graduated. Uncle Edus was a doctor. He was a specialist in gastric diseases, he had a private doctor's office in the apartment, but he was also a doctor of the National Social Insurance Institute for a while and treated the needy for free. He was a committed Zionist, he held different leadership positions in the Hungarian Zionist Association starting in the 1920s. [Editor's note: According to the Hungarian Jewish Lexicon, published in 1929 he led the Hungarian organization of the Keren Kajemet for years.] His wife, Iren Beck, came from a rich Orthodox family [3](#); her father was a tenant farmer somewhere in the south of Hungary, and had very many siblings. Two or three of them lived in the country, until they were killed in Auschwitz with their family. Ede Izsak wasn't Orthodox, but they strictly observed the Saturday and the other holidays, of course, and managed a kosher household. Aunt Iren was some kind of a leader in the Women's International Zionist Organization [4](#). They didn't have any children.

I didn't feel as much at home at Uncle Edus's, but I found everything much more interesting there. What I knew of Aunt Iren, the elegant, fashionable clothing, dyed hair, bridge games, wasn't likeable. But I liked their apartment very much: it was a big four-bedroom corner apartment in the building of the later press house at the very beginning of Jozsef Boulevard. In the biggest room, which also served as the doctor's office, there were books all along the three walls. Some of them were medical and Jewish related, and then there were very many philosophical, art and literature books. My uncle explained to me things about religion and Zionism several times, but he didn't want to press his views on me.

As Zionist leaders they got to Switzerland via Bergen-Belsen [5](#), by the Kasztner train [6](#), in the summer of 1944. In the spring of 1945 they came home, Dr. Ede Izsak worked as a doctor of the Social Security Center of Trade Unions, and he still had his private practice, too. Later he also did the medical examination of those who made aliyah, at the Israeli embassy. In 1957 they immigrated to Israel.

The next brother was Henrik [Izsak], who fell in Russian captivity in World War I, and not even a notice of his death arrived.

My father's older sister was Eszter, that was her name according to the register, but everyone called her Etel. She had five sons and two daughters, all of them were much older than me. Both her husband, Mor Weisz, who worked in a bar when he was younger, and their apartment on Liliom Street seemed old and strange to me. I remember Aunt Etel as a kind, gentle and simple old woman; she was probably religious. She died in the summer of 1944 of an illness. At least she

didn't have to live to learn about the death of her four sons: Erno, who was a tailor and a bus driver died as a forced laborer in the Don bend [in 1942]. Marton and Andor, who worked at hotel and sanatorium receptions, for a while in Paris, too, and Jozsi [Jozsef], who had a stationer's shop, died in a death march at Fertorakos in 1944 [7](#). [Editor's note: It is likely that he was in the death march as a forced laborer.] The fifth boy, Jenó, immigrated to Palestine before the war. None of the boys had any descendants. Aunt Etel's two daughters got married and became housewives. Ella's husband was a bartender in a restaurant, while Lili's husband was a market-man, a retailer. They lived through the Shoah in a ghetto and in a forced labor camp. They gave birth to a girl each, who later became graduates and each of them had a daughter as well.

Flora Izsak was only three years older than my father, so the common childhood also bound them. Her first husband, who was a clerk, died at a young age, and their son Bela was adopted by her second husband, Mor Lowi. They had a son from this marriage, too, Alfred. He was my favorite cousin on the paternal side; although he was seven years older than me, we spent a lot of time together in our childhood. I remember Fredi's [Alfred's] bar mitzvah, namely only that there was a delicious snack and a big family gathering at their place, the entire house and the garden was full with people.

They lived in Rakosszentmihály until the mid-1930s, the Lowis had a butcher's shop there. It was probably kosher; I only remember that they kept big chunks of raw meat, and I recall that smell, because their apartment was right next to the shop. Then Moric fell ill, they sold the shop and moved to Pest. Aunt Flora rented one of the stores of the Korona creamery multiple store, first in the 8th or 9th district, then she managed to get one in a better place, on Nagymező Street in the 6th district. She did this after the liberation, too, as a widow already, her husband died of an illness during the war.

They were 'moderately' religious; they observed the major holidays, they managed a kosher household before the war, Aunt Flora lit a candle on Friday evening, but on Saturday she did have to open the creamery. The two boys weren't religious already from a very young age, the fact that they were Jews didn't have any significance for them, and during the war they were in touch with the leftist labor movement. They pulled through forced labor luckily, they ran away and hid together. Bela learned to become a textile technician already during the war, and Fredi learned the tiler trade after finishing four years of high school. After the war they both magyarized their name to Lukacs, Fredi even changed his first name to the more 'democratic' Andras. He helped me in 1945 find my way around the new values of the social environment. Bela later became the director of a big textile company, and Fredi became a journalist, an editor, after graduating from university. He has two daughters and two grandchildren. Bela's only son committed suicide in the mid-1970s, after he graduated from university and got married. One reason was perhaps that he found out from a malicious remark in a Communist Youth Organization camp that he was Jewish...

For my father, who became half orphaned at the age of five, his older brothers provided paternal education and material support. They supported their mother, too, of course. I don't remember my grandmother Izsak, I was one year old when she died. But I know from the family members, and it can also be seen on the few photographs that remained as well as a 'family' oil painting that she was a nice, kind person. I don't think that she wore a wig, but she abode by the main religious rules. She lived in my father's service apartment for years, who was single at that time, but when she needed care – she had some kind of circulatory disturbance – she moved to her daughter Flora.

For the last couple days of her life, in March 1930 they brought her back to our place, namely to my father's apartment, because it was her last wish to die there. Her children and siblings were there with her for three days.

To come back to my father's childhood...I barely know anything about it, he was too rational to talk about it, I asked him in vain. Two pieces of information: he liked to play football, and he usually got hold of sweets the following way: in Pest, at Hauer cake-shop, close to their apartment, they sold the cookie scraps for fillers before closing. After the four classes of elementary school he attended the Tavaszmezo Street high school. In the 4th grade some trouble happened: he talked back to the geography teacher impolitely because of some presumed injustice and he was expelled from that high school because of this. I couldn't make him or his siblings tell me the exact reason. Considering the fact that I knew my father as someone who respected authority way too much, sometimes was even almost servile, I especially liked this story.

His brothers decided after this that he had to learn a serious and useful trade, at a place, where they don't only teach, but also educate, and demand a moral standing. This place was the Hungarian Israelite Crafts and Agricultural Association [see HICAA] [8](#).

The Hungarian Israelite Crafts and Agricultural Association [HICAA] was founded in 1842 at the initiative of the Pest Jewish Community, with the aim, which was fulfilled continuously from the beginning, to help young Jewish people in learning the industrial and agricultural trades, which had been unavailable for them until then. After several years of planning and preparation they established the gardener training ground of the HICAA in 1908. The students lived in a well equipped dormitory. They acquired practical skills in gardening. They also learned theory of the special subjects and the general subjects, and also got religious education. The first class started in 1910 with 13 students, in 1911 they enrolled twelve gardener students. One of them was my father. He ran away twice. His brother Ede brought him back. In 1914 he took the final gardener apprentice exam with excellent results. In 1915 he was an assistant in the horticulture of the economic academy in Kassa [today Slovakia], then he joined the army. After he was demobilized, in April 1919 he went back to the HICAA as an assistant gardener. In 1921, ten years after he ran away, he was named chief gardener.

My maternal grandfather was born in Alpar, in Bihar county, but in his youth he lived in Nagyvarad [today Oradea, Romania]. His mother, Fanni Wallerstein, was the second wife of my great-grandfather, Gergely Turteltaub, who already had two older, grown girls from his first marriage. He soon died, so my grandfather didn't have a blood-sister or brother. I only know of a related family, the Szenes. My mother referred to them as Uncle Szenes and Aunt Margit, so probably the woman was the relative, perhaps Fanni Wallerstein's niece. They had a son called Laci and a daughter called Bozsi. She was a teacher, my mother and her sister met her many times when she was a girl, they sometimes hung out together. As far as I remember she was at our place after 1945, too. Then she probably went abroad, some connection must have remained for sure.

My grandfather was originally called David Turteltaub and he learned to become a shoe merchant in Nagyvarad [today Oradea, Romania]. He magyarized his name to Torok already as a young man, and from the time he got married he used the name Dezso instead of David. He probably changed his name because he wanted to open a shoe store and wanted to live as a 'Pest citizen,' which he managed in the end. Fanni Turteltaub, nee Wallerstein [one of the great-grandmothers on the

maternal side], lived in Nagyvarad until the end of her life. My mother's only memory of her: she was taken to her to Varad once when she was a small child. She didn't like the dark, simple apartment, her grandmother was a stranger to her – she probably wore a wig – and she gave her cookies with jam, which my mother didn't like.

My mother's maternal grandparents, Adolf Gluck and Franciska Grad, lived in Jolsva [today Jelsava, Slovakia], in Gomor-Kishont county. Adolf Gluck went to high school in Rozsnyo [today Slovakia], which was near-by. Their daughter Jeanette was my grandmother; besides her they had eight children, five of them reached adulthood. According to the old photographs – the oldest ones are from the 1840s – neither their clothing, nor their hairdo was of Jewish character, and being Jewish basically meant for them that they observed the Neolog [9](#) religious rules.

I only know of my great-grandfather's relatives that Moric Gluck lived in Vienna [today Austria], and he was probably his brother. Then there is an interesting postcard from September 1907. It shows a square in Arad [today Romania] with the Statue of Liberty in the center, with a big cross. Printed on it with Hebrew letters are the words: 'L'shana tova umatuka', under it in Hungarian: 'Happy New Year!' On the back of the postcard, which is addressed to Adolf Gluck, it says in handwriting: 'The Szollosi family wishes a Happy New Year to their beloved relatives.' I never heard of relatives with this name. Unfortunately, by the time I took a more careful look at this postcard, there wasn't anyone to ask anymore. Or perhaps there is, only I don't know them?

The Gluck children lived in cultured bourgeois circumstances. The books and newspapers, which remained from them, are evidence of this. German story-books, some volumes of classical literature, several romantic novels from among my grandmother's books. My grandmother's sisters, Irma and Toncsi [Antonia], who died at a young age, were probably subscribed to the children's magazine called 'Az En Ujsagom' [My newspaper] already in 1890. [Editor's note: The 'Az En Ujsagom,' published from 1889 until 1944, was the first Hungarian children's newspaper of literary value, in which known writers also often published their writings.]

Adolf Gluck's two youngest children immigrated to America at the end of the 19th century, around the age of 20. Izidor Gluck was an electrician, and he went to the New World to escape army service, in fact. He had three sons, several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His sister Juliska [Julia] followed him and got married there to one of her cousins, Miksa Kohn. Their son Elias had two sons, one of them has an Afro-American wife. The husband of their daughter Edith went to the USA from Poland; they had a son, who doesn't have any children. My grandmother corresponded with her siblings in the USA, especially with her sister, just like my mother and Edith, who was a couple years younger, when they were children and later, too, although they only met in person when they were already old. Edith's family wasn't religious, but their Jewish identity was strong. Otherwise she was the only one among the many American relatives who was interested in her Hungarian roots: she was here twice and visited the place, where her mother had lived in her childhood.

My great-grandmother, Franciska Grad, died of pulmonary tuberculosis at a relatively young age. After her death, her husband, Adolf Gluck came to Pest with the children and remarried. His second wife was Mari Albachari, a Sephardi Jew [10](#), whose family had emigrated or fled from Spain [11](#). This supposedly happened several centuries ago, but she was remembered because of her looks, her name or who knows what, and my mother referred to her as the 'Spanish woman.' I don't know

how religious she was.

The youngest from among the Gluck children, Irma, was a dressmaker; she had a salon with several employees on Jozsef Boulevard. She didn't get married, perhaps because she had pulmonary tuberculosis. She died at the age of 38.

The oldest of the siblings, Dezso, had tuberculous osteitis. He was a doctor, and he worked as a surgeon at sea for a while, because of the benefits of the air at sea, but also because he liked to travel and could visit his siblings, who lived in New York. Then he was a district medical officer at home, in Tiszaszentmiklos and in Korostarcsa, for example. The postcards addressed to him, which I still have, are evidence of this. He also sent many postcards, especially to his sister Irma, even from Pest to Pest, and to my teenager mother, who loved the versatile, cultured uncle. She learned very much and got many books from him: literature, philosophy books and some small prayer books. Dr. Dezso Gluck looked at these from a wider cultural point of view rather than from a religious aspect. He didn't get married either and didn't live to celebrate his 50th birthday.

My grandmother, Jeanette Gluck – it says Janka in the register, but she wrote her name in the French way and was also called so – was 16 years old when her mother died. Soon after that she moved to Vienna, to Mor Gluck's. Her uncle and aunt didn't have any children, but they had several elegant shoe stores. That's where Jeanette learned the shoe merchant trade. This was really a trade at that time. Grandma, even when she was old, knew exactly the different kinds of leather for shoes, the heel shapes, she could take measure for the shoes made on order. So she lived in Vienna until the age of 30 to 31, and then she came home to get married. She wanted to get married to a professional, so that they could have their own shoe store in Budapest.

Dezso Torok, who was an apprentice in a shoe store at that time, and Jeanette Gluck got married in 1901, and they immediately opened their shoe store in a house on 5 Erzsebet Boulevard. At first they lived in the small apartment behind the shop on the first floor. Later they moved upstairs into a bigger apartment, and after a while, when the shop had a wealthy and stable clientele and was profitable, they moved to 15 Erzsebet Boulevard, into a big, elegant apartment. They needed the room: two children, the Fräulein [German for governess] and, at least for a couple years, the cook and the maid, lived there, and later only the maid of all work.

Jeanette Torok was a serious, skinny woman, she looked like that and her temper was also like that. From the time her children were small until she turned 75, she ran the shoe store, namely until the spring of 1944, until they owned it. Until her husband's death the store was in her name, and they ran it together, but she did more so; my grandfather didn't make any decisions without her. They sometimes went to the theater, to the opera, she read German literature, but she wasn't really interested in anything besides the family and the store. Housekeeping and socializing the least! She would have surely sacrificed anything for her children, and later her grandchildren, she lived in a happy marriage with her husband, valued her sons-in-law, but after her father's death she barely kept in touch with the cousins, with the extended family, she never initiated keeping in touch. She didn't have friends either. She dressed with a modest elegance, she didn't have much jewelry, but what she had was nice.

Dezso Torok was a more cheerful person, he took things less seriously. He liked company. He regularly went to the Circle, they only referred to it this way in the family, perhaps its real name was Erzsebetvaros Circle, and they regularly met in a cafe – or perhaps in a club – to play cards

and to talk. My grandfather liked thrillers and science fiction stories, he told stories about devilish and friendly ghosts to his daughters and decades later to his grandchildren. Grandma's rare and serious tales were about 'real' countesses.

In everyday life, in culture, Jewry meant very little in the Torok family. But it never occurred to anyone, as far as I know, in the extended family neither, at home or abroad, to convert. They weren't kosher, they didn't observe Sabbath, they perhaps observed Pesach – Dezso liked matzah coffee – and the High Holidays [Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot]. On these days the shop was closed, and they fasted on Yom Kippur, Grandma fasted even in her old age, against the doctor's advice, almost all day.

My mother, Iren Torok, was born in October 1902, her sister Klari in June 1904. When they were small they had a nanny, then until they went to high school a German governess. Jewry didn't play any special role in their upbringing either. For their elementary education, they went to the Murakozy private school; the name of several children ended with a 'y' there, and one of the boys was a baron. [Editor's note: In Hungary noble family names may end with a 'y,' so Erika here refers to the fact that many children in this school were of noble descent. The Ilona Breuer Murakozy's Public Elementary School operated from 1872 to 1934.] After elementary school they went to middle school, to the Vero Institute. This was at the beginning of Gyar Street, today's Jokai Street, close to Andrassy Avenue. Its owner, at least one of them, and headmistress was Adel Vero, who was Jewish. [Editor's note: The Vero Public Girls' Middle School operated from 1909 to 1929]. From what my mother told me, the students came from wealthier Jewish middle-class families in Pest, but the institute didn't have a Jewish character.

After middle school followed the so-called graduate course. They didn't get a certificate they could use from there, but they did get a special classical literacy. My mother liked the graduate course very much. She especially learned Greek art history and Germanic mythology, and her knowledge, even though it was on an amateur level after all, gave her much pleasure all her life. Her sister Klari also went to the graduate course, but for a shorter time, and she wasn't as interested in it. My mother learned English in her childhood, besides German, which she used daily, and both of the girls were taught to play the piano.

The Torok parents had to work very much to afford all this. They could never go on holiday, could never take trips, because they couldn't close the shop and couldn't entrust it to the employees either, Grandma went to see her relatives in Vienna for one or two days at the very most. They had a holiday home in Rakosszentmihaly. I don't know whether it was theirs or they only rented this villa. Szentmihaly was a quiet garden-city, with good air at that time, in the 1910s. The parents mostly went there only at weekends in the summer, but the children spent the entire vacation there with the governess.

The wealthy, bourgeois life degraded very much after World War I. The Torok family invested all their money in war-loan, and even the last filler was lost. Besides this the general situation of the country surely also contributed to the fact that they sold the store on Erzsebet Boulevard and moved, first to Wesselenyi Street, then soon to the house on 68 Dohany Street, where they stayed for almost 20 years. The rent was probably less there, but this was also a decent middle-class apartment. I was there for many times, even if only in my childhood, and I heard a lot about it from my mother.

The apartment: three rooms overlooking the street and a big room overlooking the courtyard, which opened from the hall, a small maid's room opening from the kitchen, the usual offices, entrance in the hall from the staircase, kitchen entrance from the outside corridor. The furniture was average, but tastefully middle-class, the plus were probably the relatively many books, many German classics among them and 'The classics' pictorial library.' [Editor's note: A 50 volume series of the classics of Hungarian and world literature, published from 1901 to 1908.] There was a big piano in the girls' room. The middle room was sitting room and dining room, but they only used it for festive occasions or when they had guests. In the glass-cupboard there was a nice, complete, though not high-quality porcelain dinner-set, a coffee, tea, liquor and compote set. There were surely other things, too, but I don't remember them, I only have some of these.

On the buffet there were polished glass trays and colored curved stemmed beer glasses, from Great-grandfather. From Ador Gluck's home many nice pieces were kept throughout generations. The room overlooking the courtyard was the dining room during the week, but this was also the store, they received the customers at previously appointed times. The personnel room was the workshop, a shoemaker worked here and other tradesmen also brought shoes. The Toroks passed these on, mainly to retailers. There were individual customers, too, and they also made custom-made shoes.

In the years around 1920 they lived in quite difficult and uncertain circumstances, but then their circumstances also consolidated. The Torok girls socialized, went to dancing school, on excursions, to the theater, and especially to the cinema: to the Palace across the road from the apartment and to the Apollo on Erzsebet Boulevard. My mother liked to stay at home the most, aside from going to the cinema. She solved crossword puzzles, arranged her postcard, bill and other collections, read, though quite superficially, many things, from Greek mythology to German-language Goethe, from art history to thrillers, which were hidden in her father's drawer. And she wrote: a diary, notes about her readings, stories and letters to her child to be. The first one at the age of 13, then regularly, but unfortunately rarely. Although it is still good to read them.

My mother didn't like to dance, she even regretted the time she spent on it, but she still went to the dancing school, especially because she hoped to find someone there she could marry. The irony of fate: she only liked one young man for real, the attraction was mutual, but the person in question was a Christian. It didn't go anywhere...mainly because of this. Their company consisted mainly of Jews, but not exclusively. They didn't go to expressly Jewish places, programs. Besides the fast on the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur], the Torok girls didn't really observe anything of the religion. My mother didn't do so because of simple disinterest, but because her later, consciously not theist, world view was already forming.

She wanted to get married badly, basically because she wanted to have children. But she wasn't willing to make any compromise. Her parents even went to a matchmaker, but she didn't like any of the potential suitors enough, and there were some for whom she wasn't good enough, because her dowry wasn't big enough. The 'original' dowry got lost with the war loan, and until the Torok parents had collected it again, she couldn't even think of getting married. Then, in the spring of 1927, one of Dezso Torok's card partners recommended his wife's nephew, Karoly Izsak, a single young man. They were introduced to each other, they immediately liked each other, and in a couple months they got engaged. It wasn't an ardent love, but a great love, complete sympathy and acceptance of each other, for more than 50 years, until the end of their lives.

I also have to tell you about Dezso Torok and his wife: they didn't only manage to save the dowry for their two daughters again, but by the end of the 1930s they also got their former lives back. They opened a new shoe store in the house on 33 Andrassy Avenue. They mainly worked on order, after measure, but there were also some ready shoes, all sewed by hand, of fine leather. Two shoemakers made the shoes in the loft of the long and narrow store. They also employed an assistant, but taking measure was always the owners' job. My grandparents were 66 years old when they opened the new store and grew young again because of it. The store had a good clientele, many people from the Opera House, which was near by, ordered from them. As far as I remember, the anti-Jewish laws [12](#) didn't diminish the clientele yet.

Starting in 1935 the Torok family rented an apartment much closer to the new shop, in the corner house on 21 Nagymezo Street. There were three big interconnecting rooms, with a separate entrance overlooking the street, a big room overlooking the courtyard and a maid's room, a kitchen and offices. By that time the younger Torok girl, Klari, also got married. Her husband was Gyula Biro, who owned a hardware store together with his father on Jokai Square. When they moved, they already had their little boy, Tamas. Klari and her husband lived together with the Torok parents on Dohany Street, and also moved to the new apartment together with them.

I don't know why, but their temper was quite different and none of them needed the other's help, they kept a separate household, only the maid, then the day-woman they shared, until they had one at all. But of course it was more elegant and also cheaper to have a big apartment than two smaller ones. To the apartment on Nagymezo Street they took my grandparents' furniture, which was in good shape: the complete bedroom furniture, the dining table, the marble top buffet, the glass cupboard, the bookcase, the Thonet armchair and the rocking chair, the green sofa with the Venice mirror above it and the art deco complementary pieces: a small table with glass top, a pendulum clock with wooden case and a brass flower-stand in the middle room. Klari got the biggest room, overlooking the street, they bought modern furniture for it.

Gyula Biro, the husband of my mother's sister, died at the age of 37, in 1940. He was in a forced labor camp in Szolnok, but the sudden heart attack, which didn't have any known precedents, and which immediately killed him didn't have anything to do with this. His son died the same way, at the age of 52, in his apartment, and his sister's son died on the tennis court around the age of 40. In 1941 my grandfather, Dezso Torok, died of pneumonia. The life of the two widowed women didn't really change. Grandma managed the shoe store alone, the old assistant couldn't help anymore either, because he was in a forced labor camp many times. The shoemakers weren't Jewish. Klari was at home, raised her son, she had some income from the hardware store, which her father-in-law managed.

Since my father, Karoly Izsak, was the chief gardener of the HICAA, his wedding was a big event in the Jewish community. They held it in January 1928, at the Dohany Street Synagogue [13](#), Dr. Simon Hevesi, the chief rabbi, the honorary president of the HICAA, led the ceremony and many leaders from the Jewish community attended the wedding. Then they immediately left for their honeymoon, to the Italian and French Riviera.

Iren Torok, already Iren Izsak at that time, moved to her husband after the wedding, of course, to the gardener training ground of the HICAA, to my father's service residence. This was a villa-like building with a mezzanine. There were three big rooms in it, a closed veranda with three windows,

a big kitchen, a maid's room, big offices, a long hall and an internal corridor, a huge laundry room, several small pantries, a big cellar and an attic. There wasn't gas, the big stove in the kitchen used mixed heating materials, in the rooms there were tile stoves heated with wood. The furniture was part of my mother's dowry. An average bedroom furniture, inlaid, elegant dining room furniture for twelve persons, a living room seating set, a glass-case and the piano in the salon from Torok's apartment. The carpets, paintings, dinner-services also belonged to the dowry, but the complementary pieces, for example the fruit trays, silver trays, those they got as wedding-presents, the most valuable ones from the leaders of the HICAA and the big flower merchants.

Growing up

A garden also belonged to the house, it wasn't big, but it was a diversified empire. A huge walnut-tree on one side, a tall hazel on the other. There were also two alcoves, covered with fox-grape and other runners, sometimes, on warm summer days we had tea or dinner in these, especially when we had guests. Part of the garden was fenced off and was used as a poultry-yard, we kept hens and ducks. When I was three, my father had a small paddling-pool dug in the courtyard, and later, when I could already swim they enlarged it, to approximately 12x4 meters, they filled it up with water from the pipes of the horticulture.

Since there was very good, clean air on the HICAA – the grounds were as high as the Gellert hill – one could bathe and walk around; our relatives rather came to spend the summer at our place, than the other way round. Until 1945 I was on holiday only four times. I don't remember the first one, we were at a small Austrian holiday resort with my parents when I was two and a half years old. Then I was on vacation two or three times with my mother and with an aunt: In 1936 on Bukk mountain, at a farm house, where we bathed in a washbasin, two years later in the Bakony [mountain range], in a simple pension, and around 1940 with a cousin of mine and her daughter at the Velencei lake, in a simple house there, too.

Before my father got married, his mother's sister, Hermina managed the household. She stayed there for a while after the wedding, too, so that she could teach my mother the rules of kosher housekeeping and simple religious rules. My mother took this on together with getting married, but she wasn't enthusiastic about it at all, and it always remained strange to her. Aunt Hermina moved soon, but she often came to our place for shorter or longer periods of time, and she taught me to pray already when I was small, she showed me the nice prayer books. My mother often reminded me of the fact that to the question 'what do you want to do when you grow up?', I always said I wanted to become 'religious,' stressing the word because I liked the way it sounded. My mother grew alarmed. She thought that I could decide if I wanted to be religious – though she hoped I wouldn't want to be – when I grew up, but I shouldn't be influenced by the bigot aunt. From then on Aunt Hermina came much more rarely to our place.

The HICAA gardener training ground meant something very important for all three of us, for my parents and me, though in a different way: it meant profession and commitment for my father, the beautiful home and environs of her family for my mother, and a world taken for granted – as I was born into it – but still full of surprises, plants, animals and interesting objects for me, in which I could move more or less freely from the time I was very small.

The main profile of the HICAA was the growing of bedding plants, first of all flowers; they sold the plants, this is where the income of the association came from. They grew vegetables and fruit

enough only to teach the students about growing them and these were used in the kitchen of the dormitory. There was a dairy-farm and a poultry farm, for our personal use, and they grew feed for the animals. There was vine-growing and apiculture for a while, but I barely remember these.

Karoly Izsak's job as a chief gardener, according to the leaders of the HICAA, was to manage the branches of horticultural production, to market the crops, to assure the practical and theoretical training of those who studied on the grounds. The evidence of the professional level of his work is that the grounds established for the training of young Jewish men became one of the most significant floriculture of the country, the supplier of the most elegant flower shops of the capital. These were mainly owned by Jews, but there was barely any independent Jewish florist. My father was still a board member of the National Hungarian Horticultural Association [est. 1885] until 1942, and for twelve years he was the auditor of the Association of Hungarian Nurseries, which wasn't really of Jewish character either. In the 1920s and 1930s he went to the western European countries many times on field trips and to buy horticultural propagation material for the HICAA.

My father was terribly – and I mean, terribly – conscientious, orderly and dutiful. The most important for him was the family, but in everyday life work and duty came before everything else. Our house was in the center of the colony, and about 50 meters from there, in a bigger building there was the chief gardener's office. My father went there early in the morning, even before 7am in the summer; he started the daily work, and came to eat breakfast at around half past 8 or 9. My mother always ate breakfast with him, and I did, too, before I started school and, later, when I wasn't at school. My father almost always read a newspaper while eating. We subscribed to the daily called 'Ujsag' [Newspaper] [Editor's note: The descendant of the liberal political daily started in 1903, called 'Az Ujsag' /The Newspaper/], and also to the Pesti Naplo [Pest Journal] for a while. [Editor's note: The 'Pesti Naplo' was a morning paper, it was a significant forum of the literature between the two world wars.]

My father was in the office until late in the afternoon and evening, he could work imperturbably when the horticultural work was done for that day. There was a ladder leant against the bedroom window, and Johann, the Slovak night watchman shouted in at every dawn from the top of the ladder how many degrees there were outside, and my father gave him orders how much to heat the greenhouse depending on that, from the fall until the spring. Before the longer winter holidays – not Jewish – when there were especially many cyclamens, azaleas and other delicate, expensive flowers waiting to be delivered in the greenhouses, or when the weather was changeable, my father waited for a signal from the night watchman several times a night.

Because of this my parents could very rarely go to the theater, to the opera, even though they would have liked to go, and they couldn't make any programs for the evenings, because my father had to be at home and had to get up at dawn. He respected the other regulations related to his job rigorously. He also got several kinds of payment in kind as part of his salary, such as potatoes, vegetables and poultry feed, to his 'own household.' In the summer some of the relatives often spent a week at our place. At these times my father always paid an amount of money to the pay-office of the HICAA, because the food for relatives didn't count as our 'own household.'

My father was a strict man. Especially with his students, but with me, too. He barely played with me, he never told me stories, while I was small; he couldn't talk with me for longer periods of time. I didn't really miss it; I got it all abundantly from my mother. Already when I was a small child, even

if not consciously, I respected my father very much for his brains, for his professional authority. Somehow I might have felt, I couldn't have verbalized it, of course, that he didn't play with me, because he rather worked so that we would have money to buy nice toys. No, this isn't true either, our world wasn't so materialistic. He worked that much, so that mom could play with me calmly and safely...

And that's what happened. While my father was always laden with the sense of responsibility towards his family and the worry because of the political situation, my mother wasn't interested in the political situation at all. She was fine without company, without entertainment. She didn't even care about housekeeping, she didn't want to at all! The domestic servant who lived with us, whom a washwoman and others also helped sometimes, did everything. She didn't have to go shopping, it wasn't really possible: the closest food store was about half an hour away. What wasn't cultivated or didn't 'grow' there – like poultry –, was transported home from the shop.

My mother partly continued her activities from her maidenhood: she read a lot, clipped and organized the more interesting articles from the newspapers according to their genre and topic: fiction, short stories, criminal reports... She gathered these in a huge case in the hall, made for this purpose. She multiplied her cactus collection: the shelves and baskets on the veranda were full with pots of them. She sometimes played the piano, and sometimes embroidered: Goblin tapestry, pillows, later she knitted me pullovers, shawls. And she wrote a diary. Several pages every day. Hardly anything happened to her, but she lived that little so intensively that she had enough to write down. Only a couple of the many dozen scrap-books remained after the war, and after 1945 she didn't continue keeping a diary.

Her main occupation though was little me: absolutely until I went to school, and still quite intensively until I turned ten, but I became independent as a high school student. I didn't go to nursery school, of course, I very rarely met other children until the age of six. Until I turned five or six, I slept in my parents' bedroom, then they modified the salon a little bit and I got a corner there with a couch and a big floor-lamp. A corner of the dining room had been mine earlier, too, my toys were there on a shelf. I had many toys, someone once said that it was like an exhibition. I had very many and pretty dolls. I couldn't play with the nicest ones, these, for example the sleeping porcelain Denise, 'whom' my father brought from Brussels, my mother closed away in the glass cupboard.

She put away the nicest chocolate figures, too, which I got from Santa Claus, for Easter, and on other occasions. She bought me regular chocolate instead, and put the others away in the cupboard. As if she had suspected, what a treasure these would become in six to eight years' time, during the war. Part of them became fusty or maggoty, but most of it remained good, edible chocolate.

I didn't play much with the toys otherwise, I rather liked them as objects. One of my favorites was the baby-house: the master carpenter of the HICAA made it, and there was different furniture in it on every floor, there was even a kitchen, a bathroom and a laundry room. The experience is lasting: in foreign towns I always visit the toy museum and the baby house collection wherever it's possible.

The most important though were the books, starting with the small, folding picture-books. I got books from my parents and the relatives for every occasion: my birthday, the Jewish New Year,

Christian Easter, from Santa Claus and at Chanukkah. Not new ones many times, but my mother's, even my grandmother's and her younger siblings' books and papers. For example the 1890 volume of the 'Az En Ujsagom' [My Newspaper] or the 1913-1916 volumes of the Jo Pajtas [Good Pal], nicely bound. [Editor's note: A children's magazine published in the first decades of the 20th century.] It was also a present that they had the weekly children's insert of the 'Ujsag' and the 'Pesti Naplo' bound for me the same way. My mother put the papers away already from 1928 and from the time I turned seven they made a subscription for me to the children's magazine called 'Az En Ujsagom.' [Editor's note: They probably subscribed to some other children's magazine, because the 'Az En Ujsagom' ceased publication approximately at the time when Erika Izsak turned seven, in 1936.]

My first book case was also a birthday present. I was already a school-girl at that time. I could read earlier, I could even write, meaningful sentences with capital letters, but without spaces and illegibly ugly. With reading I had some 'language/pronunciation' problems, to put it sententiously, later, when I was a school-child. I was astonished for example, when I found out that 'Shakespeare,' who was often quoted in youth novels, and that certain 'Shekspeer,' of whom my mother told me, were one and the same person.

I also drew a lot, but I was very bad at it. I also had many German books, old ones, too, so I also learned black letter [Gothic script], but I didn't like that. I had to speak German with my mother very much. She taught me to play the piano, too, from the time I was five or six years old. Her aim was only that I would love and be able to enjoy music, despite the fact that I had no ear for it; I was absolutely tone-deaf, which I inherited from my father. She did achieve this. It also did me good that I went to rhythmical gymnastics at the age of six. I learned to swim at the age of five, at the Lukacs bathing establishment, by line and level, from a swimming master. It was probably tiresome for my mother to regularly take me to Pest, to Buda, and probably they also had to make a sacrifice from a financial point of view.

The HICAA gardener training grounds were in the suburb of Budapest, in a part of the 10th district, called Rakos. The entrance was on Kereszturi Street. The closest tram station was 35-40 minutes away, in the meantime one had to cross a several stories high railway bridge. It took another half an hour until we got to Pest by Tram No. 28. The HICAA had its own coach, when my father had to go into town officially the coachman took him to the tram and brought him back, and at the beginning of the 1930s he took my mother and me, too.

The closest school, the Maglodi Street elementary school, was right at the tram station. As a 1st grader I was a private student in the Bezeredi Street elementary school, where one of the 1st grade teachers was a relative: she was the wife of one of my father's cousins. In the 2nd and 3rd grade I went to Maglodi Street, with pleasure in fact, though the environment was quite strange for me. The manager of the HICAA had a daughter of my age, she only lived at the grounds for a little while, back then we spent a lot of time together, of course. As far as I remember there wasn't anyone Jewish in our class besides us, a Jewish girl only got there towards the end of the 3rd grade, and there were only a few of us in the entire school. There was a separate religion class for us, but not only for us, but also for the few others, who were of 'different religion,' namely the ones who weren't Roman Catholic. I never experienced that they would have looked at me differently because I was Jewish.

The situation was different outside of school. In the spring of 1938, when I was on my way home, three boys, whom I didn't know, attacked me, said nasty things about me being Jewish and hit me. It didn't hurt me very much and I didn't get very frightened either: I saw many Arrow Cross [14](#), anti-Semitic inscriptions on the walls and fences those days. It hurt me more that my classmate, with whom I was on quite good terms, even though she was Christian, and we were together at that time, too, got frightened and ran away immediately. I completed the 3rd grade there, but in the 4th grade I was a private student again on Bezeredi Street. I went to religion class to a religion teacher in Sashalom [district]. He was the first one who made me a little bit interested, even if not in religion, but in the Bible and Hebrew letters.

From the fall of 1939 I went to high school, to the Girls' High School of the Pest Jewish Community, namely to the Jewish High School. I was very anxious to see if they would enroll me, because they had way too many applications already. That was the first year when they didn't accept Jews in public high schools [Editor's note: The numerus clausus [15](#) affected the newly enrolled, the Jewish students in higher classes could remain in their school.]. There was even an 'entrance exam,' not an exam as such, but an interview. I liked this school very much. Even the physical environment, the great, modern building, the light classrooms, the well equipped, huge gymnasium, the equipment rooms, the roof-garden and the vine-arbor in the garden suggested safety and high standard. There were many teachers, who couldn't teach at universities because they were Jewish, but most of them were erudite and great pedagogues.

We had religion class three times a week. Our religion teacher was great: from Dr. Samuel Kandel we learned humanism, decency and culture in general. Samuel Kandel and his wife, Dr. Erzsebet Scheiber, who was our Hungarian and German teacher, were later shot by the Arrow Cross men. [Editor's note: Rabbi Samuel Kandel was the religion teacher of the Jewish Girls' High School from the 1920s.]. My other favorite teacher was Richard Rieger. His subject was mathematics and we learned to think independently, logically and to deduce from him. The school helped establish a modern, European erudition.

I went to high school by train, from Rakos station, which was about 20 minutes from our house, I arrived at the Keleti railway station after another 20 minutes, and school was about 10 minutes away from there. In the spring and fall, when the weather was nice I often went to school and came home by bike. Except when I went to remedial gymnastics or English class. At these times I had lunch and did my homework either at my aunt Ilus's or at my grandmother Torok's. I sometimes even slept over at their places, perhaps along with my mother, because from the age of 13 or 14 I went to the theater, to concerts, or I had some program late in the afternoon, after which I couldn't go to the grounds alone.

Even though I lived in a Jewish institute and went to a Jewish high school, I barely had any Jewish identity, and religion didn't really touch me emotionally. The Saturday morning service was compulsory at high school, but only for those, of course, who lived close and could walk there. In the five years I attended it only once, one Friday when I slept at my aunt's, so that I could see the synagogue, which was famous for its beauty. There was a small prayer house on the HICAA grounds; there was a Friday evening prayer there every week for the students. A rabbi came only for the High Holidays, there was a worship service, which lasted all day on those occasions. My mother and I were also there.

We fasted on the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur], but as a child I didn't have to fast until the evening. Two Jewish families lived somewhere nearby, they also came to the prayer house of the HICAA, because this was the only one within walking distance for them. One of the women always brought quince stuffed with cloves, because its smell diminishes hunger, allegedly. I don't know if that's true, but I liked this smell very much, it still has a holiday atmosphere for me. My parents first had tea at sundown, there was potcake and coffee with milk or cocoa, and dinner only came later.

My favorite holiday was Pesach, especially because of the food made with matzah. We took out the Pesach dishes from the bottom of a dresser, but there wasn't any ritual. We didn't eat anything made with leaven for eight days, but as far as I remember the bag with flour remained in its place, in the pantry. There were only the three of us on seder evening, because of the distance we couldn't walk anywhere, and nobody could come to our place. I said the mah nishtanah enthusiastically. We always lit Chanukkah candles. At Chanukkah I always got many presents until I became a high school student, just like the Christian children did for Christmas. But my most memorable 'holiday' memory is of a completely different nature. When I was 13 or 14 years old, at Yom Kippur, behind the curtain, which divided the men's and women's room a boy, who was a couple years older than me, and I made a stand for being atheists...

My father was religious, without ever thinking about it, he was rather obliged by his respect towards his family and tradition. But because of the gardening, he couldn't observe all the regulations. In the horticulture Saturday and Sunday weren't working days, but they weren't rest-days either. The Jewish students usually did the gardening jobs, but there were some, and in high season many, non-Jewish day-laborers. The assistant gardeners, who conducted work directly, and the clerks sitting by desks were almost all Jewish, but the craftsmen, the fitters, carpenter, glass-worker etc, weren't. On Saturday the non-Jewish people worked regularly, and from among the Jewish students a couple, in turns, as many as were needed in the horticulture. My father worked on every Saturday, because this was a normal business-day for the trade partners, the big flower shops. So he made phone calls, wrote, but for my mother and I, since we didn't have to, it was forbidden.

My mother lit a candle reluctantly on Friday evening, she didn't have to light the fire and cook, because the maid of all works, while there was one, did it. But my mother wasn't allowed to write in her diary, and couldn't embroider, and I wasn't allowed to draw and write. I was unable to understand why my father forbade what was entertainment for us, while religion forbade work on Saturday, why we couldn't do what we liked on the day of rest commanded by God. And to this 'philosophical' problem the moral problem came. My mother told me: we could write, as long as my father didn't find out, because it would hurt him.

During the War

From 1939 to 1940, after the anti-Jewish laws, then after joining the war, our life started to change. My father was in a forced labor camp for three months in the summer of 1940, in Vac and in Maramaros county [today Maramures, Romania]. Several of my cousins and second cousins were forced laborers. I don't know whether the anti-Jewish laws directly affected the situation of the HICAA already at that time, but they sure affected the financial situation. I know that my father's income became smaller, and apart from this, we had to live more modestly. We didn't know of

course what was happening with the Jews in Germany and in the countries occupied by the Germans, but my father heard or suspected something, and he looked at our prospects very pessimistically, or unfortunately realistically. We gave up many things, which might have seemed a luxury, an exaggerated comfort, to the Christian employees of the HICAA, who had small salaries. We dismissed the maid, a woman helped once a week with the more difficult jobs. We didn't keep poultry anymore, they didn't fill the swimming pool, which needed some repair anyhow, in other words: our garden became bare.

I understood and felt very little of this at that time. I went to the theater, opera, literary evenings at the Academy of Music and to the Vajda Janos Association, to the swimming pool and to skate and to second-hand bookshops. I made some friends at school, we went to each other's place for birthday parties even in 1943.

In the fall of 1942 they started using the building of the Jewish Girls' High School as a military hospital. [Editor's note: The hospital only moved there later. First they moved the Boys' High School in the place of the Girls' High School for a while, the Girls' High School was a military hospital until November 1944 only after this.]. From then on we went to the building of the Wesselenyi Street Jewish middle school, in weekly shifts in the morning or in the afternoon, and every day, except Saturday. Originally we had a five-day school week, but we had six classes almost every day. This wasn't possible in two shifts, so there was school on Sunday because of this.

This was the case on 19th March 1944 [16](#), too. I recall we had a mathematics class. One of the teachers called Mr. Rieger to the door, then he told us in a very serious voice to immediately go home, on the shortest possible route. I called my father on the phone - there wasn't a phone in the apartment, but there was one in the office - and asked him whether I should go home or to one of the relatives, who lived near by. He told me to go home, but not on the usual route, by train, but by tram. And this, although he didn't know that they had arrested several persons at the Keleti railway station. One month later, on 21st April, the Eastern Front Comrades' Association occupied the gardener training grounds, and the dormitories of the HICAA as well, dispossessed it all of its fortune. We also had to move, we could take our own things, and we could leave the furniture we didn't have a place for, and several boxes full with stuff in the cellar. We found and got back most of these a year later.

It was natural that we went to Grandma's on Nagymezo Street. Four people lived in the 130 square meter four-bedroom apartment: my grandma, my aunt Klari and her son Tomi, and a tenant. This house was also assigned as a yellow star house [17](#). Most of the inhabitants were Jewish, but as far as I remember those who weren't didn't move out either. One of the Christian owners and the janitor didn't for sure, they weren't anti-Semites, and they were friendly in the following months, too. Two families with four members each moved to our apartment.

My father was drafted into forced labor again, to a formation in Pest, at the beginning of June. He came home from time to time for a couple hours, he sometimes sent word. This was a great security for us. Otherwise we didn't know how unsafe we were... We had no idea what happened to the Jews in the country. We didn't have any relatives or Jewish acquaintances who lived outside Budapest. We heard some 'rumors' about ghettos in the country and about trains later, but we didn't know what to make of them. Someone told us that he got a postcard from Waldsee, from one of his relatives taken for 'work,' and my mother said that it can't be that horrible in a place with

such a pretty name...[Editor's note: Waldsee is a name made up by the Nazis in order to calm the Hungarian Jews. They demanded the deported Jews, many of whom they gassed immediately, to write home that they were doing fine, indicating this place.]

My father knew more and thought realistically. He had a Christian colleague of German origin, with who he was on quite good terms, he had been at their place several times. He had a horticulture in Buda, they also lived there in a big house. My father sent us, my mother and me, to him to ask him if we could hide at their place if need be. Neither my mother, nor I wanted it, but we had to try. He apologized and brought up all kinds of excuses, and he refused our request. We had a humiliating experience and we had to run to get home before the curfew started. We could only go on the street with the yellow star [18](#) at defined hours [19](#). We bought food during this time, of course only in the shops where Jews could go in at all.

Grandma transferred the shoe store to a trustworthy shoemaker who worked there [see Strohmann system] [20](#) already at the beginning of the German occupation, before they took the shops of the Jews with an order. I don't know the details, but I know that they helped in the following months, his wife often came and brought all kinds of food and items we needed in the household. Grandma once asked her, she gave her money, of course, to bring us some cookies from the cake-shop near by, because Jews couldn't go there anymore. The woman quietly remarked that even though she could always go in, she never had enough money to buy something for her children.

In the second half of October, after the Arrow Cross takeover [21](#), we heard that they were going to take the women between 16 and 42 years of age from the yellow star houses in Budapest 'to work.' [Editor's note: According to Randolph L. Braham they called the women from Budapest to work several times: on 22nd October 1944 all the women between 18 and 40 years of age, so those who were born between 1904 and 1926; on 2nd November the women between 16 and 50 years of age, those born between 1928 and 1894, who could sew; on 3rd November they ordered again the taking into record of the women between 16 and 40 'for forced labor in connection with the defense of the nation.' See Randolph L. Braham: A magyar Holocaust, Budapest, Gondolat/Wilmington, Blackburn International Inc., e. n. /1988/.]. We started to prepare ourselves. We adjusted men's trousers, made a backpack out of my grandma's fine, thick tablecloths. I put a silk blouse in it, too, because I thought that even if we worked, there would be a rest-day, too, and then I should dress decently. Well-meaning naivety doesn't have any limits ...But it was useful: lice liked silk less than flannel.

Three young Arrow Cross men came in the morning of 10th November: everyone had to go to the courtyard. They selected us by looking at us, under and above the age limit, those who seemed able to work. They gave us a couple hours to prepare before leaving. My mother and my grandmother almost argued - they never had until then. They argued because there was a goose liver, fried in lard, and Grandma wanted to pack it all for us, but my mother said she should only pack half of it, because they barely had anything to eat. Then somehow they divided it up. The Christian inhabitants, it seemed somewhat ashamed, closed their door, the janitor helped what she could and promised that she would try to take care of the elderly and the children who remained at home.

The ones of our family who remained at home were my 75-year-old grandmother and my ten-year-old nephew. The three of us, along with my mother's sister, got into the march of those who were

supposed to be deported. From Nagymezo Street we immediately turned, to O Street, as far as I remember, and we marched towards what was Vilmos Csaszar Street then, either on that street or maybe on another, parallel street. I only remember that I felt very humiliated, and I was very much ashamed of being driven along the street this way. It occurred during the eight-day march that they spit on us, but also that they threw apples and fresh loaves of bread from the windows. When we were marching in Magyarovar, someone shouted our name from the side of the road. Some from the HICAA shouted, my father's students. They were forced laborers there; they were looking to see if there was anyone they knew in the march, even the evening before. They gave us bread, a lot of bacon and lard.

We were in Kophaza for more than a month, in smaller groups, at farmers' places, we were in a big stable, some 30 to 40 of us. We could wash ourselves at the well in the courtyard, but sometimes we could go in the kitchen of the house, where the farmer gave us warm water in a washbasin for money. For my aunt's watch we got 30-40 decagrams of sausage. They took us to work every weekday: we dug trenches. My worst experience was when a German soldier hit my mother's arm with a stick, because she wasn't moving quickly enough. It didn't have any significance physically, but the humiliating situation bothered me. My mother took it easy.

In the second half of December they took us by train to the Austrian Lichtenwörth, which wasn't far from the border. We were in the halls of a former textile factory, about 3000 of us, our place was on the straw put on the floor, tightly next to each other. We didn't even see tables or chairs for about three and a half months. At first we went to dig trenches there, too, a couple times; on the way we picked cattle-turnip and hips at least, this provided our vitamin supply for a while. We got very little food: thin soup, sticky bread, small, frozen potatoes, but I don't remember being hungry, I rather remember that we listed what we were going to eat at home, swallowing hard. For example I wanted salami and poppy seed roll, not sliced, but biting the bar.... Not hunger was the problem, but extenuation.

After a while my aunt [Klara Biro, nee Torok] completely lost her power, not only physically, but also her power of will. Her organism couldn't fight one of the contagious diseases, dysentery, and she died of it. My mother had a completely different temper, she couldn't imagine that we wouldn't get home: 'we must, because Grandma, and especially Dad is waiting for us. We would get a beating from him, if we didn't go home...' She probably managed to fight off petechial typhus and the very high temperature she had and which lasted for several days, partly because of this. For me the most difficult to endure physically was the latrine, and the lice. We could prevent our head from becoming lousy, there was a hairdresser in the Lager [German for camp], who took on cutting our hair off for two to three day's bread portion. But it was impossible to rid our clothes from them.

The Soviet troops arrived on 2nd April 1945. I fell ill of typhus at that time, so we remained in the camp for a couple more days in order for me to get stronger, and then we set off towards home. On the first evening the two of us sat in front of the fence of a country courtyard, an old woman came out of the house, she showed us inside, she barely said anything, she washed us in a place, which looked like a shed, in a big cauldron of warm water and with soap, she gave us warm soup, and in the end we could lay in a bed, in clean and fresh bedding...On the next day we got breakfast. I am still ashamed that I didn't ask her name and address. We walked on foot for more than a week on Austrian territory. Where we asked, they mostly accommodated us for the night, they gave us food, and we also slept in vacated houses, from where the inhabitants had run away, but left food

behind.

In Sopron we got on a train which was headed towards Pest. There was room in the compartments, but the Polish officers who traveled there bundled us off. They were afraid of the lousy Jews, technically speaking. The train stood at railway stations for hours, half days, and at these times another girl and I got off to get hold of some food and water. Once, close to the capital, we missed the train. I knew that my mother was very worried, but also that we would meet in Pest soon. I arrived at the Kelenfold railway station on 20th April. On my way home I asked for water in a bakery-like shop, I got some rolls with it, too, and a pussyfoot question and a faint smile.

Since I walked down Andrassy Avenue, the first place on my way was the shoe store. As I expected, the old shoemaker, the new owner was there. I found out from him that my grandmother had died and that my father was at home! He got hold of a Swiss safe conduct [22](#) for the entire family in November, it was ready on the day after we were deported. He tried to send it to the brick factory after us, but he didn't manage. At least my grandmother and my nephew didn't have to go to the ghetto; they were in a so-called Swiss protected house [23](#). Grandma lived to see the liberation, she died at home of pneumonia. According to Tomi she became that weak, because she gave him all the food. Tomi got to a Jewish orphanage in the country. We brought him home soon. He was an orphan, my parents raised him and I considered him my brother. His wife became the only Christian in the family. Tomi wasn't religious either, he didn't have such knowledge either. His Roman Catholic wife got to know the Jewish fundamentals and kept track of the holidays because of the family. My father was very upset at first that a shiksa [non-Jew] became a member of our family, but after a while he came to like her, to appreciate her very much.

My father was deported to Fertorakos at the beginning of the winter of 1944, and his forced labor formation was soon taken to Austria. A couple of his toes froze, and he arranged it somehow to not have to go any farther because of that. Almost everyone from his company perished. When the Soviet troops got to Fertorakos, he was also considered and would have been deported just like the guards and the other Hungarian soldiers. He told them almost hopelessly that he wasn't a fascist, but Jewish and had been a prisoner. In the end he got to a Soviet officer, who was also Jewish. He helped my father run away. He arrived back in Pest in mid-April.

Post-war

The HICAA gardener training grounds were completely robbed during the Arrow Cross rule; part of the buildings were destroyed by bombs. My father didn't have a professional space to expand. We didn't go back, we remained in the apartment on Nagymezo Street. He dealt with sowing seed foreign trade for a while, and from 1951 he worked at the Ministry of Agriculture, from where he retired. My mother was in hospital and sanatorium for almost two years after we got home, so that she would recover from the illness she got during the deportation.

My parents' relationship to religion didn't change after 1945 either. My father went to the synagogue on the High Holidays and at maskir, in the later years to a prayer house near-by. On the Day of Atonement he fasted even in those years when he worked at the ministry. Observing Sabbath wasn't a topic. He clung to Jewish religion in some conservative, formal way. My friend and I once had a Christmas tree, or as it was officially called at that time, a pine-tree, of course not in any relation with religion, only because of its beauty, the atmosphere. My father didn't talk with me for a week after that. [Editor's note: In the first part of the 1950s they experimented with the

banishment of the word 'Christmas' and its combinations from the Hungarian language: instead of Christmas tree, they used the expression pine-tree.]

At first, besides and after a couple weeks of treatment in a sanatorium, the most important for me was to make up for the absence at school. In June I went to school again already. In the summer I started to go to a district organization of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association [24](#). The Hungarian Democratic Youth Association came into being at the initiative of the Communist Party at the end of 1944. It was started as a united leftist youth movement, independent of parties, but practically it became the youth organization of the Communist Party. I really liked the community life there, and I confessed and took on the political aims with honest, naive enthusiasm.

In the fall of 1945 they admitted me to the Communist Party as a person younger than 18, with special permission. As I saw it, there wasn't any difference there between Jews and Christians, I liked that this topic didn't even turn up. I found out a couple decades later, that there were hardly any non-Jews among us. Politics was an issue at the Jewish high school as well. At least in our class, in the school year 1945/1946, in class VII/a there was a big debate among the members of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association and the Zionists. The latter ones were in the majority, but slowly they 'ran short,' though only a few of them immigrated to Israel.

At that time I didn't really argue, I rather wrote. I became the contributor of the central newspaper of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association, the Ifjusag [Youth]; this is how my career as a journalist began. In the fall of 1947 I was a trainee at the Szabad Nep [Free Nation], the central newspaper of the Communist Party, then I edited the paper of the Chemist Union. From the fall of 1948 I worked at the Hungarian News Agency, at the beginning of 1953 already as a copy editor. The Zionist doctor trials [25](#) were held in the Soviet Union at this time. My bosses said that they wanted to prevent the AVO men [26](#) from taking notice of me because of my uncle's [Dr. Ede Izsak] Zionist and Israeli connections, so they sent me to the country, as the head of a county Hungarian News Agency's editorial office. This was a several grades lower position than the previous one, but in the end I didn't mind, the work, the environment was interesting. In the meantime I graduated from university. After high school I started studying Hungarian and Philosophy, but later I transferred to the History Department and was a correspondent student.

I came back to Pest in 1957, I held different positions at the Hungarian News Agency. In 1991 I retired as assistant managing editor, but I worked for another four years. During the decades we talked and argued with my colleagues about very many political, ideological and ethical topics, but never about Jewry, the Jewish Question, anti-Semitism. The fact that I am Jewish didn't have any significance to me until the last years. I was one [a Jew] evidently, anyone, who was interested in it at all, knew this about me, but it wasn't a topic. Somehow I didn't have a talent to recognize who was Jewish and who was Christian, and I didn't really care. I'm sure there were anti-Semites of different types among my colleagues, I know this for sure, but I never experienced any anti-Semitic attitude directed towards me. True, I wasn't sensitive to it either.

My group of friends, my direct 'private milieu' was mixed. Jews and Christians, but those, who didn't believe in 'either god.' I never got married, those who were my partners for longer or shorter periods were Christian. This way I could see Jewry, as a group of people from the outside, too, as a philosophical and ethical system, as culture, as individual character. Generally speaking: my Jewish identity became stronger through my non-Jewish friends.

Glossary

1 Jewish high school

The idea of founding a Jewish high school came up in the second half of the 19th century: the school committee of the Hungarian Jewish Association came forward with the suggestion of founding a Hungarian Jewish high school at the 1862 educational meeting. But the adepts of assimilation of the 1868 Jewish congress and some of the clerks of the Pest Jewish Community disapproved of the plan because they feared that it would lead to segregation and impede assimilation. However, since in the 1880s anti-Semitism became stronger, many of the Jewish scientists and teachers supported the idea.

In 1892, at the 25th anniversary of the emancipation of the Jewish denomination, a wealthy Jewish protector, Antal Freystadtler (1825–1892), started a one million forint fund for the founding of a denominational high school mainly for Jewish students in Budapest. Sandor Wahrmann donated 600,000, Salamon Taub 120,000 forint. The fund was handled by the Ministry of Religion and Education, and the other two donations by the Jewish community. The Jewish community bought the plot in 1910, and in 1913 the construction started after the plans of Bela Lajta. In 1914, when World War I broke out, the building was interrupted for several years.

1. The years before the war

The Jewish boys' high school started to operate in 1919 in Budapest, in the building of the middle school of the Jewish community, and the Girl's Foundation High School of the Pest Jewish Community started to function in the girl's middle school.

In 1922 the constructions were restarted on Abony Street, and by October 1923 the boy's high school could move in. The foundation school character of the two Jewish high schools ceased in 1928, and from then on the Jewish community supported them. By 1931 the entire building was ready, and the girl's high school could also move in.

After the two anti-Jewish laws the possibilities of the students to continue their studies at universities were restricted, so in September 1939 the board of both high schools started a new trade school in the building: a tool-making school for the boys, while the girls were taught sewing and housekeeping. English was the compulsory foreign language at both schools.

In December 1941 the building of the boy's high school was occupied for military purposes, so in the rest of the school year 1941/1942 classes were held at the girl's high school in the morning and in the afternoon. In June 1942 the wing that housed the girls' high school also had to be given up.

Both schools started the school year 1942/1943 at the Wesselenyi Street Jewish elementary and middle school, then in the next year in a few rooms of the National Rabbinical Seminary.

In 1944 the last school day was 31st March.

2. After the war

The school year 1944/45 basically started on 13th March 1945 (and lasted until 16th July). At this time the Jewish High School operated in the building of the rabbinical seminary.

In the school year 1945/46 both schools operated on Wesselenyi Street. In 1946 the Jewish community got the Abonyi Street building back. In the school year 1948/1949 schools were nationalized in Hungary. According to the agreement made with the state the Jewish High School remained the property of the Pest Jewish Community, and kept its denominational character. In 1959 the two high schools joined together and in 1956 took the name Anna Frank.

(Source: Felkai Laszlo: A budapesti zsidó fiú- és leánygimnázium története, Budapest, 1992.)

2 The first Nazi concentration camp, created in March 1933 in Dachau near Munich

Until the outbreak of the war prisoners were mostly social democrats and German communists, as well as clergy and Jews, a total of approx. 5,000 people. The guidelines of the camp, which was prepared by T. Eicke and assumed cruel treatment of the prisoners: hunger, beatings, exhausting labor, was treated as a model for other concentration camps. There was also a concentration camp staff training center located in Dachau. Since 1939 Dachau became a place of terror and extermination mostly for the social elites of the defeated countries. Approx. 250,000 inmates from 27 countries passed through Dachau, 148,000 died. Their labor was used in the arms industry and in quarries. The commanders of the camp during the war were: A. Piotrowsky, M. Weiss and E. Weiter. The camp was liberated on 29th April 1945 by the American army.

3 Orthodox communities

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,. In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

4 WIZO

Women's International Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920 with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. A network of health, social and educational institutions was created in Palestine between 1921 and 1933, along with numerous local groups worldwide. After WWII its office was moved to Tel Aviv. WIZO became an advisory organ to the UN after WWII (similar to UNICEF or ECOSOC). Today it operates on a voluntary basis, as a party-neutral, non-profit organization, with about 250,000 members in 50 countries (2003).

5 Bergen-Belsen

Concentration camp located in northern Germany. Bergen-Belsen was established in April 1943 as a detention camp for prisoners who were to be exchanged with Germans imprisoned in Allied countries. Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the British army on 15th April, 1945. The soldiers were shocked at what they found, including 60,000 prisoners in the camp, many on the brink of death, and thousands of unburied bodies lying about. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 139 -141)

6 Kasztner-train

A rescue operation linked to Rezső Kasztner and the Vaada (relief and rescue committee of Budapest). Kasztner was a leading Zionist in Kolozsvár who moved to Budapest after Northern Transylvania was annexed by Hungary (1940). In the capital he joined the leadership of the Vaada, founded in 1943. After the German invasion of Hungary, the leaders of Vaada believed that the best way to save Hungarian Jewry and delay the 'Final Solution' depended on contacts and negotiations with Eichmann and other Sonderkommando officers. Meanwhile, the Germans played for time since the deportations had already begun. Finally, on 30th June 1944 a train with 1,684 persons (instead of the original 600 agreed on by Eichmann) was able to leave Hungary. After being detained in Bergen-Belsen, the passengers of the Kasztner train eventually reached safety in Switzerland. Kasztner went on negotiating with the SS until the end of war, but without further success. After the war Kasztner moved to Palestine. In a trial he was accused of sacrificing the interests of many Jews for the sake of a preferred few. Days before the court cleared him, he was assassinated.

7 Death Marches to Hegyeshalom

After 15th October 1944 the German occupation of Hungary and the Arrow Cross takeover, even Jewish women were ordered to work in fortifications around Budapest. At the beginning of November the Soviet troops initiated another offensive against the capital. In the changed situation the deportation plans 'had to be sped up' and many transports were directed on foot toward Hegyeshalom at the Austrian border. These marches were terribly cruel and resulted in an unprecedented high death rate. Until the Soviet occupation of Budapest (18th January 1945), about 98,000 of the capital's Jews lost their lives in further marches and in train transports, as well as at the hands of Arrow Cross extermination squads, due to starvation and disease as well as suicide. Some of the victims were simply shot and thrown into the Danube.

8 MIKEFE (Hungarian Israelite Crafts and Agricultural Association, HICAA)

The HICAA was founded in 1842 at the initiative of the Pest Israelite Community, its first chairman was Dr. Fulop Jakobovics, a doctor. The association considered it one of its primary aims to cultivate Hungarian language. According to its statutes from 1890 'the aim of the association is to educate poor or orphaned Israelite boys to become professional craftsmen and factory and industrial workers and farmers.' Thus they prepared the youth for professions which had been unavailable for the Jewry for a long time. They provided scholarship for young people studying in different schools, they supported those who graduated. In 1892 they established a dormitory for apprentices (VII. Damjanich Street 48), and in 1908 a gardener training establishment (at Kereszturi Avenue). The HICAA was a religious institute, they had a kosher kitchen, and the students had to attend the Friday evening worship service. Both buildings of the HICAA were

confiscated at the time of the German occupation, and during the 1949 nationalization the association fell apart for good. (Magyar Izraelita Kezmu es Foldmuvelesi Egyesulet /1842-1949/. Dokumentumok, Budapest, 2000.)

9 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. The third group, the so-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

10 Sephardi Jewry

(Hebrew for 'Spanish') Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

11 The expulsion of the Jews (Sephardim) from Spain

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. There were more and more false blood libels, and the polemics, which were opportunities for interchange of views between the Christian and the Jewish intellectuals before, gradually condemned the Jews more and more, and the middle class in the rising started to be hostile with the competitor. The Jews were gradually marginalized. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. Many Jews were forced to leave their faith. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians, who were accused of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. At the end of July 1492 even the last Jews left Spain, who openly professed their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (Source: Jean-Christophe Attias - Esther Benbassa: Dictionnaire de civilisation juive, Paris, 1997)

12 Anti-Jewish Laws in Hungary

The first of these anti-Jewish laws was passed in 1938, restricting the number of Jews in liberal professions, administration, and in commercial and industrial enterprises to 20 percent. The second anti-Jewish Law, passed in 1939, defined the term "Jew" on racial grounds, and came to include some 100,000 Christians (apostates or their children). It also reduced the number of Jews in economic activity, fixing it at six percent. Jews were not allowed to be editors, chief-editors, theater directors, artistic leaders or stage directors. The Numerus Clausus was introduced again, prohibiting Jews from public jobs and restricting their political rights. As a result of these laws, 250,000 Hungarian Jews were locked out of their sources of livelihood. The third anti-Jewish Law, passed in 1941, defined the term "Jew" on more radical racial principles. Based on the Nuremberg laws, it prohibited inter-racial marriage. In 1941, the anti-Jewish Laws were extended to North-Transylvania. A year later, the Israelite religion was deleted from the official religions subsidized by the state. After the German occupation in 1944, a series of decrees was passed: all Jews were required to relinquish any telephone or radio in their possession to the authorities; all Jews were required to wear a yellow star; and non-Jews could not be employed in Jewish households. From April 1944 Jewish property was confiscated, Jews were barred from all intellectual jobs and employment by any financial institutions, and Jewish shops were closed down.

13 Dohany Street Synagogue

Europe's largest and still functioning synagogue is a characteristic example of the Hungarian capital's Romantic style architecture and was always considered the main temple of Hungarian Jewry. The Jewish Community of Pest acquired the site in 1841 and the synagogue was built between 1854 and 1859, designed by Ludwig Foerster (who also designed the synagogue of Tempelgasse in Vienna, Austria). Using the biblical description of the Temple of Solomon as a model, he developed his peculiar orientalist style while using the most modern contemporary techniques. The Hall of Heroes with the monument to Hungarian Jewish martyrs, set up in 1991, and the Jewish Heroes' Mausoleum built in 1929-1931 are next to the main building while the Jewish Museum is in an adjacent building.

14 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.

15 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.

16 German Invasion of Hungary [19th March 1944]

Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary. In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On 18th March, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's. On 19th March, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojaj, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

17 Yellow star houses

The system of exclusively Jewish houses which acted as a form of hostage taking was introduced by the Hungarian authorities in June 1944 in Budapest. The authorities believed that if they concentrated all the Jews of Budapest in the ghetto, the Allies would not attack it, but if they placed such houses all over Budapest, especially near important public buildings it was a kind of guarantee. Jews were only allowed to leave such houses for two hours a day to buy supplies and such.

18 Yellow star in Hungary

In a decree introduced on 31st March 1944 the Sztojaj government obliged all persons older than 6 years qualified as Jews, according to the relevant laws, to wear, starting from 5th April, "outside the house" a 10x10 cm, canary yellow colored star made of textile, silk or velvet, sewed onto the left side of their clothes. The government of Dome Sztojaj, appointed due to the German invasion, emitted dozens of decrees aiming at the separation, isolation and despoilment of the Jewish population, all this preparing and facilitating deportation. These decrees prohibited persons qualified as Jews from owning and using telephones, radios, cars, and from changing domicile. They prohibited the employment of non-Jewish persons in households qualified as Jewish, ordered the dismissal of public employees qualified as Jews, and introduced many other restrictions and prohibitions. The obligation to wear a yellow star aimed at the visible distinction of persons

qualified as Jews, and made possible from the beginning abuses by the police and gendarmes. A few categories were exempted from this obligation: WWI invalids and awarded veterans, respectively following the pressure of the Christian Church priests, the widows and orphans of awarded WWI heroes, WWII orphans and widows, converted Jews married to a Christian and foreigners. (Randolph L. Braham: A nepirtas politikaja, A holokauszt Magyarorszagon / The Politics of Genocide, The Holocaust in Hungary, Budapest, Uj Mandatum, 2003, p. 89-90.)

19 Curfew in Budapest

After Jews were required to move into yellow star houses in June 1944, Hungarian authorities ordered a curfew. Jews required to wear yellow stars were allowed to leave their houses between 2 and 5pm only for medical treatment, bathing and shopping. Those breaching the order were liable to a fine or internment. After the Arrow Cross takeover, the yellow star houses were simply closed for 10 days and Jews were forbidden to leave their homes for any reason. In the beginning of December non-Jews were required to leave the ghetto area while Jews were allowed to come out for only two hours in the mornings. The ghetto was closed on 10th December, its gates guarded by armed Arrow Cross men and policemen. After 3rd January 1945 even dead bodies were not allowed to be taken out.

20 Strohmenn 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 second anti-Jewish Law passed in 1939, 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 Strohmenn system insured a degree of survival for some Jewish businesses for varying lengths of time.

21 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.

22 The rescue activity of Swiss diplomats

The rescue activity of the Swiss diplomats was organized around the embassy. The head of the mission was ambassador Jaeger, who actively contributed in assuring the conditions needed to save Jews in Budapest for Consul Carl Lutz. Carl Lutz was the Swiss consul in Budapest in 1944-1945. The so-called 'Schutzbrief,' the safe conduct for the Jewish refugees from Budapest was his idea. He saved 10,000 Jewish children, who were sent to Palestine with these safe-conducts. He

issued more than 50,000 safe-conducts without permission. Besides this he played a role in establishing 76 so-called protected houses in Budapest. Jewish refugee agencies estimate the number of Jews saved by him at 50,000. Consul Lutz's temporary agent in Budapest, Dr. Peter Zurcher prevented the SS from exterminating the 70,000 inhabitants of the Budapest ghetto before the Soviet occupation.

23 Protected house

In November 1944, the International and Swedish Red Cross, as well as representatives of the consulates of neutral countries came to an agreement with the Hungarian foreign minister, Count Gabor Kemeny, to concentrate the Jews holding safe-conduct passes in different parts of the city until the time of their transportation to neutral countries. The zone of these protected houses ('international ghetto') was formed in the Ujlipotvaros district of Budapest, since the majority of residents living there had been sent, in marching companies, toward Austria. In practice, the protected houses weren't a secure refuge. There were often raids for various reasons (fake papers etc.) when many residents were dragged off and shot into the Danube. In January 1945, the Arrow Cross started transporting protected house residents to the large Budapest ghetto, but the determined protests and threats of the ambassadors eventually stopped the emptying of these houses.

24 MADISZ (Hungarian Democratic Youth Organization) (1944-1948)

Established in December 1944 in Debrecen (which had already been liberated by then) upon the initiation of the HCP, which wanted to spread its influence among the youth. Its membership included an especially high number of young peasants. Since other parties had also created their youth organizations, MADISZ started fighting for the unity of workers, peasants and intellectuals. Its head organization was founded in 1948 under the name Hungarian Popular Youth Alliance (MINSZ).

25 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.

26 AVH (and AVO)

AVH (and AVO): In 1945, the Political Security Department was created under the jurisdiction of the Budapest Police Headquarters, and directed by Gabor Peter. Its aim was the arrest and prosecution of war criminals. In October 1946, the Hungarian State Police put this organization under direct authority of the interior minister, under the name - State Defense Department (AVO). Although the AVO's official purpose was primarily the defense of the democratic state order, and to

investigate war crimes and crimes against the people, as well as the collection and recording of foreign and national information concerning state security, from the time of its inception it collected information about leading coalition party politicians, tapped the telephones of the political opponents of the communists, ...etc. With the decree of 10th September 1948, the powers of the Interior Ministry broadened, and the AVO came under its direct subordination - a new significant step towards the organization's self-regulation. At this time, command of the State Border, Commerce and Air Traffic Control, as well as the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH) was put under the sphere of authority of the AVH, thus also empowering them with control of the granting of passports. The AVH (State Defense Authority) was created organizationally dependent on the Interior Ministry on 28th December 1949, and was directly subordinate to the Ministry council. Military prevention and the National Guard were melded into the new organization. In a move to secure complete control, the AVH was organized in a strict hierarchical order, covering the entire area of the country with a network of agents and subordinate units. In actuality, Matyas Rakosi and those in the innermost circle of Party leaders were in direct control and authority over the provision of it. The sitting ministry council of 17th July 1953 ordered the repeal of the AVH as an independent organ, and its fusion into the Interior Ministry. The decision didn't become public, and because of its secrecy caused various misunderstandings, even within the state apparatus. Also attributable to this confusion, was the fact that though the AVH was really, formally stripped of its independent power, it remained in continuous use within the ranks of state defense, and put the state defense departments up against the Interior Ministry units. This could explain the fact that on 28th October 1956, in the radio broadcast of Imre Nagy, he promised to disband that State Defense Authority, which was still in place during his time as Prime Minister, though it had been eliminated three years earlier.