

# Ferenc Leicht

Ferenc Leicht

Budapest, Hungary

Interviewer: Judit Rez

Date of interview: June-November 2004

*Ferenc Leicht has lived with his wife in Budapest for almost 50 years, in a plainly furnished apartment.*

*Most of their furniture are family inheritance, on the walls there are graphics, in the showcase there are color photographs of their grandchildren.*

*Mr. Leicht continued to work even after he had retired, he guided tourists from Israel in Budapest.*

*His wife writes short stories, novels about her life and their common life, which can be already read on the Internet thanks to their son who lives in Israel.*



- [My family history](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [After the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

---

## My family history

I can only trace back my family tree until my grandfather, I don't know anything about my great-grandfather. We had information about him in our documents, but we took those with us to Auschwitz so that we could prove our Hungarian origin. This wasn't a lucky idea, because nothing remained of them. My parents wanted to arrange their citizenship in 1941, because at that time they deported the Jews, about 20000 people, who couldn't prove their Hungarian citizenship to Poland, and they handed them over at Kamenetz-Podolsk to the Germans who killed them.

[The massacre of Kamenetz-Podolsk]<sup>1</sup>. In Slovakia, in Pozsony county, where my grandparents lived deportation had not started at that time, there was still order, the cemeteries had not been devastated, so it was relatively easy to find the grave of my great-grandparents. I know that on the grave of my ancestors it was written where they had come from for generations, and in these cemeteries they often wrote on the grave the occupation of the deceased, too. From that one could tell for example that this and this was a Levite and came from Bazin [today Pezinok, Slovakia].

In 1941 the registers of the Jewish community, retroactively to several centuries, were still there. That's how I know that in 1805 one of my ancestors, called Ferenc Leicht rented 5 acres of land, because he wasn't allowed to have his own, and he plowed that land. My parents got many

certificatory documents there, but not even one remained.

My paternal grandparents lived in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in Pozsony County. I don't know exactly where, but the Jews migrated in that region – Szent Gyorgy, Bazin, Nagyszombat [today Trnava, Slovakia], Modor [today Modra, Slovakia]. The family lived in these villages for centuries. My grandfather, Mozes Moric Leicht was born in 1867 and died in 1929.

First he was a mercer, but he got ruined in 5 minutes, in the Leicht family there wasn't any business spirit, we couldn't even make 20 fillers with business. If someone doesn't employ us, we die of hunger. Later my grandfather became a shamash in Somogycurgo. My paternal grandmother, Ida Diamant was born in 1870 and died in 1922.

I didn't know any of my grandparents from the maternal side, because they both died in 1929, before I was born. My maternal grandfather was called Lipot Herczfeld, he was born in 1881, and my grandmother was Malvin Maria Weisz, she was also born in 1881.

They were exactly of the same age, and they died of cancer at the same time. My grandparents migrated to Transdanubia, they lived in Tilaj, then in Veszprem, and in the end they got settled in Nagykanizsa. My grandfather was a baker, they had 7 daughters.

My deceased grandfather always used to say that he was the happiest man on earth, because one who had 7 houses wanted to have an 8th, but the one who had 7 daughters wouldn't have liked to have any more. The oldest of the girls was Vilma, who was born in 1904, the second one Gizella in 1905, then my mother in 1906, Ilona in 1911, Irma in 1914, Erzsebet in 1918 and the youngest girl, Etelka was born in 1919.

So I didn't know any of my grandparents, but I did know my two great-grandmothers. They both came to Hungary from Vienna [Austria] and they outlived their children. One of my great-grandmothers, the mother of my maternal grandfather was Katalin Herczfeld, but she called herself Kadi [Hungarian for cadí], so in my childhood I thought that she must have been a Muslim judge in her youth, then I found out later that she had been a fraulein, a governess. She only knew German practically, that's why she pronounced the name Kati as Kadi, and that stuck until her old age. I thought that she was my Kadi grandmother, she was about 80 years old when I got to know her. She was born in 1852 and she died in 1936.

My other great-grandmother, the mother of my maternal grandmother, was called Betti Weisz. She was also a fraulein all her life. She was born in 1850, and she died in 1932. I didn't have any great-grandfathers though, because they both had a child without getting married. When I was small I thought that their master had seduced them, whereas one of them had a child at the age of 31, and the other one at the age of 29. I have no idea who my great-grandfather was, and nobody else knows anymore.

Since they were both governess and they both had a child as maiden, they couldn't keep their children with them, because they raised the child of the family where they lived in Pest. They gave their own children to someone else to raise them in the country. My grandmother, who was Maria Weisz originally, got the name Malvin, because her mother gave her to a family called Weisz, who already had a daughter called Maria Weisz. So in order to discern her from the Maria who was their own, they called my grandmother Malvin and raised her nicely.

They treated her as their own child, and the Weisz children also considered her their sister. Even though they are not our relatives, they remained in my memory as my grandmother's brothers and sisters. My parents treated the Weisz' as cousins, and I treated their children of my age as my second cousins. I still keep in touch with them as if they were my blood-relation. My grandfather was also raised this way by someone, I don't know who, perhaps he might have received a worse treatment. And the great-grandmothers only turned up when they were around 80. They raised small children in German until their old age. They never learned Hungarian decently.

My father, Geza Leicht was born in 1905 in Nagyszakacsi. He had 3 sisters: Julia, who was born in Modor in 1898, Olga, who was also born in Modor in 1899, and Frida who was born in 1904 in Enying. His oldest sister Juliska [Julia] lived in Nagykanizsa and was a seamstress, and a good one. She had a fiancé when she was 20, he was called Bela Remenyi, and during the Hungarian Soviet Republic [2](#) he was a member of the directory, and because of that he was hanged in 1919, after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

Juliska sunk in herself because of this, and she only got married in 1937 to a widower, Imre Hirschler, who had 2 children. All three of them were gassed later. Juliska got married again after the war, to another widower, Vilmos Balazs, whose daughter and first wife had been gassed. After the war they came to Pest, because it wasn't a very fortunate thing to be a Jew in the countryside.

[Editor's note: During the Holocaust almost all the Jewry from the country was deported and killed, so after World War II the communities in the country, which were flourishing before, disappeared.]

Olga remained in Somogycsurgo at first, then she came to Pest with Juliska and her husband. She had never had her own apartment or household, the poor thing was a victim of the anti-Jewish laws [3](#) all her life. She was a shopkeeper for 25 years, but she was fired because of the first anti-Jewish law, and in 1944 she was deported to Bergen-Belsen.

Then she was in Sweden for a year in order to recover, and when in 1954 she was of retiring age, they didn't count in the previous years because she didn't work for more than 5 years before, so she had to work 10 more years in order to get the minimal pension. She died at the age of 93 as a maiden.

After the war, in 1942 or 1943, Frida moved with her husband from Somogycsurgo to a big apartment in Pest, where her husband's relatives lived. Then her husband was drafted into forced labor and was killed. I was on very good terms with their son Miklos, he was the only one of my nephews who survived the Holocaust. Frida died in 1957, Miklos in 1992.

My father was in the 4th grade of high school in Csurgo - at the school which was famous because Csokonai [Editor's note: Mihaly Csokonai Vitez (1773 - 1805), Hungarian poet, was born in Debrecen. Csokonai was a genial and original poet, and wrote a mock-heroic poem called Dorottya or the Triumph of the Ladies at the Carnival, two or three comedies or farces, and a number of love-poems.] had taught there - when he was sent down from the high school because once he didn't greet the Catholic priest on the street.

When they called him for account he said that the Christian students didn't greet his father either. Namely there wasn't a rabbi in Csurgo, the shammash was the head of the Jewish community, which was my grandfather, and they didn't greet him either. Then my father became a merchant

apprentice. He realized very soon that he didn't have any talent for that, and then he became a baker's apprentice. He served his apprenticeship in 1923, at the age of 18, then he got on a bike and went to look for a job.

I know that he went from Somogycsurgo to Nagykanizsa by bike, which is about 26 kilometers. And in 1923 he became a baker's man in the bakery of my maternal grandfather. But there was another assistant there, Terezia Herczfeld. She was my mother, who was the third, the biggest and strongest Herczfeld girl.

My mother was born in Veszprem on the 5th July 1906. She learned the baker's trade for 3 years in my grandfather's bakery in Nagykanizsa, and she graduated with distinction at the apprentice school in 1924. It wasn't usual for a woman at that time to have an assistant's certificate.

My mother was approximately as heavy and tall as I am now, but she was 10 times stronger than I have ever been. If she slapped someone in the face, he fell against the wall. A bolting-bag weighed 85 kilograms, and she could easily lift that. At that time the kneading machine had not been invented yet, or at least they didn't have one, and they baked 800 kilograms of bread daily, and pastries, too, and my father and her kneaded it all, or when there was an apprentice the three of them did..

So this is how my parents met, and when I was born they lived in Keszthely for a short time. My deceased grandfather, whose name was Lipot, wasn't called Uncle Lipi [Lipot] for some reason, but Uncle Pali. In the Jewish families it is customary to name the children after the deceased grandparents or parents. When I was born and my mother had to give in my name she called me Ferenc, because I would have had an uncle called Ferenc on the paternal side, if he hadn't died of lung cancer at a young age.

But five days after I was born my maternal grandfather, Uncle Lipot died. By the time I was 8 days old, at my circumcision I got his Hebrew name. So my Hebrew name is the same as my grandfather's, I got the name Jehuda Arje, just like him, but my Hungarian name, Ferenc is the name of my long ago deceased uncle whom I didn't know.

My cousin who was born 3 months later than I got the Hungarian name of my grandfather, and was called Pal. He was unfortunately killed later in Auschwitz. But since I was the first grandchild, the family, my aunts and everyone called me Pali. So much so that in my report card from elementary school I was registered as Pal Leicht, because they didn't ask for my birth certificate, because everyone knew me. I thought that that was my name, too. It only turned out that it wasn't my name when I went to middle school and we brought my birth certificate from Keszthely. At middle school they nullified my elementary school report card, so that nobody would think that they enrolled a child with a different name.

### • **Growing up**

When I was born both my great-grandmothers lived with us. I was 3 years old when Betti died, I think she had skin cancer, and I was 7 when Katalin died. As a matter of fact she raised me, because my parents worked day and night, and I was committed to her care. She was very-very nice, she always took me on a walk in the Pap Garden, which was about 200 meter from our apartment, and I could play there, My parents used to say that when I was very small she took me

by the hand and she adjusted her steps to mine, and when I grew older and I wanted to hurry, I dragged her after myself. She loved me very much, and I loved her very much, too. She did everything in the world for me. They told me that when I was small and slept, she sat by the baby carriage and flapped the flies away with a green branch. She didn't like her own grandchildren, and they didn't like her either, but I was the oldest great-grandchild and she loved me very much.

My dear father was the best baker in Nagykanizsa, he never cheated on my mother, he didn't beat her and didn't drink. His only bad habit was that he was a heavy smoker, he smoked until the end of his life, and because of that he died early, at the age of 69. Unfortunately he got my mother into the habit of smoking, so she also died early, at the age of 64 of circular insufficiency. I only smoked one cigarette in my entire life. My father was a reservist at that time, and he was a heavy smoker. There was a cigarette called Honved [Hungarian for patriot], there were two thin red stripes on it. I called it officer darling. The coffin-nail is nothing compared to that, it was such a strong cigarette! And my father came home, he put the stump on the cupboard, and when he turned away I took it and took a pull at it. My father turned around, he saw it, and I thought that he was going to pull my ears, but he didn't. He took it and said 'my dear son, a gentleman doesn't smoke stumps. Here is a whole one.' He even gave me a light, and showed me how to smoke it. I smoked that cigarette and I never smoked since then, not even once. I never thought of smoking. My father was smart in this respect. He didn't forbid it, he let me smoke. I smoked that cigarette and I threw up for three days. I was 6 years old at that time.

In our first house on Teleki Street not only we lived, because that was a very long plot, a courtyard ran along one side of it and on its other side there was a 40 meter long house, and that was divided crosswise into four apartments. These were all one-bedroom apartments with a kitchen. There was electricity in the house, but no running water. The toilet and the well in the courtyard were common, and there was no sewer, but the sewage-water simply trickled into the ditch, and that was quite smelly. The toilet was on the other end of the courtyard, about 80 meters from the house, and sometimes my great-grandmother Kadi, she used a walking stick, told me: 'kids, I am going to Siberia'. By this she meant that she was going to the toilet. The plot was so long, that one had to go to the end of the garden by bike. Next to us lived a gypsy musician called Foszak, then Uncle Boda, the shoemaker, Mr. Boka, who was a driver, and the Hollanders, who had so many children like stars on the sky, they were all my friends. The driver had a red-haired daughter, Anci who was of my age, and the poor thing died of meningitis, I was still there when she fell ill. And I had a goat, too, I think, for about 3-4 years, because then it started to bunt and my parents sold it.

In our house we were the only Jewish family. On the street, in our second neighbor there was another Jewish grocer, and on the other side of the street, quite far, at about 200 meters from our house there lived a family, the Baneth, I went to school with their son, Tibor. And these were all the Jews on the entire street. That wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. Everyone lived where he could. To the right from our house there was an elementary school, and to the left there was the house of a teacher called Mantuana.

So in the fore part of our house, on the street side lived our family, and the bakery, which had two rooms, the kneading and the baking room, was built to the apartment. The two great-grandmothers lived with us, and my parents supported my mother's four sisters, Ilona, Irma, Erzsebet and Etelka, who still went to school at that time. [Editor's note: Both of the mother's parents died in 1929] The older girls were already married. The four girls had the 'schultz room'. It was called 'schultz room',

because my grandparents once had a tenant with this name. I lived in the same room with my parents, which was heated with a tile stove. I never heard that something like bathroom existed. In my childhood I used to wear a pair of black shorts, and no shoes, and I looked just like a gypsy child. I was always tan, and always dirty. In the evenings my mother put me in a washbasin with water, took a cloth or something, and washed me.

Our kitchen functioned so that they cooked for 16. There were my parents and I, the four sisters, the two great-grandmothers, the maid, the baker's apprentice and two assistants. Or an apprentice and the cook, who was our neighbor, she was a widow and her son also came to eat at our place sometimes. But that woman cooked so terribly! If there was meat once a week everyone was happy. But there was pasta at least two times a week. And once a week there was a pasta which we called baker's illness. That was vermicelli dusted with ground poppy seed and sugar and it was called baker's illness, because if there are crescent rolls left, the baker is ill because he couldn't sell them. And we cut up the crescent rolls and made vermicelli dusted with ground poppy seed and sugar, poured milk, jam, this and that on it. And we called the soup 'eat-it-soup'. We hated it, because there was very much thickening in it, because our mother didn't really have money for the ingredients. But there was a lot of fruit in the garden, and we ate that up.

My parents worked in the bakery with an apprentice, a baker's man and a domestic servant at night. For a kilogram of bread, for the dough and the cleaning of the workshop 4 liters of water was needed. They carried the water from the yard, from the well, the domestic servant pulled up the 4 cubic meters of water from the well every day. When he didn't pull up water or carry water, then he cut wood for the oven. The domestic servant lived at our place, in the attic above the oven and ate at our place, too. The apprentice and the baker's man, too, everyone. Our last apprentice was Jewish, who was unfortunately killed in Auschwitz. I was with him in the Lager [German for camp].

There were two ovens in the bakery. One was called lifting oven which lifted the dough and baked a little crust on it. Then they took it out, and in nice German baker's language they *umpakk*, put it in the other oven, which was called *Umpakk-oven*. The bread was baked in that. Then they switched. The *umpakk* became the lifting and the other one became the baking oven, several times a night. They called the tier stand where they put the baked bread *garb*. Everything had such a funny German name, for example there was something called *pekedli*, which was a half liter mug with water, with which they cooled the oven if it overheated. Because at that time there weren't instruments which could show the temperature of the oven. The baker had an instrument for that, a handful of flour. If he threw that in the hot, empty oven and the flour just fell and burned- it didn't burn in the air sparkling, or it didn't just fall and remain there, then the temperature of the oven was right. If it was too hot, they pored in a couple *pekedli* of water. And there was the *streisechter*, which was a cowl, in which there was water, and using a brush with a handle called *vishli*, the kind that looks like the back-brushes they sell today, they brushed the flour off the bread, so that the crust would be crunchy. I think nobody knows these names anymore.

When my parents finished their work in the morning 800 kilograms of bread was baked, and there were rolls, too. But they still couldn't go to bed, because then the baking of the dough prepared at home followed. The housewives kneaded the dough at home and took it to the bakery to have it baked. They brought it in bread-baskets put on their head. This cost 5 filler a kilogram. We weighed the baked bread, and we got as many times 5 filler as many kilograms it weighed. And a kilogram of bread cost 36 filler. I knew this very well. Nagykanizsa had 32000 inhabitants and 36 bakers.

800 people could support one bakery. And we had enough customers to get by well. My father was the best specialist in town, the best miser - this is also a German word, it means to stir or blender. He smelled the flour, looked at it, felt it, and told how much yeast, salt and water was needed. Many mills delivered flour, and each was of different quality. And the one who could tell how to make a good bread out of that, was the miser. And my father made excellent goods out of everything. The clerks, the movie theatre, the hospital, and almost all the restaurants bought the bread from us. And we supplied for the district, too. 800 kilograms of bread is a lot! 400 loaves of bread of 2 kilograms each.

When my parents finished work and went to bed I got up. In the beginning we played soccer with the other children in the courtyard, and I always told them to keep quiet, because my father got angry once when he woke up and slapped me in the face. He didn't hit me often, I will be grateful for this until I live, but he always did when I woke him up. Later I quit playing because of this, and started reading very early, well before school. Perhaps one of my aunts taught me to read, I don't remember.

My parents didn't have time for this, but there were my four aunts who were already going to school, the youngest of them was 10 years older than me. I could already read when I was 5, at the age of 7-8 I knew the 3 Tolnai lexicons, which were at home, by heart. I didn't learn the encyclopedias, but I read them so many times that they stuck in my head. It was the same case with the Toldi At middle school we had to learn the first chapter of the Toldi by heart, and it was enough to know excerpts from the other chapters. But I read the entire Toldi so many times that I knew all 12 chapters by heart. [The Toldi trilogy is an epic poem trilogy written by the great Hungarian poet Janos Arany.

The trilogy was inspired by the legendary strong Miklos Toldi, who served in the Hungarian King Louis I of Hungary's army in the 14th century. The interviewee refers to the first part of the trilogy.] Among our books at home I had a very nice one, Mihaly Zichy's pictorial 'The tragedy of man' [The tragedy of man by Imre Madach is a dramatic poem approximately 4000 lines long, which elaborates on ideas comparable to Goethe's Faust.] which I got as a present in 1942 for my bar mitzvah. Then we had many books by Rezso Torok, which were humorous writings.

[Editor's note: Rezso Torok (1895-1966)- exceptionally productive novelist, his humorous novels brought him success.]. I liked Wild West novels very much, too. We had a lot of these books, and then there was a series called Ten-Filler Novels, because each book cost 10 fillers. We had many books by Zoltan Thury [Editor's note: (1870-1906) - writer, journalist], whose writings I liked very much, of course when I grew older, and I read a lot and continuously. We also had books by Rejto at that time already [Jeno Rejto (1905-1943), Hungarian writer of Jewish origin.

He is most famous for his parodies of foreign legion novels, written under a pen name. After 1945, he was seen as a dime novel writer, but today his oeuvre is highly valued by literary critics. He died in forced labor in Ukraine.]. We didn't really read the scientific books and the difficult novels, but we did have the first three Tolnai lexicons or encyclopedias. Then in 1944 they took all of our books. My wife and I have about 2000 books, my parents might have had about 200. There's a saying that it's not all the same if when a child leans against the cupboard a bottle of brandy or a book falls on his head. Well, books fell on my head already at that time, and on my child's head even more.

My parents supported my mother's four sisters so that they would get the house and the bakery. They were both my grandfather's originally. But in the meantime, the husband of my Aunt Vilma, Gyula Sternberger, who had a paint shop, drank away the capital of the shop, he was an alcoholic and a gambler, and they sold the house from above our head. Then they divided up the price among the 7 daughters, and from then on my father felt offended and he never trusted anyone again. He didn't even trust me. Because he supported the 4 girls and the 2 great-grandmothers, thinking that the house would become his, and it didn't happen so.

When they sold the house in 1936 we moved to the next street, to a certain housing estate for pensioner clerks. It was about 500 meters on foot. On this housing estate mostly pensioner civil servants lived: pensioner policemen, gendarmes, railway-men, mailmen, revenue officers, servicemen, who could retire after 25 years of service. There were only houses with a garden, each had a huge garden, the yard with the garden was about 200 meters long. We weren't adepts in gardening, but our neighbors went shares in it with us, they planted strawberry, they polled the trees and they sprayed. The strawberries were very delicious, and when the neighbor picked them he divided them: 'Mr. Lejk, this is yours and this is ours'- that's what he said. They called my father Mr. Lejk, they couldn't pronounce Leicht. And we had a lot of peach trees, there was ripe fruit during the entire season, because there were several kinds. And there were pears, and everything you can imagine. Besides that we had pigs, too, because we killed pigs.

We didn't have other stock, because the countrywomen from the surrounding villages always brought us geese, ducks, chicken, hens and what we needed. The women came with huge, 15-20 kilogram baskets on their head full with fruit, vegetables, dairy, chicken, eggs, what people had ordered from them. These women had a very nice poise, otherwise they couldn't have walked with these baskets. Some of them only brought one kind of food, and shouted: 'here is the milk woman', or 'buy apples, pears', or 'buy chicken, geese', but these were living animals. There was a market, too, in Nagykanizsa, but sometimes by the time these women got to the market they had sold their goods on the street. Teleki Street, where our previous house was, was a main road, it still is, it was the road to Kaposvar.

The house on Tavasz Street, in which we lived, wasn't ours, but my father rented it for 140 pengoes a month. This was a lot of money, 20 pengoes were a good day-wages, a loaf of bread cost 36 filler, an egg cost 4 filler. At that time the girls weren't with us anymore, because Vilma took the two small ones, and Ilona and Irma had got married by that time. On that housing estate for public servants 3 Jewish families lived: a baker family, that was ours, a grocer, and a very old Jew, Uncle Dukasz, who was a private citizen, and his son, Miki Dukasz was a bachelor. But he couldn't have much money, because he was a private citizen among miserable conditions. The other family was Istvan Burger, his wife and their daughter, Iren Burger, they were the grocers. The girl was my friend in my childhood and I adored her. Unfortunately she was killed in Birkenau. I will never forget her, I can still see her, an ugly little girl, a skinny Jewish girl, but her eyes and intelligence! She would turn 75 on the 16th November, I know that, too.

We had a bakery on the housing estate, just like at the previous place. There wasn't a well, but a drinking-fountain on the corner, about 100 meters from the bakery, and the man-servant had to carry the water from there with buckets. This was a big problem. My father was obsessed with having enough flour and wood, so he had about 240-270 cubic meters of wood, the yard was full with this wood, so that we couldn't see the top. The flour was in the corner of the kneading

workshop, usually about a truckload of flour. If there wasn't enough room for it, we put it in the shop.

As far as I remember in my childhood we were on holiday twice. Once in Balatonfenyves and once in Balatonmariafürdo. Both times we were in someone's summer cottage. We went with my mother only, my father never came, because both of them couldn't leave the bakery there at the same time. There were 36 bakers in the town, and they would have taken our customers, so that none would have remained. My parents never closed the bakery. They entertained themselves so that they played cards with the neighbors, it didn't matter whether they were Jewish or not. There were big card parties at weekends, and I was a big card player in my childhood, too. They seldom went to the theatre, because theatre was quite expensive under the circumstances of that time, and also because they were exhausted. My parents worked very much. And always at night, that was very tiresome for them. But they adored each other. They were very sweet. My father was never rude, but they always entertained themselves with quarreling and fighting for fun, and then they ran away from each other. They had a game, which they still played a lot in the 1950s. My wife laughed at them, because I had been married for a long time, I had a son, we lived with my parents and they still kept doing this.

We weren't religious at all, not even my grandparents. They also assimilated completely. They told me, that my grandfather, who was a shammash, was always angry on Sundays, because he wasn't allowed to smoke, he had to give good example. Saturdays were a hell for them, because my grandfather was nervous and he nagged his children all day long. Not even my great-grandmothers were religious, because if they had been, they wouldn't have had natural children. And my parents not only dressed like the locals, they also used to kill a pig. They didn't observe the holidays at all. But in the bakery it wasn't really possible to observe the holidays, because most of the customers were not Jewish. We couldn't observe the Sabbath or the Pesach, because the leaven was always there in the bakery. Perhaps they went to the synagogue by turns on the biggest holidays, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. At the high holidays they fasted, but this was a completely incidental thing. Being a Jew in my childhood only meant for me that I went to a Jewish elementary school, and then it was obligatory for me to go to the synagogue on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Because if someone failed the religion class had to repeat the year. Then I learned to be a prayer leader, I knew how to conduct the Friday evening service. When I went to middle school we left the class when the others had religion class, and the rabbi held religion class for us.

In 1939, at the age of 10 I applied to the Piarist high school in Nagykanizsa. They enrolled 5 Jewish children, but they didn't enroll me as the 6th. This was overzealous from their part, because the anti-Jewish laws only limited the number of those who could be enrolled at universities, and I never forgave them for this. In this year my mother's sisters and their husbands got together. I was the only child who was there, partly because it was at our place, and partly because I was the oldest one, who could understand the events more or less. They discussed whether they should stay or go. At that time the only country which would have accepted the Jews from Hungary was Uganda. [Editor's note: In 1903 British colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain came up with the idea of establishing a Jewish state on the territory of Uganda. By this time the efforts of Herzl regarding Palestine had failed, and he accepted the proposal, but he soon abandoned the Uganda plan because of the strong opposition that it raised. After Herzl's death in 1904 the Zionist leadership dropped the Uganda plan.] My father said that he could bake bread in any language. Istvan Lusztig,

Aunt Irma's husband, who was as big as a wardrobe and an incredibly strong man, said that there wasn't any work which he couldn't do, because he was incredibly strong. The third one, Ferenc Schnitzer Sarlos, Etel's husband, who was a goldsmith, said that there wasn't any place in the world where he couldn't make a living as a goldsmith. The others, Vilma's husband, Gyula Sternberger, who was a paint merchant, Gizella's husband, Jenő Berger, who was a bartender, Ilona's husband, Feri Vermes Wortmann, who was a clerk, and Erzsebet's husband, Jenő Eisinger, who was a bookseller, said, that they wouldn't leave, that something will happen, something always happens to solve things. Because the majority decided that we should stay, we stayed. And the saddest thing is, that those 3 survived who wanted to live. Out of those who wanted to stay nobody survived the Shoah.

In middle school the children already went to the 'Levente', and we had to wear a 'Levente' uniform with yellow stripes. [see 'Levente' movement]<sup>4</sup>. The 'Levente' activity was a compulsory extra curricular activity, twice a week, but only for Christians. They didn't admit Jews, even though we worked as much as the 'Levente' members exercised, we were called 'auxiliary training youth'. They prepared us for the forced labor. In the center of the town people laughed at us when we shoveled trash, swept and did other things. But it didn't really bother me, because I was the son of the baker from the end of the town, and who knew me besides our customers?! And those who knew me, let's say those to whom I delivered the rolls every morning - never thought of laughing at me. But there were a lot of Jewish children from wealthy families there with me, for example the son of the wealthiest lawyer in town, and people made fun of them with great pleasure. Being a scout wasn't obligatory, but they never admitted any Jews into the scout troops. I would have done that with greater pleasure.

The middle school was quite far from our apartment. In winter there was always a lot of snow, and I had to beat a path every morning in the huge snow, and sometimes I was absent, because I couldn't beat my way to school. At that time there wasn't coeducation, the boys and girls were strictly separated, and I had a permit from the headmaster of the girls' school to walk the neighbor girl, the daughter of the grocer who was of my age, to school and home. We were 10 years old, and in the mornings we beat the path to school together. She was a small, delicate girl, and she was afraid of the other boys, because they said nasty things about her being a Jew. At that time people said very nasty things about Jews. The children shouted 'dirty Jew' and they fought, and the adults, the teachers did it as people do it today, in a covert way, but it was obvious. Especially at middle school, where mostly non-Jewish children went. Most of our customers were also very anti-Semite, but they bought bread from us, because it was good. Two corners away there was another baker, a certain Gyozo Ferenczi, who painted an arrow cross on his gate at the end of the 1930s, and he asked the people around him why they supported the Jew, and didn't buy bread from him, because it wasn't far away, but they still didn't buy rolls from him. They told him, that because the Jewish bread was better than his, and that he should have made better bread, and then they would have supported him.

My homeroom teacher at the Zrinyi Miklos boys' middle school was Gizella Arato, may she be healthy if she is still alive, or may her memory be blessed if she has already died - she was an antique teenage girl, they considered a 26 year old single woman an old maid, she was the strictest teacher in the school. She was incredibly strict, she taught Hungarian and German, and took both very seriously, with grammar, spelling, reading and everything. At that time it was a

recommended pedagogical method at school to beat the children. With cane or hazel switch, which was as thick as my thumb. And despite the fact that I was one of the best students in Hungarian and German, at the Jewish school we had learned German from the 2nd grade of elementary school, she spanked me regularly if I was wrong. Otherwise she wasn't anti-Semite, if someone made a mistake, she spanked everyone indiscriminately. In 1945 teachers had to prove that they hadn't been pro-German or such and such. At that time everyone cleared each other, but they didn't clear this teacher saying that she taught German too enthusiastically. This was bullshit, because she taught Hungarian just as strictly and intensively. But for me especially, this strictness was almost a live saving thing later. At that time I had been learning German for 8 years, I understood and spoke well, I could write and read, which wasn't common. In this part of Hungary the Jews were Hungarian, and in Nagykanizsa we didn't even know that the Yiddish language existed.

Most of the teachers at middle school were very anti-Semite, respect to the rare exceptions. For example I was by far the best in national defense class, I had 1, at that time grading was inversely. [Editor's note: 1 was the best, 5 was failure. From the 1950-1951 school year the mark 5 was the best in the 5 mark scale.] I could recount all the imbecility that was in that book, and there was a lot of bullshit in it. The teacher told the others: 'Shame on you, this Jewish child, who doesn't have anything to do with this knows it, and why don't you learn it?' Despite of this there wasn't anyone at school who was more Hungarian and irredentist than I was. I was convinced that Trianon was terribly unjust, and we should get 'everything back'. [see Trianon peace treaty]<sup>5</sup>. My parents were on the same opinion, they also lived their lives as Hungarian, they weren't mindful of the fact that they were of Jewish origin, and thought that their ancestor had arrived with Arpad, but I surpassed them by far in irredentism and Hungarian patriotism. [Editor's Note: Prince Arpad led the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian basin where the Hungarians settled.] The fact that I was Jewish only meant for me that on Fridays and Saturdays I had to go to the synagogue. I hated the rabbi, dr. Erno Winkler, the poor thing, he was also killed unfortunately. He taught religion from the 1st class of elementary school until middle school, but I could never stand him. It happened that he slapped me in the face, I don't know anymore why, perhaps I was wrong in something. And what is unforgettable: he taught us to be Hungarian irredentists. He was, too. But he didn't teach us the Jewish religious laws, he didn't teach us what was allowed and what wasn't. He kept together with the rightists and the leaders of the Jewish community were corrupt. They assimilated the entire town completely. People say that there used to be three kinds of Jews in Hungary: Orthodox, Neolog and Nagykanizsa Jews. They also said that in Nagykanizsa not even the water was kosher, because the Jews from there were not religious at all. There weren't any kind of Jewish organization or youth movement, except the women's association, which the wealthier Jews made for themselves, but nobody from our family used to go there. My mother's family with her 6 sisters was a women's association in itself.

During the Yugoslav war I became the air-raid warden in our district. [Editor's note: The German army attacked Yugoslavia together with the Hungarians in 1941]. All the men were already soldiers in 1941 and all the Jews were forced laborers. In Nagykanizsa there wasn't regular bombing at that time [see Air-attacks against Hungary]<sup>6</sup>, the Yugoslav bombers only flew once or twice, but air defense had to be taken seriously, and since it was completely unorganized centrally, the inhabitants from the district asked me to be the warden.[Editor's note: Nagykanizsa was bombed 3 times during the war.] In that neighborhood I was the oldest boy. We agreed about a cellar, which

was big enough, and the inhabitants of 5 or 6 houses went there, and it was my task, as a Jewish child, to escort the neighbors from half the street and my mother to the cellar. I also had to check if everyone had their papers, their valuables, and whether they had flash-lights and food. I had everyone pack a suitcase or a bag, an air-raid pack, as they called it, and I always checked if they had it on them. My mother and I also went there. It was a joke, because this was in 1941, well after the third anti-Jewish law. But it didn't affect me, I kept going to middle school, and my father kept baking bread when he wasn't on forced labor.

### During the war

I was quite old during World War II when there was a ration card system. [see: Ration card system in Hungary(1940–1951)]<sup>7</sup>. There was a worker's ration card, a heavy worker's ration card, all kinds of cards, which started from 5 decagrams. We had to cut the tickets from the card, add up how much a person was supposed to get, ask me another, for example 1 kilogram and 85 decagrams. If the loaf of bread was of 2 kilograms we had to cut off 15 decagrams. I learned this so that I didn't need to slice it up, I could cut it off the loaf at once. This had to be done very accurately, because if we had given someone more than he was supposed to get, we wouldn't have got enough flour. And if we would have given less, the person in question would have complained. So I learned this very well, and I learned something else, too. Ever since I can remember I can cook, and not badly. While my father was sleeping either my mother or I was in the shop, then they switched. But when my mother was awake, usually in the morning, and she cooked, I learned how to cook, so that if she went to the shop I could make the meal. I even taught my wife how to cook later.

After middle school, from 1943 I went to a commercial college for a year in Nagykanizsa. I didn't have to take any entrance exams, because I was such a good student that there was no need for it. The schools published a year book every year with the list of all the pupils and their grades for each subject. The names of those who graduated with distinction was printed with italics, and the names of those who were excellent with bold letters. I knew the general subjects better, I was first at school in Mathematics, but for example I was never good at drawing, handcrafts, physical exercise and singing. I always had a problem with arts and crafts, and these spoilt my grade average. I was a good student at the commercial school, too. I never studied at home, I read very much, but at home I never did the homework, which I couldn't do at school. I had just finished the 1st grade, when the Germans marched in on the 19th March 1944. By the 31st March all schools had to be closed, they closed all the schools. And from the end of March one order came after the other. From the 5th April we had to wear a yellow star [see Yellow star in Hungary]<sup>8</sup>, bicycles had to be surrendered. [Editor's note: The 'collection' of the bicycles was done decentralized. In some counties they made forms in order to take the 'Jewish bicycles' into inventory, on which the name of the factory, the construction number, the number and quality of the tires, the disposable spare parts and tools, the pump and the lamps had to be written. (*In Ungvary, Krisztian: „Nagy jelentosegu szocialpolitikai akcio” – adalekok a zsidó vagyón begyujtésehez és elosztásához Magyarországon 1944-ben (1956 Institute, Almanac X, 2002, Budapest).*]. They destroyed the bakery with this order. There were four bicycles, I also delivered bread and pastry to the customers. The radio had to be surrendered, we didn't have a phone, but I had a Box camera, and I had to surrender that, too. Everything.

One day they placarded that the Jews weren't allowed to leave their apartment. This was on the 26th April. By then they had taken everything from us. The bakery functioned throughout, because

my father was an independent tradesman, so he couldn't fire himself. And they couldn't withdraw his trade license, because part of Nagykanizsa would have been left without bread. At that time only my mother was still at home. My father was a forced laborer, he was a forced laborer at many places, in 1943 for example he was near Csaktornya, then in Godollo, in 1944 in Veszprem, he was a baker at the Veszprem Railroad Building Company. During the war he was on forced labor for periods of 3-4 months, they let him home, and drafted him again later. They let him home again, and drafted him again. On the 26th of April we still baked with my mother and on the 27th we still sold bread before they came to deport us. Between the 26th and 28th they gathered all the Jews from Nagykanizsa. 2-3 policemen came and told us that we could take with us as much as we could hold, except precious metal, cash and weapons. They made a list of these, but in general terms, for example, the usual furniture of a kitchen, a common bedroom with the usual bedding. Everything, everything was 'usual'. A bakery with the usual appliances. They wrote in the list in detail the things that they made us surrender. My silver pen for example, which I got in 1942 at my bar mitzvah -, and even though they didn't admit me to the scout troop, I really wanted to have a scout knife, which I did get, and I had to surrender that, too, because it was a weapon. They also counted how many bread tickets and goods there were. And also they counted the flour and the wood, but they didn't write these on the list, because there was a lot of these, but they made these their own.

Then we first went to the courtyard of the small synagogue with my mother. The big synagogue was built in 1826, it was a huge, internally arched monument. On the outside it had a roof, on the inside it was domed. The synagogue was the so-called big synagogue, there was an organ in it, too. [Editor's note: Otherwise first at a synagogue in Hungary, in 1845!] Besides that there was a small synagogue, too. The small synagogue was in a huge building complex, in which there was the Jewish elementary school, the commercial school, because that had been a Jewish commercial school originally, but the town took it, but many Jewish teachers and young people went there, the Jewish rest-home, an apartment house, where there were apartments in which besides the people from Nagykanizsa the employees of the Jewish community lived, and the small synagogue. Since we lived in the outskirts of the town, by the time they got to us with the gathering, the big synagogue had become full, and then they started to cram the Jews into the small synagogue. My mother's other sisters, all 5 of them were already in the big synagogue. Even my father's sister, Juliska, who lived in Nagykanizsa was there, only Olga remained in Somogycsurgo, and Frida had moved to Pest with her husband before. And on the 28th in the morning they put me in the apartment of my aunt Juliska, who lived in the apartment house near the small synagogue, and she paid rent to the Jewish community, and who had been taken to the big synagogue by then, We were there for a night with my mother and about 10 other families were jammed there, there was about 30 of us. And the subject of my adoration, the neighbor girl, the daughter of the grocer was also there, and we were very happy that we could be together. And on top of this my uncle's angora rabbits were also there. Because my Aunt Juliska's husband, Imre Hirschler, who was a clerk, had been fired because of the anti-Jewish laws, and because he had to make a living he started to deal with angora rabbits. At that time it was in fashion, because its fur could be sold for good money. And as they were taken to the big synagogue, nobody fed the rabbits, even though the Lucerne had been put next to them. When they took us there I started feeding the rabbits, and once a young SS came next to me, because the ghetto was already guarded by the SS, and we fed the rabbits peacefully next to each other. I didn't have any bad experiences in the ghetto. And when they brought the Jews from Csaktornya and Murakoz, they transferred us to a room of the

rest home.

In Nagykanizsa there was an internment camp in the former coffee factory. There were leftists there, too, and all kinds of people, and a lot of Jews. But because the internment camp was small, there were only a couple truckload of Jews, they came to the small synagogue and the big synagogue and selected men and women between the age of 15 and 65. Among others, they selected me, my mother, my Aunt Bozsi [Erzsebet] and her husband, but they didn't select the neighbor girl for example. They didn't deport those either who had small children, even if they were of this age. They lined up those who fit into this category on the 29th in the afternoon, escorted them to the coffee factory near the railway station, and the train came. But we didn't know that at the front of the train there were a lot of cars full with the people from the coffee factory, nobody told us. They put about 80 of us on the train. Then they filled that long train with who knows how many Jews from Nagykanizsa, Csaktornya and Murakoz, relatively not old men and women. I got into the same car with my mother, my Aunt Bozsi, her husband, and quite a few of my schoolmates. I had never seen the policemen who put us on the car before, I only found it out about 10 years ago that they were from Szombathely.

And on the 29th the train set off, but nobody told us where we were going. But since it was the first train, everyone was optimistic, nobody thought that there might be a problem. Everyone had brought food from home, and we didn't eat all what we could hold in two days, so we took that on the train, too. But there was a problem with the toilet. We designated a bucket to pee in it, and when someone had to pooh, then we relieved ourselves in coffee boxes and different food boxes and other empty boxes. When the train stopped somewhere the Germans let everyone get off the train to go to pooh, but they pointed the machine guns to our bottom. My Aunt Bozsi composed a song about this on the tune of the 'I live in the brick factory', which went like this: 'We live in the cars, reserve our dirt, if we leave the station, we throw out our dirt'. She didn't lose her humor, and they just had their first wedding anniversary at that time, on the 1st May with Jenő Eisinger, whom she had snaffled from his first wife. The 'En a teglagyarban lakom' was a forced laborer's song, which my father and the other members of the family who had been on forced labor brought home. There were very many musicians on forced labor, for example the leader of a band called Filu, this was a widely known jazz band in Budapest before the war, Fulop Schenkelback was there with my father and I still have the music of the song which he wrote for my father there, and he never played it nowhere.

Those who slept in the car were in a baby position, and those who didn't sleep were sitting. On the floor of the car, of course. And since everyone knew each other, many of my classmates were there, there was no conflict among us. Everyone was optimistic, and we just hung out together. Maybe I was even sorry that the neighbor girl didn't come with us. On the 2nd May we arrived to a huge plane territory. Before the train stopped we could see through the holes that people in striped clothes were disassembling the wrecks of airplanes, but we had no idea that we would ever have to do anything with that. Then they opened the cars and gentlemen in striped clothes started shouting, that everyone should leave everything in the cars, the women should leave their purses, too, and immediately get off the train. And they got on the train to make us hurry. One of them asked me in Yiddish how old I was. I understood this, because it is very similar to German. I said 15, then he told me: 'say that you're 17'. I didn't know Yiddish, but fortunately I understood this. Then they got us off the train, and we had to line up five by five. I held my mother's hand from one side,

my aunt's hand from the other, and on that side was my aunt's husband, and someone else, but I don't remember who anymore. I know that we went in rows of five. We walked along nice and slowly. They didn't really make us hurry, but there were wolf-dogs, SS, so it was a threatening situation, but nobody said a loud word. They didn't yell, didn't threaten us. And then we arrived in front of an elegant German officer.

As it turned out later, that was Mengele. Interestingly he was very polite with us. He told my mother very politely: „*Gnädige Frau, können Sie laufen?*“ [German: *Dear lady, can you run?*]. My mother didn't understand a word in German, I used to pull her leg by saying that if Hungarian language didn't exist, she would have to bark like puppies. And of course she didn't understand the question. She told me: 'What is he saying, what is he saying, what did he ask?' I translated it to her that he asked where he should run. Then he said that we had to part temporarily. 'Ladies please step to the left, men please to the right.' They separated us, and I never saw my mother and my grandmother again until they came back from the deportation. I went with my aunt's husband, with that certain stationer Eisinger, and they assigned us both to work. As I later found out, they assigned my mother and her sister to work, too.

We were in Birkenau. Birkenau was huge, 2 square kilometers. Next to the camp there was a huge factory of the IG Farben in the process. [Editor's note: The IG Farbenindustrie-concern. They built the Buna-Werke Synthetic Tire and Petrol Factory near Auschwitz, where many prisoners worked.] They only assigned a third of the approximately 4000 people who arrived with the train I also came with to work, they gassed the rest immediately. Which was an 'excellent rate', so to speak, because later there were transports 100 percent of which were gassed. There wasn't enough room in the Lager [German for camp], and they gassed them. Usually only 4-5 percent went to work, and the 95-96 percent went to the gas chambers immediately. But our company seemed suitable for work. And they put us, 400 or 450 of us, I don't remember exactly, on trucks, and took us to the camp, which was 5 kilometers away and belonged to the IG. They called the main road in the middle of the Lager Lager Strasse [German for Camp Street], and lined us up there five by five, and we took off to the other end of the camp across the gate, where the disinfecting room was.

As we were walking there the old prisoners shouted us to throw them everything we had in our pocket, because they were going to take them from us anyway. We didn't do it, we had no idea whether they would take it or not. We didn't know what to think. But I didn't have anything valuable on me. And when we got there they took off everyone's clothes. I was wearing a winter coat and a nice pair of ski boots, even though I never knew how to ski. I was dressed properly, not elegantly, but the way the farmers from Zala dress: with boots, trousers and a sleeve-waistcoat. I had a pair of mittens, but the point is that they took everything, shirt, underwear, socks. I still had the Bocskai hat on my head, and they wanted to take it by force, aggressively. And I opposed it that they shouldn't take it because it was my school cap and it wouldn't hurt anyone if I had it. I realized it afterwards why I was so attached to it. Because that gave me the identity, that I belonged to that school, to Nagykanizsa, and to Hungary after all. But then they took it by force. And then they said 'every Jew was made of a piece of shit', and then I started bawling. I realized then that I wasn't Hungarian after all, even though I felt so, I thought so. Then I realized that the way I lived and thought wasn't real, and that I had to face that I belonged to another ethnic group. My original environment didn't love me, they handed me over to the Germans who stripped me of my clothes, cut my hair bald, they even cut off me what was barely there, because at the age of 15

there wasn't much to cut. I didn't even shave at that time.

They took us to a shower, where there was water for about 2 and a half seconds, everyone had to wash quickly. They gave us soap with the inscription R.I.F. I found it out later that it meant *Reine Jüdische Fett*. [Pure Jewish Fat] It was made out of pure Jewish fat, so it was cooked out of humans. [Editor's note: According to our present information soap made of human fat is a legend based on misinterpretation. In the Polish ghettos the German occupiers distributed bars of soap with the inscription 'RIF'. The Jews in the ghetto interpreted it as 'Rein jüdisches Fett', namely 'pure Jewish fat', and that's how the belief that the Germans made soap out of Jewish bodies spread. In reality RIF means 'Reichsstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung'.]. Then cold water for a couple moments, then running across the free ground, to the supplier barrack, where they gave us each a pair of underwear, shirt, as it came. With striped pants and striped jacket. Nothing else. We didn't get any shoes. But they did take ours. They lined up everyone, 400 of us stood there barefooted. The SS came and asked 'where are your shoes?' It turned out that they had forgotten to order wooden shoes for this many people, they had only ordered the clothes. He beat up the prisoner who was responsible for this in front of us, and then he said that everyone should put on his own shoes. My former schoolmate, a certain Gyuri Nandor took my ski boots under my nose. I was very angry because of this, but I got a pair of little bit smaller, but brand new boots. There were all kinds of shoes, good ones, bad ones, boots and high legged shoes and normals shoes, and everyone took whatever he could lay hands on. I hung on to the boots, and the leather shoes were life saving, because the wooden shoe was something cruel. Those whose leather shoes wore out got wooden shoes, and very few of them survived.

In the bath we got a tattoo, too. The prisoners tattooed us, the old prisoners. By the time we got the striped clothes we were already tattooed. I got number 186889. So I don't have an A-B number, because after the 15th May they recorded every Jew with A or B. They started with one and numbered until 20000. And when there were 20000 A-s, they started the B-s until 20000 as well. But they didn't get to 20000, because in the meantime January came, and they evacuated us. I got very exasperated that I am not a cow after all, to get marked, but the one who tattooed me told me that I shouldn't regret this, because it was almost a life insurance. Those who weren't tattooed got to the gas chamber more often than those who were tattooed. Because that meant that they worked somewhere.

We lined up again, and they took us to the quarantine block, which was block number 44. There were 56 blocks, and the auxiliary buildings, the showers and toilet. In block 44 there wasn't any bathroom or toilet. During the two weeks of quarantine they didn't do anything but taught us how to line up for the roll-call. And they also taught us that if we saw a German we had to take off our cap five steps before meeting him, and after five steps we had to walk past him in stand-to, however faint we felt. And that at the counting there was line-up, and that lasted for a long time, because there were about 10000 people, and until they had counted all of them, none of the blocks could move. Everyone had to stand. They were obsessed with continual roll-call. And with the way we had to eat the food. The instructor, the block ältester [Editor's note: German for block elder, the prisoner in charge of the block/barrack/] happened to be a German criminal, on his clothes there was a green triangle pointing down, which was usually the mark of the criminals. In our block he had such power, that he almost had the power of life and death over us. His and all block commanders' superior was the Lager ältester [German for camp elder] -, who was also a German

criminal, and always wore nice polished boots.

There weren't any knives, there wasn't any cutlery. They told us that everyone was supposed to get a quarter of a loaf of bread every day, half a loaf, which was oblong, twice a week. They made it out of sawdust, bran, and who knows what. It was terrible, but when someone was hungry, it was good. They also said that we would only get the 'zulag', the additional food, if we worked. This meant a spoonful of 'hitlerbacon', that is, marmalade. If not marmalade, then black pudding, and if not black pudding, then margarine. The margarine, and everything else was the size of a cube sugar. They gave these out in the morning, one ate it or not. That was everyone's own business. They gave half a liter of coffee, made of caffeine substitute of course, and I think it was full with bromide. [Editor's note: There is no factual evidence of administering sedatives (bromide), though many from different places affirmed that the prisoners were given bromide. But it is probable that bromide wasn't even needed: the small amount of food, the beating, the cold or the heat, the little sleep and the terrible work exhausted the prisoners very quickly and bore down their resistance.] Nobody felt any lust, so to speak. And they strictly forbid drinking water. We were allowed to wash, but not to drink. It was placarded on huge placards that a 'sip of water could cost your life'.

They made all the Hungarian Jews who arrived to Auschwitz write a letter, a preprinted German postcard. It was written on it 'I am in Waldsee - this was resort in Switzerland - I am fine, greetings to everyone', and we could sign it, address it, and send it home. [Editor's note: They required of the deported Jews, many of whom the gassed immediately, to write home that they were doing well, indicating a place-name, Waldsee, made up by them.] Those who were in the gas chamber 5 minutes later also wrote it. But they gave one to everyone so that we would let people know that we were alive. In the Lager [German for camp] where I was they also distributed the Waldsee cards, and I wrote one to one of my neighbors who lived in Nagykanizsa, next to our bakery. And my mother also wrote from where she was, from the women's camp. At that time they had taken her with her commando to the StammLager, she went to work from there. [Editor's note: StammLager: Auschwitz I, because the Hungarian deportees didn't arrive to Auschwitz but to Birkenau.] And the neighbors got these cards. They knew my father's address on forced labor, and they sent him both versions in an envelope. Unfortunately I don't have either one of them, because at that time nobody thought about keeping them. They would be historical relics now. And my father wrote a reply addressed to Waldsee, because when the neighbors got the cards they were told that if someone wanted to reply should write in German, put it in an envelope and send it to the address of the Budapest Jewish community. Because these cards were brought to Hungary with a German military van to the Jewish leaders appointed by the Germans, and they had to send them out. And they sent them out and collected the replies, which arrived. When the German car brought cards again, grabbed the replies, put them in the car and took them. And in the Auschwitz stammlager they brought out these letters one day at roll-call and distributed them after the list. My mother got the reply. I don't know of anyone else besides her who got a reply. Because most of them had been killed by that time. In the letter it was written that everything was alright etc, and my father wrote in German that Feri had also written. From this my mother found out that I was alive somewhere, she didn't know where, but that I was alive. She knew this already sometime at the end of June, beginning of July.

But from the end of August I also knew that my mother was there somewhere, because even though it was strictly forbidden to send word from one camp to the other, and they sentenced to

death and hung those who did it, I also saw a lot of hangings, news still spread. They took the women prisoners from Auschwitz to work somewhere by truck in the morning, and brought them back in the evening, and that was to the east from our camp, too. So the women knew that there was a men's camp. And the route on which we went to work crossed the Krakow-Auschwitz main road. A brave woman dropped a paper ball at the crossroad, and an even braver man bent down and picked it up. And he took the paper to the Lager and it went round. It was written in Hungarian, and among many other names it was written, I recognized my aunt's handwriting, that Erzsebet Eisinger and Terez Leicht were looking for Jenő Eisinger and Ferenc Leicht. We knew out of this that they lived, otherwise any other news. But the fact that someone lived in August didn't mean anything among those circumstances.

When they assigned me to work they transferred me to barrack 30, the ones who lived there worked in commando no. 90, in a group of workers. They assigned many young men there, because they thought that it was easy to make skilled laborers, or at least trained men out of the young students. They called us „*umschüler*“, that is, on retraining. I happened to become a locksmith, so I got to locksmith re-training, which practically meant a huge closed workshop, and there everyone worked. German civilians, English and American airmen prisoners of war, Polish volunteers, French volunteers and civilians, who had been brought there by force. It's difficult to imagine the chaos that was there. But during work everyone was equal. They assigned me next to a German lather, who called me Franz. I don't remember anymore what his name was, Herr something, but he never hurt me, I never had any problems with him. Even when the toe-cap and the heels of my boots started to wear out, he showed me where I could find an iron plate, and taught me how to use the drill, and let me make iron toe-caps on my heels, and he even got hold of some nails, so that I could nail it up on the toe-cap, too, so that my shoes wouldn't wear out. I couldn't have learned lathing, because I am left-handed, and the lathes were all right-handed. He told me to bring this material, he gave me a caliper square, bring this many and this kind of poles, take them here and here. So I was a kind of do this and do that man. And I was assigned to this man. There were 500 men in the commando, who worked in different buildings on the territory of the factory, they were building the factory of the IG Farben. The IG Farben was building an extremely big chemical factory. And all the 10000 people worked there. [Editor's note: The IG Farben didn't only operate one factory, it's possible that this one was built by 500. In the biggest IG Farben factory, in Monowitz (Auschwitz III) about 10000 people worked in January 1945.]

And I worked in this workshop with a couple of my acquaintances, friends, in commando no. 90. Commando no. 90 had an obercapo, who was a German criminal, and if someone asks me whether the German criminals were good or bad people, I can say it depends. Once the master didn't give me anything to do, and so to speak I was slacking about. And he sneaked to my back, and beat me up with a thatch. He knew me by name, and said 'Franz, you know why you got this, don't you?' I said 'I know, because I wasn't working' He said 'No, not because of that. But because you weren't working, and you didn't notice that I was coming. What would have happened if an SS had come instead of me, what would have happened to you, what do you think?' And otherwise he could have beaten me with an oaken cane, because he had one of that, too. He could have broken my arms and legs, because we were completely defenseless. But he told me this. What was I supposed to say?

If someone did a good job in principle, but in reality was friends with the capos [Editor's note: Capo - concentration camp inmate appointed by the SS to be in charge of a work gang.], got voucher to the Lager mess, where one could buy cigarettes, Majorca tobacco, pickled cabbage - which was vitamin - and mustard, nothing else perhaps. Out of the 500 people in commando no. 90 nobody ever got a voucher like this, but the obercapo kept all the „*premier-schein*“ for himself, then he bought cigarette in the mess of the Lager and exchanged it with the English prisoners of war, who didn't have enough cigarettes, for the soup that they got at noon. We also got soup, it was called 'buna' soup, turnip-tops, nettles cooked in water, it was warm, and very bad, it was tasteless, but we ate it with our leftover bread. And after a while we didn't get 'buna' soup, because the capo regularly exchanged the cigarette with the prisoners of war for the much thicker and better soup which they got, so we got that so called „*engländer suppe*“, namely the English soup. And this capo was a German criminal. Who, when the SS saw him, he beat barbarously everyone he could reach, and at the same time he didn't distribute the vouchers, though he could have done it, but exchanged it for soup for us. Otherwise they handled the prisoners of war much better than us. There were Americans, English, Australian, New Zealander, South African, whose airplanes were shot. They were in a POW camp 2 kilometers away, and they worked at the same place we did, only their food and the way they handled them was different.

So at noon we got that soup, and in the evening when we went back to the camp we got the so called „*abend suppe*“ [German for evening soup], which was perhaps a little bit better, because sometimes there was some potato in it, too, which was a luxury otherwise. And this was the food. They calculated, that this was enough for about 4 months, if someone worked regularly, but after 4 months he became skin and bones. The Germans called those who became skinny Muslims. And occasionally there was selection. This meant that we had to march next to a strong lamp, naked, past the SS Lager head physician, who was called doctor König. Fortunately Mengele wasn't a Lagerarzt [German for camp doctor] at our camp. They drove the men to one end of the barrack, we had to take off our clothes, and march past the Lagerarzt naked and tell him our number. He had a list, we were registered by our number tattooed on our arm, and he ticked off how many we were. Jenö Eisinger, my aunt's husband was quite in a bad shape already, and it was to be feared that they would select him. He hid under a bed and I went past the Lagerarzt and told his number, which was different from mine with 50 or 60. Then naked, as I was, I jumped out the window of the barrack, I ran back on my hunkers, climbed back in, and marched past again and told them my own number. Otherwise it was typical, that the barrack commander knew this, but he didn't mind. Many protected their own father this way. While I was in that barrack I got my aunt's husband through the selection twice this way. He was also in commando no. 90, but he was a pipeman. The steam pipes, water pipes ran in the open air on huge stands, these were serious, thick pipes with big diameter, and they were very heavy. This was a very difficult job, and those who did this became Muslims very quickly.

At dawn, when it was still dark, there was a bell, with which they woke everyone up, and the first thing was to make the beds. Everyone got the top, middle or lower story of a three story bunk-bed. There were about 240 people in a barrack. I think there were about 80 bunk-beds. And there was a straw mattress, a pillow filled with straw and a blanket for every bed. It rarely happened that there were so many people in the barrack that we had to sleep double, usually everyone had his own bed. This was a labor camp in fact, and compared to the conditions in Auschwitz it was good. The IG Farben had a huge thermal station, and the Lager got its used water for heating. Every barrack

had central heating, which was very good in the winter, but unfortunately the bedbugs liked it very much, too, and the barracks were extremely buggy summer and winter. When we were ready with making the beds, then shoe polishing was next. Because of enigmatical reasons the wooden shoes and the other shoes, too, had to be smeared with cart-grease. And there were 3 or 4 boxes of cart-grease, everyone snatched them away from each other, of course there weren't any handkerchiefs or rags. Some smeared it with the bottom of their shirt, I smeared it with my hat. With the side of the hat. The hat was a quite useful thing, because one could use it for everything. There wasn't any toilet paper either, and people tore off a little bit from the bottom of their shirt, then threw it away. By time the long shirt became very short.

Next to our barrack, separated with a wire fence, there was the brothel of the Germans. There they took Aryan Polish and Czech political prisoner women, pretty and young ones, and forced them into prostitution. They didn't get anything for this, only food. But they got enough of that. And the popular capos and the SS, and some prominent prisoners, strictly Germans, could go to them. Well, in different novels it was written that they forced the Jewish girls into prostitution. Not a word of this was true in Auschwitz, because as it was forbidden for a Jewish man to mess about with a goy woman, just like in Hungary, it was the same the other way around, too. The Germans weren't allowed to mess about with Jewish women. Because they considered the Jews as if someone would have had intercourse with an animal. Simply they didn't consider the Jews human. And the German, who had intercourse with a pretty Jewish girl by accident, it happened in Birkenau, I found it out afterwards, a German sergeant started an affair with a Jewish girl, they hung the Jewish girl, and they shot the German. And that was it. So they didn't consider a woman even the most beautiful Jewish girl.

Otherwise the Germans had a sense of humor. I found out from my mother later, that when they separated the women and assigned them to work, they said that 400 young, possibly pretty girls should step forward, but only those who were virgin. Everyone was scared to death that they were going to be taken to the brothel. Of course, because there wasn't any information. The humor of the Germans: they took them to Gleiwitz, to the soot factory, to one of the most difficult physical work. They took there expressly pretty, young, virgin girls. And in our camp, when we had been already there for several months, they once said that those who had gardener training should step forward. The son of our rabbi, the rabbi from Nagykanizsa, whom I will never forget that he taught us so that we wouldn't know that we were Jewish and different from the majority, who was one year older than me and worked at a horticulture every summer, stepped forward saying that he was a gardener. He wanted to work outdoors, to be a gardener, about 30 of them stepped forward and they took them to the coal-mine in Jaworzno. [Editor's note: Jaworzno - town 20-30 kilometers south-east from Katowice [today Poland], according to the memories of a former concentration camp inmate they mined the coal with bare hands. (Simon Rozenkier: Let Courts Give Closure To Holocaust Victims, in „Forward”, 12 December 2003)]. This was the German humor. And the rabbi's son died, the poor thing, he didn't come back.

In the Lager there was no typhus, not even petechial typhus, because there was delousing every week. And generally, they didn't bring in epidemics. They did bring in scabies, but there wasn't any among us. There was bathing monthly, but every morning we had to wash with cold water down to our waist. One couldn't exist without that, because it was obligatory. So the scabies spread, and a disease called ukrainska, because that also came from the Ukrainians. That was like a choleric

diarrhea. A diarrhea which came out of one just like water or coffee. One couldn't hold it back, everyone crapped himself, I did too, when I got it. Simply there wasn't enough time not only to go to the toilet, but to take off one's trousers. Everything came out of us. One could get dehydrated because of this, it was very dangerous, but the old prisoners told us that there was one way to get better, otherwise most people died of it, namely to not eat and drink at all for 24 hours. A complete Yom Kippur.

The Germans were very afraid of the petechial typhus. Every Saturday afternoon there was lice control, and they gave us new shirts and underwear. One couldn't get some wonderful shirt or underwear. Some old ones, it wasn't always clean, but it had been disinfected. They brought them from the disinfecting room, the smell of the chlorine could be still felt on them, and we could rip them off safely, because after a while we got another one. Otherwise we learned it from the old prisoners, that that was the way to solve it. There wasn't any toilet paper and handkerchief. The handkerchief was the inside of my cap, and the external part was my shoe polisher.

After cleaning our shoes we got breakfast. We had to go to the *block-stube*, or to the *tagesraum* - that's what they called the 3 by 8 meter small room which was separated in the front of the barrack, where the barrack commander and the *Stubedienst* [Editor's note: inmate responsible for the order of the block.], namely the room servants lived, and there the room servants stood on two sides: one gave me a piece of bread, the other one put that small thing on it, a third one poured half a liter of coffee into my mess-tin. Which was otherwise sweet, warm and bad, but we weren't allowed to drink water. We drank coffee, and the next time soup. When everyone got his food then there was roll-call right away, because before marching out they counted everyone in front of the barrack. And at the gate again. When they counted us, we had to stand there with smeared shoes, and eaten breakfast. Those who couldn't eat their food, it was their problem, or they had to put it away. There was no pocket on our clothes, was there? One had to position it so that it wouldn't fall. We either ate the marmalade, or cut the bread and put the marmalade between the two pieces and held the bread with our shirt, we pressed it with the sleeve of our jacket. We lined up in front of the barrack, and the capo counted and checked who was missing. It was forbidden to stay in the barrack, because they beat up those who did, but if someone was ill or had some problem could go to the doctor. The only person who was a doctor at the hospital officially was doctor König [Edmund König], he was an SS doctor, he didn't stay there. But the ex-director of the medical clinic in Vienna, doctor Vass from Kolozsvár [today Romania], the director of the dental clinic were there as prisoners, the most excellent doctors were there under the pretext of being hospital attendants, who could treat us the way they could, and with what they had. There was no penicillin yet at that time. Those who had some kind of disease got Ultraseptil, and they either got better, or they didn't. And for example in case of injury there were four kinds of unguents. Boric Vaseline, zinc Vaseline and that black ointment which smelled like tar, called Ichtiol, and there was a brown one, which smelled a little bit like chocolate called Pellidol. At the hospital there wasn't selection once a month, but once a week. And if someone spent 2 weeks at the hospital, in whatever shape he was, even if he would have gotten better the next day, was gassed.

After they counted us, as many as we were out of the 500, with the exception of the sick ones, we set off, walking in step, in rows of five, because the SS counted us again at the gate. And so that we would walk in step, there was a band, a brass band, I think with 8 or 10 musicians, who happened to be gypsies, and the band was called Music Capo. They played the best light opera

tunes, and there was a small stand inside the gate, and they stood there and played until everyone marched out, and they always marched out the last, and marched in the first. They worked just like everyone else, but they were careful so that their fingers wouldn't get hurt. There was a trumpet player, a cymbalist, a small drummer, a big drummer, but it was a brass band and it functioned. On the way the vorarbeiters, that is, the foremen, who were the alternates of the capos, kept running next to us and in front of us and they kept shouting 'in straight lines'. This meant that we had to align ourselves with the one in front of us, because they could only count the people easily by fives. Because the Lager was on the other side of the road in comparison to the factory, they simply blocked the Krakow-Auschwitz main road with a chain of guards while we marched in and out. The chain of guards was made of two rows of guards with a rifle or a submachine-gun, and dogs, they stood there about 100 meters long, at 5 meters from each other. At noon we got a half an hour lunch break, I think, perhaps at 1, I don't remember anymore. And we worked until dusk. The workday wasn't determined in hours, but it depended on the daylight. Because by the time it got dark, even the last person had to be in the camp. So in the winter the workday was shorter than in the summer. And we set off later, because in the dark, until day-break none of the prisoners was allowed to leave the Lager. And when we marched it, we marched the same way, with music.

In the Lager we talked very much about food at first. About what we were going to eat at home. Then we got out of this habit. The truth is, that after I had had a good cry when they took my cap, and after I had experienced what my life in the camp was like, from then on I focused on starving the least possible, on not being very cold and to be beaten rarely. It didn't matter to me anymore whether I would be liberated or would die, what happened to my family. Because, how should I put it, one couldn't do anything with these thoughts. And I feel ashamed forever, and I will never forgive the Germans for this, that during these 2 months they made me accept it as an order. I mean that if I would have tried and survived for a couple years, then I would have become a vorarbeiter or a Stubedienst. I imagined a Lager career for myself, and nothing else outside the Lager. Apart from the fact that I could have died any time. How should I say it, that wasn't a topic in itself. Who lives, lives, who has died, died. They selected someone, oh well, they did.

We had loss regularly, and the selection was ordered by the IG monthly, because most of the people, usually 10 percent, was in poor health. And they usually selected 1000 people each month. Those who were selected were gassed, and after that they brought another 1000, so the people shifted about continually. Until the 20th August I was in this so called Werkstatt [German for workshop]. The schedule was so that we worked until noon on Saturdays, and we got the afternoons off, so we were in the Lager. Louse control, cleaning, straw mattress filling, such activities. And among the Sundays there were so called free Sundays, but then we couldn't live social life, but rested in the barrack and were happy that we were alive. On the other Sundays all the Lager had to go to work. Well, the 20th of August was a free Sunday, and the Americans, who had never bombed neither Birkenau, nor the rails, attacked the IG Farben, and they plastered the workshop where I had worked with bombs, nothing remained of it.

I was desperate, I thought I was going to commit suicide, that they would send me somewhere to work, and I said that I would rather run against the wire fence instead of struggling with the cable commando, here and there, outdoors. Because cable-laying was a very difficult work, it was the most difficult. At that time there were only leaden cables, one meter of that weighed 120 kilograms. First that had to be pulled out, unrolled from the drum, and before that the cable trench

had to be dug. When they dug the cable trench the cable commando was happy, because that was an easy job. Because when the cable had to be pulled out, it was inhuman, very few survived it. I knew someone, he was from Nagykanizsa, who survived the cable commando. Everyone admired him. And I knew that I couldn't endure this difficult work only for a couple weeks, and that they would select me for gassing, and I could go to die. Then 3 of my schoolmates from Nagykanizsa grabbed me, they simply sat on me and started to explain me that I shouldn't be stupid, that I would endure and they would, too. Not everyone worked among such conditions as I did. And that I shouldn't fool about but keep quiet. They sat on me during a half night. They saved my life, but unfortunately none of them lives anymore. On the next day they made new commandos, and they assigned me to the warehouse commando. This meant that I had to work in a warehouse. The warehouses were half roofed barn-like buildings, open on the side. And it happened that they found out that I could write and read in German. They assigned me to the gas-cylinder warehouse, to the hydrogen, oxygen, acetylene gas, and all kinds of huge cylinders, and I gave them out, and I kept a record of the number of cylinders each commando took, and as physical labor I loaded, I thought I would shit in my pants, because a cylinder weighed 80 kilograms, and I might have been around 50. And finally one of the workers from there realized that it was stupid to lift them, I only had to tilt them a little bit and roll them. They taught me how to roll a cylinder and how to keep the record, and everything.

Once, when there was lineup for the march back from work, the submachine-gun of one of the mad SS discharged, probably not on purpose. Three bullets went into my right leg, I sat down and said, 'Oh my God' and when we marched in I limped and went straight to the hospital. They treated my leg nicely, smeared it with one of those four ointments, and bandaged it with a bandage like crepe paper. They put gauze and cotton on it, bandaged it in all three places, and sent me back to the barrack, saying that I couldn't stay in the hospital. I said I didn't even want to stay there, because I knew what was what already. I went to work with my injured leg, I limped a little bit, but I still went, and because I didn't really strain myself, because I only had to roll about 25 cylinders there and back each day, and I mostly sat and wrote, it didn't really affect me. But the wound became poisoned and it became swollen. Then they told me that I had to stay in the hospital, otherwise I would have died in 4 days if they had left it so. People died of blood-poisoning. They operated it and I was admitted into the hospital.

From the first time when they robbed me of my identity, so to speak, I didn't try to be in Hungarian company. I mostly made friends with Polish Jews, or Greeks, French and German Jews. And I had a lot of friends among the old ones. I knew one of the Stubedienst at the hospital, we talked a lot, I could say that he was a pal. He might have been twice as old as I was, maybe about 30, 25, he was a very decent German Jew. I told him that this wouldn't get healed in 2 weeks. He told me that we would solve it. And in 2 weeks there was selection. To my biggest surprise I passed, nobody made me step aside. I asked the Stubedienst how this was possible, and he told me to go and ask the clerk. The clerk was a Belgian Jewish boy, about 18-19 years old. And he showed me that I had a brand new record. On the 13th day they threw my record out, and on paper they admitted me to the hospital again. They did this several times, I got injured sometime in the middle of November, and in January I was still at the hospital. But unfortunately I wasn't doing very well, because even though I could walk already, I still had running sores. While I was at the hospital, they selected my Uncle Eisinger unfortunately, they gassed him. There wasn't anyone to go through the selection instead of him. I only found it out later, it was terrible, but I had to accept it, I accepted the German

mentality: poor Eisinger, was nothing but skin and bone, he would have suffered for a certain time, in the end this would have happened to him anyway. I felt sorry for him, I was sad, but at the same time I understood the situation that this had to happen. I will never forgive myself for this. That I accepted this. This is an awful thing. At the age of 15!

In the hospital they changed my bandage every other day, they smeared my leg with unguent, and the swelling went down, only the running sores were on it. When I could already walk the Stubedienst put me to work, to help him. I had to carry bed-slippers and to help the new patients use it. At that time they brought in a lot of non-Jews, but French, who, I don't know why became suspicious, they put them into the Lager and got a red triangle, they became political prisoners. One day the Stubedienst asked me if I wanted to get half a liter soup more daily. Of course I did. One was always hungry, especially because we didn't get the bread zulag. He told me, 'here's a wire brush and some grease, and out there is the chimney for disinfecting'. It was a huge iron chimney, about 10-12 meters high, which was tied with cables, on a concrete ring put into the ground. They screwed it up, and the bolts were rusty. He gave me a wrench so that I would move the bolts, clean them, grease them and twist them repeatedly. This meant that I had to twist 6 bolts a day, and for this I got half a liter of soup, I was very happy about it. It was a very good job, and though I only had a shirt and a pair of trousers at the hospital, they lent me a striped jacket, so I wouldn't freeze outside while I did this work. I did it diligently until the 18th January. I only found it out recently, in 1998, at the first reunion of the former Lager inmates, why I had to do this. I had to do it, because the substitute of the barrack commander and some others planned that they wouldn't let everyone be killed. Because they thought that if the Russians came there, then the Germans would encircle us with machine guns, there were many of us in a small place, and they would have killed us all. And these few people planned that since the 10-12 meter high chimney of the disinfectant stood at 6 meters from the fence protected with current, they wanted to blow it down on the fence and then there would have been a short-circuit, and that would have also torn the fence, and we could have ran away. They made me do this, so that the bolts would have been easy to screw off.

On the 18th January they evacuated the camp and they took those who could walk. But at the time we had heard the Russian cannons for days. I also wanted to leave and I asked for my clothes and shoes. There was a box in the hospital in which there were the clothes recorded by number, and I went there and it was empty. They had taken my clothes and my shoes. I stood there in a shirt and pants, and I said that I wanted to leave. They said, 'no, not with this foot, Franz, you wouldn't get far, on the one hand they would shoot you when you fell, and on the other hand it would get swollen again, and then you couldn't get help at any hospital and you would die.' I was very desperate, because I was sure that they would kill those who remained in the hospital. The Germans didn't let those live who couldn't work. But the Germans left on the 18th January, and they put a fist sized lock on a thick chain on the gate of the Lager. The gates were locked, and there were no guards around. The current was still in the fence, but the watch-towers were empty. On the fence there was a lamp on every other pole, and the wire fence was lighted up from the inside and outside. Those who were in the hospital were left there. 740 people, that's three barracks. And the men of a medical barrack and 2 surgical barracks remained there. Everyone was scared to death. I was, too. What would happen to us, they would surely kill us. They would set the barrack on fire. Or shoot us. This happened in the smaller Lagers. Auschwitz had about 40 ancillary camps, where there were only a couple hundred people, and they set the hospital barrack on fire,

and they shot those who wanted to leave. So everyone died there. We didn't know about this, but we knew the 'local customs', so to speak. The front line was getting closer, they kept shooting. And one day the Kraftwerk, the electric plant in the factory stopped, and the lights went off and the heating stopped.

We were there for 10 days and nights, and we were quite hungry. We weren't thirsty, because there was enough snow. In the meantime the Russians kept bombing the Lager. We were lucky, because even though they set many barracks on fire, they didn't set any of the hospital barracks on fire. And we went to eat on the garbage-heap, which was next to the kitchen, and we ate the garbage, which had been thrown out from the awful evening soup, which they couldn't use for anything in the kitchen. Beat stalks with mud, potato peels, things like these. We appreciated these very much, and ate them quickly, raw, as we found them. Later, when there was no power anymore, we cut up the wire fence at the back because there were some, who knew that the potato pits were there, that they had brought the potatoes to the Lager kitchen from there. On the hole we could go out one by one and bring potatoes. There were some who fell, and froze to the ground. Whenever we went through for potatoes we always had to step over the one who had died there. From then on we could eat potatoes, raw of course, because there wasn't any fire, oven or stove.

The Russians arrived there on the 27th January 1945. First they only went into the factory, I saw the strange uniform, and they kept shooting wild. And by that evening the combatant German formations left the surroundings and they liberated Birkenau and Auschwitz, and the prisoners who survived in the hospital. Then we simply cut up the wire fence, and I, who could walk, and some others helped some of our comrades who spoke Russian go out. They produced an officer from somewhere, whom we called in to see the conditions there. By that time about 200 of the 740 had died of starvation or froze, or died of their illness. About 540-550 of us survived, I don't know exactly. Famished, loafers, skinny, scraggy fellows. The man was completely thunderstruck. He sent a guard for a political officer. The political officer came and he was also astonished. The first thing he did was that he had some film people brought there, who filmed us as we were liberated. I'm sure that these recordings still exist somewhere, not only at the Russians, but I'm sure that they gave copies to Hungary, too.

The Russians gave us 3 bags of mush, a quarter of an ox and 4 bags of saccharin, which I didn't know what it was at first, and that square bread, which was completely dry, and the soldiers got it instead of rusk. The political officer arranged that the inhabitants of the closest town, Monowitz, the men and women were brought there for malenkij robot<sup>9</sup>. They told the men to rub off with snow those who couldn't walk and take them to an empty barrack, where there were straw mattresses, but no blankets, so they covered them with another straw mattress. Those who could walk washed by themselves and everyone moved to a clean barrack. Then the Polish men had to take the bodies and pile them up, so to pile them up in the Lager, which they also recorded. There were 240 bodies, which looked good. They had to women cook soup. The Russians got hold of some mess-kettles, and they cooked beef stock with mesh. Doctor Vass and the other doctor cautioned everyone to eat soup, only a little bit of it, and not eat any meat. And the famished flock dashed at it, and another 250 died in a very short time, because of the sudden eating. This required self-discipline, which I had at that time. I didn't eat any mesh either, I ate 8 spoonfuls of soup, and I kept starving. On the next day I ate 8 spoonfuls of soup with a little mesh, and I starved

on. Otherwise it was winter, and the stock could be kept safely, it didn't go bad, only the ice had to be broken on the top. We kept eating this for several days, and I first tasted the meat after 8-10 days. We were in the camp until the 13th February, and when we ran out of food the Polish women came to cook again, they hated us, but they had to cook.

When the Russians took us to the Auschwitz main camp I could already walk and I wandered the entire camp. I went into the depots, which today in the museum are the hair storage, glasses storage, shoe storage, clothes storage, and such things, with a small part of the stolen things, which hadn't been transported from there. There were a lot more things at that time. One of the first things I did was to change my clothes, because I was in a light striped coat, a shirt and pants. I didn't find any shoes because they had taken my civil shoes, and I found a gum-boot for one leg and a boot for the other. I walked very smoothly in them. But I also found a lot of shirts of good quality, and I put half a dozen of those away.

In the first week of March they told those who could move to go to Katowice [today Poland] with the local train and to have themselves registered according to nationality so that they could be transported home. I went to Katowice with my friend from Ungvar [today Uzhorod, Ukraine], with whom I had been together in the Lager and we had shared everything. He was more to me than a brother. He still lives, I found him after 38 years, and we continued our conversation from where we had left off. In Katowice we found a school yard, and 2 armed guards in front of it, who wore armbands made of Czech flag. He went in, we said goodbye, and I went to look for the Hungarian camp. The several barracks surrounded by wire fence was a former camp, not of the Jews, but of the prisoners of war. A guard was standing in the gate, I registered myself and I saw that they still guarded the people. I was very bored of life behind the wire fence, and I went back to the school where the Czech camp was, I asked my friend out and told him that I wasn't going to go into the Hungarian camp. Then what should we do? On the one hand I said that I was one year younger, because I had heard that they were mobilizing the Czech young people from the age of 16, on the other hand I made up a name for myself telling them that I was from Csap [today Chop, Ukraine], I only spoke Hungarian and I had never learned Czech And besides that Yiddish, of course, because I had gone to Jewish school, but not to Czech school. And the Czechs hated me, but they received me in, if I was from Csap, I was a Czechoslovakian citizen. And I was there in the Czech camp until the 25th March. Then on Annunciation Day [Editor's note: Catholic holiday on the 25th March] my friend, one of his cousins and I took our stuff what we had, and we sneaked out of the camp straight to the railway station. We waited for a train to set off towards the East and we got on a car in the back and lay on top of the coal. By the morning of the 26th March we arrived to Krakow [today Poland]. I had my 16th birthday then. In Krakow there was a market and we sold one of my shirts, I don't even remember what the currency was at that time. I bought plum jam, we had brought bread from the Czech camp, and on the steps of the Krakow railway station I celebrated my 16th birthday with plum jam and bread. At that time hair started to grow on me, a hair then a long break, then another hair, and long break, and then I went and I shaved solemnly. For the first time in my life, on my 16th birthday.

By the time we arrived to Lemberg [today Lvov, Ukraine] the sores on my leg recrudesced. There were already about 50 Jews in Lemberg who had returned. There were 100000 Jews there before, and about 50 returned. They gathered in the synagogue, in an office. We told them who we were, what we were, and that we were trying to get back to Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. They gave us

some food and accommodated us. We slept in the attic of the synagogue on the Torah scrolls, which had been gathered there from everywhere. We became lousy there, in Lemberg. I never had any lice before. But the sores on my feet restarted, so I had running sores and I needed medical care. Then the Jews from there told us that we could go to the Soviet military hospital, where a Jewish doctor was the commandant, and then we were in the hospital for about a week. Then we went to Munkacs [today Mukachevo, Ukraine] by train, there I said good-bye to my friends and the train took me nicely to Miskolc, from where it didn't go any farther. I saw that they made everyone get off the train and lined everyone up. Jesus Mary, what is going to happen? It was delousing. They checked everyone to see who was lousy. I had huge lice, so I stepped among the lousy voluntarily, they disinfected me, sprinkled DDT on me, they put my clothes and shoes in some kind of a steam disinfection, because of which I could hardly put them back on, because they became as hard as stones. I had Soviet boots, which I had got in Lemberg from the commandant of the hospital.

In Miskolc I went to the Jewish community, which already existed. From my arm and the circumstances they could tell who I was. I arrived to Miskolc exactly on the 15th April, where I got a good dinner, but I don't remember anymore what, some good food, and 100 pengoes. With the 100 pengoes I went right back to the railway station, because I had seen earlier that they sold pancakes with poppy seed for 5 pengoes. And I invested the 100 pengoes in 20 pancakes with poppy seed, which I ate after dinner. At that time that didn't make me ill anymore, of course. On the next day I went to Budapest by train. The city was mere debris, it was terrible. The ruins of the bombed buildings were one story high. On the territory of the ghetto, on Akacfa Street 64 or I don't know where, one of my father's sisters, my Aunt Frida lived who didn't have to move, but I wasn't looking for her, because I had no idea whether any Jews had survived in Budapest, but I visited one of my distant Weisz relatives, who had a goy husband.

But before that I had to go to the DEGOB [National Committee for the Treatment of Hungarian Jewish Deportees]<sup>10</sup> for registration. Those told me this, who distributed food at the railway station and asked everyone if they had been prisoners of war, where they had come from and what they had done. I told them that I was Jewish and I had come from Auschwitz. They told me to go to Bethlen Square 2, to the DEGOB and check in. As I found out one had to register there, because the names of those who had returned before me and knew whether anyone had escaped from the family were written on a board there and one could read 'X. Y. lives'. On the other hand they wanted to ask me the names of those whom I knew that survived. At the DEGOB they asked my name, my number, what had happened to me. And I could enumerate 20 or 30 names, the names of those whom I knew in the Lager, some from Nagykanizsa, and some who weren't from Nagykanizsa, about whom I knew that they were survivors. They wrote it on a long list, which they posted in several copies, that: 'X. Y. lives, Ferenc Leicht notified us'. And for example the name of Feri Schnitzer, Etelka's husband was written there, that he was a survivor. He had returned from forced labor or he hadn't, but someone told them that he survived. Those who returned stood in line to register. And if someone rolled up the sleeve of his shirt and there was an Auschwitz number on his arm, they let him in out of turn.

From Bethlen Square I went straight to Visegrad Street 66, to my relative, where everyone lived to my great joy, and they told me that I could have gone a day earlier, because my father had gone home to Nagykanizsa on foot the day before. Before they took my father to Germany as a forced

laborer, drove him to the Tattersal [11](#)- that's what the racetrack from Pest was called. But in the meantime the Russians encircled Budapest, and they couldn't deport them because of this and took them to the ghetto. My father was liberated there, among quite bad conditions. His sister lived there, so he could move there easily. And my relative also told me that my father knew that I was coming, because my name had been posted out on Bethlen Square, because a shoemaker from Nagykanizsa, called Kluger had come home before me from where I was, too. He told them my name, but I didn't notice that I was written there. So my father knew that I had escaped, he waited and waited and waited, and he got bored of it and set off for home. He traveled for 4 days with all kinds of vehicles, he hitchhiked, traveled by horse carriage, and he arrived home to Nagykanizsa on the 18th or 19th April.

My father was last a forced laborer at the Veszprem Railroad Building Company, and he didn't build railway but he baked bread. He escaped relatively well. He couldn't work in a bakery at the Tattersal for the first time, and he didn't work in the ghetto either. Otherwise he was a ghetto policeman [see Budapest ghetto][12](#), who patrolled during the night so that they wouldn't wander about, he watched the order in the ghetto, more or less, so that the Jews wouldn't take others' things, and if someone got ill or fell to the ground, he picked them up so that they wouldn't freeze. He was in the ghetto from the 25th December until the 18th January. During that time he lived with his sister Frida, whose husband was also a forced laborer, he died. And her son, Miklos, who is my only cousin from the paternal side who survived, also lived there. None from the maternal side survived. Then my father moved to our Christian relative on Visegrad Street, to whom I also went. So he was among relatively human conditions, because the forced laborer bakers didn't only bake for the forced laborer units, but for the Hungarian army, too. They baked enormous amounts of bread, night and day in shifts, and they mobilized all the bakers. The butchers, too. And because of this he never starved of course, to his luck. Except in the ghetto, where he didn't have to bake anything anymore, he just tried to endure.

From my relative I would have also gone to [Nagy]Kanizsa, but I didn't start off without knowing what I would find there. Because I was afraid, and my foot wasn't that perfect either. It took several years until it healed completely. I said that I would wait until there was some train. At that time there weren't trains yet, because the Germans had taken up the rails, they had bombed them, all kinds of things had happened. On the 27th April I found out that a test train was going to go to Nagykanizsa. This meant that the engine pushed a truck in front of it, and two cattle cars were hooked on at its back, and this was the Nagykanizsa test train. I got on after some arguments, because they didn't want to let me on it without a ticket. And my uncle, Feri Schnitzer, about whom I had already known that he lived, was on the same train. We were happy to meet and we went home together. I arrived back on the 29th April 1945, exactly one year after I had been deported.

## After the war

I went to our apartment, where the bakery used to be, and it turned out that it wasn't possible to go in because the Soviet soldiers had moved into the apartment, they used it as storage, because they weren't interested in the apartment but the bakery where they baked bread for themselves. They made square bread in tin pans, which stunk so bad that I almost fainted, because as it turned out they put waste oil on it so that it wouldn't burn. They didn't let us in, and for a couple more months, until the unit, which was stationed there left, we couldn't go neither into the house nor into the bakery. My father lived at the neighbor's, they received me in, too, and I moved there. The

neighbor woman who lived across from our house came crying, she was happy to see us, she loved us. She asked me if I wanted her to cook chicken for me. I said ' Aunt Kati, I would like some noodles with peach jam.' I craved for something sweet. Then she made noodles out of half a kilogram of flour, she boiled them and gave them to me with some peach jam. I ate them all in a minute. She cooked for us, and my father and I lived at the other neighbor's. One of the apprentices ran the bakery, a Christian baker called Szabo, who said when my father arrived that as soon as the Russians left he would give everything back to us. Nothing was missing from the bakery, because they started to use it immediately, and the Russians didn't take anything either, but the apartment was emptied from wall-to-wall, even by the nice Hungarian neighbors. Nothing was left there, nothing at all. When the Russians left at the beginning of the fall Szabo let my father back. Until then we lived off Joint aid. The Joint gave us money or something, and we gave that to the neighbors who cooked for us. Though I could cook, they didn't let me close to the stove. Because they thought it wasn't appropriate for a 16-year-old boy to cook, when the housewife was there.

In the meantime one of my father's sisters, Juliska arrived, who had been deported. Juliska was in the group of 70 women from Nagykanizsa, who had been assigned to a group of 400 women and first they were taken to Gelsenkirchen [today Austria] to work, and when Gelsenkirchen was bombed they were taken to Sommerda. [Editor's note: Both Gelsenkirchen and Sömmerda were auxiliary camps of Buchenwald. In Gelsenkirchen they made the prisoners work at the Gelsenberg Benzin AG, in Sömmerda at the Rheinmetall-Borsig AG.]. And their lagerführer [German for camp director], their commandant took care about them so well that during deportation only 2 of the 400 women died: one during and air-raid because of some shrapnel, and the other one of some illness. 398 of them returned, among them my aunt Juliska and many of my young friends from school, and all 70 women from Nagykanizsa returned. Their SS commander was granted later the Yad Vashem decoration in Jerusalem because of this. So when Juliska came back, she moved back to her own apartment next to the small synagogue where we had been in the ghetto. Juliska already knew at that time that her husband and two children had died. She wasn't happy. Then we thanked the neighbors for their help and moved to Juliska's with my father, because she had her own apartment where there weren't any Russians or anyone else. In the apartment of my uncle, Feri Schnitzer, I don't know, I think there might have been some Russians there, too, so we could only move to Juliska's. From then on my aunt, Juliska cooked for us, and then already the 4 of us got the Joint money, and we could run the household out of that easily. And Juliska, I will never forget, cooked plum dumplings, not too big ones, but real plum dumplings, many of them. Then my father and I competed. He ate 28 plum dumplings at once, I ate 34. You can imagine how hungry I was, I was a teenager, and I was famished, after 1 year of starvation. It's terrible how much I could eat, everyone thought that I was going to die because of that.

When the Russians left we could move back to our apartment. At that time they stored up the furniture which had been taken from the Jewish apartments in the synagogue. If a Jew came home he could search for his own furniture if he found it. We didn't find any of our own, but we found the table, two armchairs and wardrobe of my oldest aunt, Vilma, which I still have. And we found one of the wardrobes of my aunt Ilona. We recognized it at once, because I used to go to their place for about 10 or more years. The Government Office for Abandoned Properties gave us the furniture for a receipt, and allocated us 2 couches and a cupboard. There were thousands of pieces of furniture which had no owner, because out of the 3000 Jewish deportees 65 came home to Nagykanizsa.

There was enough to choose from. My father and I furnished the apartment somehow, and right after that my father's brother-in-law, Feri Schnitzer moved to our place. He was a jeweler and goldsmith, and someone else worked in his workshop. Feri Schnitzer walked into his workshop and told the person in question to be so kind to leave the room. 'Why, he said, do you want to get it back?' Feri said 'no', and he broke up the bottom of the kiln and took out 15 gold bars, each of which weighed 70-80 decagrams. And he carried these away without the other man knowing about it, he just only saw that the bottom of the kiln had been broken up. At that time, while the Russians were there it was dangerous to exchange gold, especially to keep gold. So we carefully buried them where we lived, somewhere close to the pigsty. I have no idea what happened with them later. Otherwise when we left, before the Germans came in, my uncle Eisinger and my parents buried their rings somewhere under the pigsty, about 5 rings, a necklace and a golden watch, which was my uncle Eisinger's. But they didn't find it, and then we dug it out. It was right under the pigsty. They had dug up everything, except the pigsty. In our pigsty the pigs weren't on the ground, but we made a span-high platform. And they hedged that in, they put the wall on it, and the pigs didn't stand on the ground, but on that board stand, so that they wouldn't freeze. And my father and I took out the jewelry, most of which was my aunt Bozsi's [Erzsebet] from under the sty, Eisinger's watch was all rusty, only the golden case remained, and we waited for my mother because we had heard news that she survived. At least that she had been liberated in Bergen-Belsen.

Sometime at the end of September the relatives from Budapest phoned and said that my father should go after my mother, because she was there, but she couldn't come home. My father went to Budapest, there was normal train traffic, and with my mother and my aunt Bozsi [Erzsebet], who also survived, they came home to Nagykanizsa somehow. Aunt Bozsi was lucky, because she lived in a house with a garden in a nice neighborhood, they didn't rob her apartment, and she could simply move in. Everything she had was untouched, because some boss moved there, and when the Russians came he ran away. Then her house was sealed, so all the furniture, her underwear, her sheets, everything she needed was there in the apartment. But she didn't have a husband, unfortunately, I knew that he had died. I told her that while we were together I tried to save him from the selection, but when I got to the hospital I couldn't do it anymore. She cried on my shoulders.

My 80 kilogram mother weighed 35 kilograms when she came home. Because she had almost died of petechial typhus. They could hardly heal her from the petechial typhus, she could hardly walk. Aunt Bozsi and her first worked in Birkenau, but all her sisters and their children were gassed immediately. The Krupp had a subsidiary company near Auschwitz. Everyone who worked there wore a badge. My mother brought her badge home, but unfortunately it got lost. They made the outer shell of the bullets, not the igniter, but the shell. And they worked there until the 18th January, until Auschwitz was evacuated. But while I was still there I had no idea about this. All of my mother's other sisters were deported to Birkenau, none of them came home, they were gassed at once with their children, even my nephew, who was taller than me. Out of the sisters only my mother and her sister Bozsi survived. They were together throughout, they were liberated together and they also came home together. Only my father found her wife, the others didn't. We were the only family in Dunantul which survived all this with no loss.

At that time there was a Public Supply Government Office, and the local government official designated the bakeries which were able to work, where there were enough people and there was equipment, too, and he allocated us flour and wood. And we got all this for free, because we could prove how much wood and how many truckloads of flour they had taken in 1944. My father had to find a new apprentice, because the old one died in Auschwitz unfortunately. He was in the same Lager with me. We needed a domestic servant, too, so they recruited the personnel, but first they employed cleaning ladies, who washed everything off, because the Russians were nice people, but cleanliness wasn't their virtue, and they started to bake sometime in the middle of October. From then on the bakery prospered, because we had our customers.

Otherwise this period was, and it lasted for another half a year at least, when the Russians looted everywhere. And besides this, they violated the girls, the women. If they caught a woman, an entire platoon violated her, the poor thing almost died of it. We were also afraid that they would rob us, and on the other hand my mother also lived there, she was under 40 at that time, whatever poor health she was in, the Russians didn't care about anything. I think my father brought my mother to Pest, I remember very vaguely why my mother wasn't at home, but my Aunt Bozsi, a 26 year old pretty woman came to sleep in my parents' bedroom, which was an inner room, and I slept in the outer room. We had to arrange, so that the Russians wouldn't come to our house, and we decided to get hold of a Russian officer, who would keep the others away. After some inquiries we found a first lieutenant, he was a big man full with decorations, and as it turned out, he was Jewish. He was called Vlagyimir Korecki. And he was Ukrainian, 22 years old. I was already 16 at that time. We fooled around with him a lot. My parents asked him why a serious Soviet first lieutenant, who was a serious man, fooled around with a teenager. He didn't speak Hungarian, but we could understand each other in Yiddish, which I had learned quite well during the year spent in Auschwitz. We understood each other well, and he said: ' Listen up! When I was of the same age with your son I marched in. So I have been fighting since then. There were inhuman conditions, I took part in terrific fights, and I didn't have the chance to be a child. Now I am happy to have the time to fool around.' He stayed in the same room with me, because we didn't have a separate place. My parents were in the other room. He lived there for a half year, until his unit left sometime at the beginning of 1946.

One day they sent us word from the Piarist high school, where they hadn't admitted me earlier, and where none of the 5 Jewish boys whom they had admitted returned from deportation, that they would enroll me at that time. I didn't really feel like going to school, but my mother begged me that because I survived I should study. Because I had gone to commercial school before and there were different subjects, I didn't know any Latin for example, I had to take some difference exams. I started to study with a teacher called Licsak, who taught at the Piarists, but he wasn't a priest. He was a young man, and I learned very intensively with him for 3 months. Then I went to the high school where I took the four difference exams. I had to take an exam in 4 subjects, I got 1 for 4 out of them, and a 2 for one of them. Then I said thanks, and never went to school again. I didn't even consider studying there. I was just like my father. If they kicked me off from somewhere, if they didn't want me, then I never went there again. I only wanted to show that I was capable of doing it.

My parents joined the communist party at that time and they wanted me to join a leftist organization called MADISZ [Hungarian Democratic Youth Organization]. But those people were there who had been the most anti-Semite before, so I said that I wouldn't join these people. I was

too young to become a party member at the age of 16, and I wasn't that excited about it either. In the Lager [German for camp] I had learned that I was Jewish, but I didn't know what to do with this identity of mine. Because I wasn't religious, I hated the people from the Jewish community, I hated the Zionists because of my teacher, I didn't like anything or anyone who would have bound me to the Jewry. But I was still very Jewish. I don't know if you can imagine how confused a 16 year old boy can be, who had had such experiences. I simply didn't know what to do. At the beginning of 1946 a young man called Frici Lusztig (he is now the director of the Safed Hungarian Museum in Israel) came to Nagykanizsa. This Frici Lusztig was the organizer of a leftist Zionist movement, who called together all the Jews he could in Nagykanizsa and explained that not those were the Zionists who wore a badge, but those who were willing to risk their lives so that the Jewish state would be built. At that time it was called the 'national home'. Because in the original 'Zionist Declaration' it is written 'a national home guaranteed by international law' [Editor's note: The interviewee refers to the Balfour declaration.] They didn't speak about a state at all. And he explained that if someone was Jewish and felt Jewish should take part in this and help. This was like an irradiation for me, and right there and then I joined one of the youth Zionist organizations of social democrat character called Habonim Dror. They told me in this movement that it wasn't enough if one kept talking and stood at home, but that we should move in and declass ourselves deliberately. Namely to learn manual labor and practice it, because they did not need as many intellectuals as there were among Jews. I joined the movement, I said good-bye to my mother and said that from then on I would act according to my convictions.

Then I went to Pest for 6 weeks' training, to a seminar. The Zionist movement was still legal at that time, we were in a Jewish villa, its owner had been killed. We lived there, too, there was about 40 of us, 20 boys on bunk beds in one room. There were girls there, too, they were equal with us, moreover they were often the cleverer, they were often the bosses. Otherwise very famous people taught us, psychologist Ferenc Merei lectured to us and Albert Molnar, who was an excellent social democratic social scientist. The Joint supported us, just like they had supported my parents at the beginning, but they rather supported movements than private persons.

After 6 weeks I went to Szeged, to Szeged-Algyo. There was also a villa, where there was an orchard, and they taught us how to look after fruit trees. There was a gardener who knew how to do it, and he taught us how to cut back the vines and fruit trees, and how to do the agricultural, horticultural work. And I was there until the end of 1947, when one of the inheritors of the villa turned up, and he sold the villa and the garden to someone and we had to leave. Then I came to Budapest with the group, which was broken up again. They sent me to a villa, where I didn't have to learn what I had learned in Szeged, but I became a mechanic apprentice. I stayed there, I lived there, and I was a mechanic apprentice until the beginning of winter 1948. In the meantime I visited my parents regularly, and because I didn't have money for a winter coat my parents had a winter coat made for me.

On the 29th November the UNO voted that they would divide Palestine in two, and the Jewish state would be established there. All the Zionist movements and the Jewish communities, at that time still united, organized a meeting, a celebration at the Erkel Theatre (which was Municipal Theatre at that time), so that everyone would hear the news and rejoice. At that time we had already learnt to sing in Hebrew we had started to learn to speak Hebrew. The religious traditions were only kept by those movements which belonged to the religious party. My movement was strongly social

democrat, so much so that there were pictures of Stalin and Lenin on the walls. There was an even more leftist movement than ours, it was completely red, it was called Hashomer Hatzair, 'The Young Watchman' [Editor's note: The left-wing Zionist youth organization was created by unifying various Zionist groups of Eastern Europe in the beginning of the 1910s. It developed its own educational and kibbutz system. In Hungary, the organization appeared towards the end of the 1920s and soon recruited 1,000-2,000 members.] There was another social democrat movement, but it was of different orientation, they were called Makkabi Hatzair. [Editor's note: Leftist Zionist youth association, which appeared in Hungary in the second half of the 1930s, mainly in Jewish higher education institutes.] Besides these there was the Hanoar Hatzioni [Zionist youth organization, part of the General Democratic Zionist Block. One third of organized young Zionists belonged to it in Hungary.] and there was the Bnei Akiba, the sons of [Rabbi] Akiba, who were religious. [Editor's note: The youth 'division' of the religious-Zionist Mizrachi association. These young people were one third, one quarter of the Hungarian Zionists.]

As soon as the Jewish state was voted the fights started in Israel. [see 1948 War of Independence in Israel]<sup>13</sup>. And then boys and girls of my age volunteered immediately, we wanted to go to fight, and in that fall, at the beginning of the fall 1947 we enlisted to the Haganah and waited to leave. But they didn't set us off, because the English were still there. But it was to be expected here in Hungary that after March 1948 the events would 'swing to the left', and there would be no possibility to leave, so sometime in the winter, at the end of January or beginning of February, we went to Austria. The entire company, about the 40 of us. We got a so called collective passport, in which it was written X.Y. and 38 people. So practically we crossed the border legally, with collective passport.

They took us to Vienna where a vacated school was the refugee camp. We were there for 6 weeks, partly because they didn't know what to do with us, there was too many of us, and partly to rest, and so that they would clothe us. We left with the clothes we had on us, we couldn't bring anything with us. Then the drillmasters of the Israeli elite army arrived, and they started to train us for armless, as they say man against man fight. There was a small young girl there who trained us, she was as small as a sitting dog. Then she showed a grip, which she should have warded off by grabbing me, but she couldn't hold me, and I fell on her knees with my back, fortunately not too fast. I didn't get very hurt, but for a while I was invalid. After 6 weeks they took the entire company to a place, where a former Lager was already full with volunteer Jewish young people, who had been gathered to one place from all kinds of movements from all Europe. And there they continued the drilling, but in bigger formation.

I had a great time there. That was the happiness of my adolescence. I also have to mention that the fact that there were girls there, too, didn't mean anything special to me. When I should have learned how to handle women I was in the Lager. Simply I didn't care about this, because I mourned for my childhood love Irenke for years. So I didn't care even about the most beautiful girl, I didn't care about girls at all. And everyone was astonished that I was so withdrawn. They thought that I liked boys or I don't know what. In this regard I became mature at around the age of 20. Though girls fell for me.

We had retraining there for 2 or 3 months, then we went from there to Italy on foot through the Brenner Pass, in big snow, with smuggler leaders. They took us to Meran, the Italians call it Merano. They accommodated us into an empty sanatorium. They started feeding us, and so to speak

nursing us, and we were there for about 2 weeks. Then they took us to an Italian refugee camp called Chiari. We were in Chiari on the 15th May when they proclaimed the State of Israel. Then we held a big celebration. We put up the white-blue flag, and did other things. Let's go, off we go! But this wasn't that simple, because the entire Italy was full with such camps where there were young Jews, volunteers. There was 5000 of us only from Hungary. And before we had left Austria we went to I don't know how many refugee camps with the blue and white flag and recruited the young Jewish kids to come and defend the country. There were some who came, and some who didn't, but we did grow in number in the meantime.

They took the entire company from Chiari to a port called Fano, which is between Rimini and Ancona in Italy. Fano was an ordinary small fishermen's village at that time, today it is a tourist paradise. They told us that the Israeli army needed sailors, too, and we should get used to the sea, and go to sea with the fishermen. And that's what we did. We got uniforms, it was written on them *Scuola Marittima Ebraica* [Italian: Jewish Sailor School]. But of course it was far from it, we only went on cogs. In a proper sense they got us used to the sea. I was unlucky with this again, because I had an accident and my leg got injured again. They excluded me from the training, the drilling. Also because I was seasick many times. The cogs rocked like a nutshell, I helped how I could, but most of the time I couldn't, because I was sick.

In the middle of September they took us to a camp, near the harbor called Ostia. 700 of us joined a small cargo-boat, which was about the size of a barge on the Danube. After 4 days we arrived to Haifa, exactly on the 17th September, when Bernadotte, the UNO mediatory was shot by the Jewish extremists in Jerusalem. [Editor's note: Count Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948) Swedish diplomat commissioned by the UNO to mediate in the armed conflict between the Arabs and the Jews after the proclamation of the State of Israel. None of the parties accepted his plan according to which Israel would get the northern and western part of Palestine and the Arabs the eastern and southern parts, and both parties would acknowledge each other. The Jewish extremists considered him a threat to the existence of the country and they killed him.] They immediately gave the volunteers on the ship army ID cards, and we signed it on the ship that we had joined the Palmach [Editor's note: These were the shock-troops of the Haganah during the British mandate, then during the war of independence.] These weren't only trained for defense but also for the break-through at all costs. But at that time we hadn't been trained at all, not with guns, but only for hand to hand fight. And they took us to a camp called Tel-Mond, and the combats were about 8 kilometers from these. They drilled us there in 12 days. This means that we did no formal training at all, like attention, hold on, right turn, give a salute, there wasn't anything like these. But everyone got a rifle, I got a German Mauser made in 1942, on which there was a swastika. And they showed us where the sight and the butt was, where to load the 5 cartridges, where to cock it, and how to fire it. But they didn't give us any cartridges, because there weren't any cartridges, they were happy if there were enough for the front. And we learned to use the gun in theory, we learned how to cover ourselves, and they made us exercise a lot. At that time I was still in a good condition, but it was a custom that we ran almost until the front line and we shouted three times in Hebrew, that we were there and they should shiver, 'we are the Palmach!', 'hinenu haPalmach!', because the Palmach was famous and the enemy was afraid of it, and then we ran back. This meant 14 kilometers of running every morning.

This lasted for 12 days exactly. You can imagine that in 12 days we couldn't really become experts without any cartridges. And besides there was another problem that in our platoon of 40 nobody spoke Hebrew. And I was the only one who spoke Yiddish. The other ones were from Pest, so how would they have known? I had only learnt it in the Lager, it wasn't my mother tongue either. So it functioned so that the drillmaster said in Hebrew that 'this is a gun'. Then someone, a man with a loud voice shouted in Yiddish 'this is a gun'. Then I told my own company 'boys, he is saying that this is a gun'. Then they explained all the parts of the gun in Hebrew, then in Yiddish, then I explained them in Hungarian. So all orders or commands had to be interpreted twice so that our ordinary citizens would understand them. I knew Yiddish 'thanks to' my connections in the Lager, my life.

I was in Israel for 2 and a half years. While I was a soldier and there was war I took part in the attacks. The aim was to crowd the Egyptians out somehow from the territory of the future Israel, and also from the territory of the Arabian state to come. And there were a couple Arab villages, which we occupied as we went along because most of the Egyptian army was in a village from where they fled to Beer Sheva. And until then the Arab villages could be occupied on the way, some kibbutzim could be liberated, there were some places where there wasn't anyone anymore. We had a lot of casualties. Beer Sheva was a town with 30000 inhabitants, with an English fortification, a well fortified place. Then we stopped and the worst and most difficult night in my life was when we had to walk round Beer Seva. The surroundings of Beer Seva is part of the desert [*Negev*], there they took everyone by car everywhere, with a fleet of motor cars, and the problem was that after a while the cars couldn't move along. And on the first car there were many wires of 2 meters, simple wire fence rolled up, about 60 kilograms of it if not more. We, the beginners had to take it off and roll it out, and the cars went on it nicely, and by the time a car got to the end of a fence the other one had been already rolled out, then the third one was rolled out, and there was so much wire netting, it had been calculated, that the entire fleet could go through it. But then we had to roll up the first one and run forward with the 60 kilogram thing on our shoulders and the four of us had to roll it out again, and we kept going this way the entire night, for about 35 kilometers through the sand. You can't imagine what a big work this was. It is a lot even to walk 35 kilometers, but to run with this dirty fence, to roll it up and down was inhuman.

Miklos, the child of my father's sister, Frida Leicht, my only cousin who survived, was also in Israel. We liked each other with Miklos, because we were very similar in thinking. He also had a strong Jewish identity, even though later he had a Christian wife. He went to Israel already in 1946 at the age of 16 with a youth group and he lived for a while in Pardes Hanna [town in Israel] in a kibbutz. When I was on holiday I visited him. In 1951 he returned and at a course he met a girl who had already had a child, but she was a very nice and pretty girl. They got married and lived together until 1956. They were like doves all the time. Once one of them flew out, then the other one. Miklos left his wife and child at home in 1956 so that they would go after him, and he went back to Israel to the same kibbutz. He lived there until 1962 or 1963, but he couldn't live without his family so he came back again. So he was there two times. When he first came home he magyarized his name to Revesz. He died as Revesz in 1992 in Debrecen where they lived.

I was demobilized exactly after 2 years, on the 17th September 1950. In the meantime I regularly went on holiday with my friend with whom I had gone there, and when they broke up the unit, we still remained in the same unit. Some of his relatives lived in a village called Hadera, we were

about 15 kilometers from there, and if we went on leave we hitchhiked there, and his relatives gave us to eat and accommodated us. They accepted me as the buddy of their relative, in Israel I didn't have anyone. And when we could leave for more than 1 day we went to work either to a construction or to prune vines. We made a lot of money with this kind of occasional work, because there weren't many people there who knew how to prune vines. We were in Hadera starting from the 17th September, and we worked. The cutting back of vines paid the most, and we were good at it. If there wasn't work, we poured concrete, molded, so we did all kinds of construction work. It also happened that we built roads, like the road-makers here. Until January, in 4 months I made as much money as in 5 years in Hungary when I used to work here. At that time they still paid with English pounds, and well.

My friend's uncle had an acquaintance who rented us a room, and the 2 of us paid for it, about 10 pounds a month as I remember, which was a lot of money. But we made that much in 1-2 days. And besides that we both got a weapon, because there was watch in the village, the peasants had to guard their own lands and crops. But they didn't like to stay awake at night, because they worked a lot during the day, we also worked when we cut pruned the vines, but we were young, and we took on the guard for money. So I worked during the day, and from sundown until 2 in the morning I was on watch. I made a lot of money but we didn't have an apartment. We were considered night lodgers, because the 2 of us slept in a room. If the girlfriend of one of us was there, the other one went on watch. I would have wanted to get hold of an apartment. At that time quite small houses were being built, with one and a half rooms, with not many modern conveniences, but there was a kitchen, a shower and a toilet in them. And I wanted to buy one of these on the installment system, because I had enough to pay an advance, but it turned out that these were only for families. Then I thought that I would bring my parents here, because there was a family uniting action at that time. The Israelis gave money for the family members to be brought to Israel. But they still couldn't take me on at the construction. I went to another village, too, where those who wanted to work there got approximately 5 acres of land, a similar house, a carriage, a mule and a cow with calf. They sent me away from there, too, saying that I would have needed a family. I was angry and I went to Tel-Aviv. The army had an office there, which administered the affairs of demobilized soldiers. I went there and said that I needed an apartment. Jaffa was empty at that time. The Arabians had run away and it was full with empty apartments. But there I was told again that unfortunately they couldn't give me an apartment because families from Yemen were coming there with as many children as stars on the sky, and they had to accommodate them first and couldn't solve my case. And they also told me that either I got an apartment or not I could go home because there was communist regime at home. I got very angry at them. I gave my blood and life to Israel, but I didn't want to be a fool. Then I wrote my mother and told her to arrange it so that I could come home to Hungary and suffer no harm.

My mother, who had been a party member for a long time, since 1945 (and this was in 1951, in January perhaps), went to the party secretary of the town and told him what the problem was. He said that it was quite dangerous, because those who came home from abroad were usually caught, but in the previous year on the 1st May I was at the 1st May march in Israel, where the company where I belonged to carried the pictures of Stalin and Lenin with a red flag and a communist banner in Hebrew. And I had sent home earlier the picture which was taken there, and my mother showed it to them so that they would see what my opinion was. Then they went with this to some local or other authority with the party secretary. It didn't even take 10 days and I got the

notification that I was free to go home. I got a free ticket from the Hungarian embassy in Israel, the Polish ship called Bathori took me to Constanta [today Romania], and from there I came to Hungary by train, and I went home by train to my parents in Nagykanizsa, who started to encourage me to continue my studies. No way! I was too old, I was 22, and adult man, I didn't want to have my parents keep me, they were in their 50s already, they baked the bread and worked a lot. But I didn't have any trade, neither schooling nor trade. I had graduated the 4 classes of middle school. And I came to Pest.

I met a family on the ship, who also came back and had 4 beautiful daughters. The second to last was about 16-17 years old at that time, and I fell in love with her so much that you can't even imagine. She was very beautiful and also very smart. I flirted with her on the ship, under the supervision of her parents of course. I visited them, too, in Budapest, they got a shop on Sip Street, where the family lived, too. But since I didn't have enough practice in making court, but I talked with her my own way, she broke up with me after a short time. But I knew that she worked at the United Lamp Factory, and I decided to try to make peace with her, and I went to work at the United Lamp as an unskilled worker, and I worked at the electron tube manufacturing. Because I could certify that I had learned to be a mechanic for a while, and they employed me as an unskilled technician. Then I never made it up with that girl, even though she was there and we saw each other daily, she didn't care about me.

My starting salary was 680 forint, and I had to live off this. I lived in a room in Ujpest, the landlady was a very old woman, who had an antique teenage daughter. As far as I remember I paid 100 for the room, for 5 forint I got a tram pass, which was good from my apartment to the United Lamp Factory and back, once a day. And everything was very cheap. I ate lunch at the canteen of the factory. At that time there were different canned foods: cholent with sausage, stew, and I don't remember, perhaps goulash. There were 3 or 4 kinds, which I bought alternately for dinner. If I worked the night shift by chance, then I passed down the lunch ticket, and I ate these bottled foods during the night. They gave me a very bad salary, and I didn't have any free time. I worked like a madman all summer, and at that time they were recruiting working class cadres to continue their studies. And at that time I already counted as a cadre, despite the fact that it was written in my curriculum vitae that I had come home from Israel. Then I applied to the evening technical school, the Landler Jenő Industrial Technical School, which was in Ujpest. They enrolled me and I started studying in September. And then in October they drafted me and on the 5th November I became a soldier of the Hungarian People's Army.

At that time military service lasted for years. I was ruined. I had about enough. Otherwise I was a lot better trained than the officers of that time, who had been trained in 6 months, 6 weeks. I was soldier in Zahony, because it was a new Hungarian custom to take those who were from Nagykanizsa to Zahony, and those who were from Zahony to Szombathely, those from Szombathely to Szeged, and those from Szeged to Győr and so on. I was a soldier for 2 years, I was bald for 1 year out of these 2, and I couldn't leave the barracks for 6 months because they didn't let the recruits to go out. When I could have gone out after half a year I had to wait another 6 weeks to have my name changed, because they couldn't spell my name on the leave-pass. They had drafted me for 3 years, but Imre Nagy came with his 1953 program when they said that they had to economize on everything that wasn't absolutely necessary. And they let one third of the army leave, they demobilized us.

Then I went back to the United Lamp and after work I attended the Ujpest Industrial Technical School which I graduated in 1957. First I lived in Ujpest in tenancy in a stairway. In the one-storied houses one couldn't go to the attic from the apartment, but from a small room, like a small hall. And under the stairs there was enough room for a bed. And I rented that because I didn't have enough money for something better. At that time my salary was about 800-900 forint, part of which was so-called peace loan and other things.[Editor's note: The peace loan was a peculiar form of taxation introduced in Hungary in the first half of the 1950s. The government issued government bonds for 'building peace', which it had to pay back to the citizens only after 10 years without taking into consideration inflation. The total value of the peace loans, issued on was 6,7 billion forint. People did not really need these bonds, but they were expected by the party to buy them nonetheless.] The peace loan for a year was a month's salary. I didn't go home to my parents in Nagykanizsa often, but we wrote each other letters and my mother was so kind that I sent her my laundry in a box, and she sent me back my clothes washed. I didn't have the possibility to wash. It wasn't easy to have a wash either, when the family didn't use the bathroom they let me in. They even let me in to the kitchen to cook sometimes.

There was 40 of us technicians on that floor of the Lamp Factory, and 800 young women made the electron tubes. And among that 800 women there was always one who was my actual girlfriend, so to speak. First name informality was general there, but I usually addressed everyone formally. And at that time I was still called Feri, Feri, please, this was my title. I only said hi to those girls with whom I was on good terms. And there was a lot of them, one was nicer than the other. Once they ran out of some piece and they sent those who made fluorescent lamps to other departments. They sent a girl to me to teach her to work in the electron tube making. She was a typical Jewish girl, and it turned out after 2 minutes that she had graduated high school. There were a lot of breaks, and during breaks we played that one said a poem or a quote, and the other one had to guess where the quote was from. Then I thought that I was an adult man, I was 27 years old and I had to find someone for good. Then I started to pay court to this girl, and then she went back to the fluorescent lamp department, and sometimes I brought her a book to read.

Then we started to date. I was in my last year at the technical school, so in the last year she accompanied me to school almost always when I went there from work. All her family worked at the United Lamp, her father worked as a foreman at the development department, her mother was some kind of a journalist of the journal called 'Izzo' [Lamp]. Then once she wanted to introduce me to her parents, and the 4 of us sat to the table for lunch in the canteen. Then her mother and father looked at me carefully, and her mother whispered to them 'unsereins'. The kitten of our cat. I don't know how she knew, because I'm not a typical Jew and my mentality is even less so. The point is that the United Lamp had an excursion to Belatelep near Fonyod that year. I went, and the girl and her father did, too. Then when we went down to bathe we discussed that we would get married. The truth is that I didn't think she was very pretty, but she was very intelligent, she seemed a rough diamond so to speak. True, that she kept saying about herself that she was an atheist and progressivist, but I thought that may this be our biggest problem in life. And on the 13th October 1956 we got married. We only had a civil marriage, my wife wore a nice red costume, because by the time the rabbi would have had the time the 23rd October came, and by the time things got calmed we would have been ashamed to stand in front of the rabbi. We went on honeymoon to Csucs mountain, we were there for 3 or 4 days in a tourist house, I think it's not there anymore, it had been demolished I think. We went to gather fallen wood and there was an iron stove and we

heated for ourselves. We had an excellent time.

Vera, my wife comes from Szeged, she was born there in 1937. They were deported in quite a 'lucky' way in 1944. At that time they took a trainful of prominent Jews from Budapest, with the permission of the Germans and in exchange for 20 million pengoes, to Switzerland. [see Kasztner-train]<sup>14</sup>. The very rich Jewish families gathered the 20 million pengoes with the condition that they and their families would also go with the train. So there were some intellectually prominent people on the train like Lipot Szondi for example [Editor's note: neurologist, psychiatrist, the author of the fate analysis and the Szondi-test] or the rabbi from Szatmar [today Romania], who was the most famous Jewish scholar in Hungary and who was an anti-Zionist all his life [Editor's note: Joel Teitelbaum (1887–1979): Between 1929–1944 he was the rabbi of the Orthodox Jewish Community from Szatmar. He fled to Switzerland with the Kasztner train, from where he went to Palestine in 1946, then to the USA, and with the members of the Szatmar Jewish community who survived founded the Szatmar Hasidic community.]. I don't know by name but there were more than a 1000 people who were accommodated in a separate camp in Bergen-Belsen for a while, then they were put on a train, and they were really taken to Switzerland. And 4-5 trainful of Jews from the country were deported not to Auschwitz, but to a concentration camp near Vienna called Strasshof. 3 trains left from Szeged, 2 to Auschwitz, 1 to Strasshof. [Editor's note: According to Randolph Braham's researches the first two transports were directed to Auschwitz, but 'only one of them got there. The Germans directed the other one to Strasshof, in exchange for the trainful of Jews from Kecskemet, who were supposed to be deported to Austria, but because of negligence and routine they were commanded to Auschwitz.' The third transport was directed to Strasshof originally, and most of the 5739 people in it survived the deportation.] My wife was on this latter train. But all her relatives were on the first 2 trains, they were all killed. But her father, who was an electrician and an X-ray specialist the director of the hospital on Szeged didn't want to let to be taken, because there were very many injured at the hospitals and the X-ray had to be used all the time. But her father didn't agree that his family be deported without him, so in the end they deported him, too, with the last train to Strasshof. And my wife's grandmother and grandfather, too. In Strasshof they didn't kill anyone, they got accommodation, they got food. And from there they sent them to work, mainly agricultural work. The peasants took a Jewish family, who worked for them from morning until dawn in exchange for food and accommodation in the stable.

Then they were deported to the Czech-Moravian Protectorate, to Frain [today Vranov, Czech Republic] and from there to a place called Znaim [today Znojmo, Czech Republic], and the parents worked at the brick factory and did debris carrying. And there they didn't hurt the children or the elderly, they even entrusted the grandmother of my wife, who was a teacher and nursery school teacher to look after the children. During the day they went up to the attic of the brickburning oven because the weather was nice there and she taught them there. My wife wrote in one of her short stories that the Czechs were very kind to the deportees. Then when they were liberated they went back to Szeged and my mother-in-law joined the communist party, and she kept nagging my father-in-law until he also joined. In 1947 or 1948, I don't remember exactly, there were the purges, they were both excluded and also fired from their workplace. My mother-in-law had been a clerk, my father-in-law had worked in his profession. They were there at a loss, and in Szeged they couldn't find a job anymore. Then they came to Pest in 1950 or 1951, I don't remember, and found a job at the United Lamp Factory, my father-in-law as an electrician, my mother-in-law as an editor at the newspaper of the United Lamp Factory.

My wife's parents had a two-bedroom-apartment in Ujpest, with interconnected rooms, and she had a 6 years old sister, too. She stayed with her parents and I lived one corner away, not in the staircase leading to the loft, but in a belvedere on Arpad Street, in a house which has been demolished since then. The son of the family lived there, who was serving his 2 year military service and I rented the room until he was going to be demobilized. So my wife and I lived separately. We got married on the 13th and on the 23rd they started shooting [see 1956]<sup>15</sup>. I didn't feel like getting involved at all. Everyone knew that I had been an Israeli soldier, that I had been a Hungarian soldier. I was 27 years old and well trained, I must say. I played all the instruments from the anti-aircraft gun onwards to everything. And when the civic guard was formed in the Lamp Factory they came and brought me the machine gun and the submachine gun and what not, asking me to go with them. I apologized and said that I had gotten married 10 days earlier and I wouldn't leave my wife. And I didn't go. But the son of the family where I lived came home from Taszar on foot. They said, 'we are sorry Ferike, vis maior, move out. At that time fights had already been going on in Ujpest, too, and everyone lived in the cellar.

In the meantime, on the 25th October when the fights hadn't started in Ujpest yet, we were all at the United Lamp Factory and when we finished work my boss and the party secretary called me in and said: 'Look, Feri, you are a trained soldier. Here is this engineer called Lali E., who is a very smart man, a genius and we need him, he wants to go home to his parents, opposite to the Houses of Parliament, on Alkotmany Street. In that district there are a lot of fights, try to escort him home safely.' Then we set off with Lali on foot and I was his guide, his mentor. What I did was, that acquaintances of mine lived in different places. From Ujpest I phoned one of my acquaintances who lived on the corner of Dozsa Gyorgy Street and asked what the situation was there. He said nothing, we could go safely. Then we went up to his place. From there I called my acquaintance on Marx Square. He said that there were heavy fighting from the Danube until there, but after Szondi Street there weren't. Then we didn't go there, but took the backway to Szondi Street, we looked round, it was relatively calm there. Then we walked on the boulevard, it was calm in that part. Because that certain demonstration, on which ten of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated on the 25th in front of the Parliament, was at that time. In the end I took Lali home, then I set off to go back to Ujpest. In the meantime there was a lot of shouting at my back, a Soviet combat car came from Kossuth Square to Alkotmany Street. When I said to myself that I wasn't going to wait for this, and I ran in to the Unitarian church on Marko Street. There 2 young men surrounded me at once and asked me who I was. They made me sit among the others, there were already X plus N armless men there, who were waiting for the Russians to move along. And when they continued on their way they let us out. Then I went back to Kossuth Square to see what the news was there. The demonstration had ended already, it was something terrible, it turned my stomach, though I had seen a couple things in the war. But this was too much for me, too.

My mother-in-law, my father-in-law and my wife lived in the big yellow house called Mefter-house at the corner of Arpad Street. They lived in the apartment overlooking the square, from where one could see the Northern Railway Bridge, where the combat cars fired a lot. Everyone had moved to the cellar. I also went to the cellar where everyone from the approximately 20 apartments of the house was, on mattresses and everything put down along the wall. There wasn't any more room, only in the middle, we put clothes on the ground with my wife, we lived together for the first time there in that cellar. One day a Russian combat car came in front of the house and started to fire at it. I counted 19 hits. And one blew away the main water-meter next to the apartment of the

caretaker, and the water started pouring into the cellar where the people lived. There was a tap outside which had to be turned off, but the combat car was standing there. Then the caretaker and I stuck out our nose waving big white sheets, a grouchy Russian came there and pointed to the roof that someone had shot from there and one of their officers died. I told him that everyone was in the cellar. He insisted, but he let us turn off the main tap and then we went back. But they shot at everything that moved. I went up to cook in the apartment of my mother-in-law on the first floor. But they didn't dare to come out, they were in the cellar night and day. And I cooked out of what they had at home. But my mother-in-law was a negligent housewife, they barely had anything. Carrots and apples. I made carrot sauce, simmered the meat well, baked it in the oven and took it downstairs with the carrot sauce. My father-in-law said that he had never eaten anything that delicious. We were down there for about 3 weeks, and I cooked throughout. The braver ones from among the others also went upstairs to cook. This house had back exits, too, and when the geese for export were taken to the Ujpest market so that they wouldn't go bad, because they couldn't export anything, there was no train traffic either, one could buy a whole geese, I went and bought one, too. One could buy bread and geese. On the 4th November at dawn the radio said that everyone should go to work. By that time the Soviet tanks were in Ujpest and they lumbered and shouted everywhere. I said that as I saw we wouldn't set off for work.

Once the fights stopped for a while, then I went immediately to the United Lamp Factory and the first engineer, Vaszily was very frightened and didn't know what to do. I told him 'Comrade first engineer, in my opinion you should first have all the depots locked, because they will take away all the goods'. We locked everything and the United Lamp Factory wanted me to be part of the armed guard. At the first gunshot the guard changed sides. Weapons remained, but no guard. I apologized and said that I wouldn't spring to arms. The situation was chaotic for a long time, because the demonstration was about to end, but the United Lamp Factory kept demonstrating and the revolutionary committee of the factory didn't let the work be started until the members of the AVO [see AVH][16](#) and the Russians broke in by force, they took the committee, then work started.

At the time when they were still shooting, on the 5th or 6th November, our relative, Istvan Mate Lusztig, who had lived in this apartment, he was the husband of one of my mother's sisters who was killed, called me on the phone and asked me to visit him. We appreciated our very few relatives so much that after the blood-relation who linked us died, we still kept in touch as relatives and still loved each other. He married a widow in Nagykanizsa and in 1947 they came to live in Pest, because an uncle of the wife, a reputed lawyer died here. And when I came here, Istvan Mate Lusztig put a rental contract in front of me in which it was written that I had been living there for 3 months, and that my wife was also going to move there, and wanted me to sign it. I asked why. He said because they were going to go abroad [Editor's note: In the weeks after the 1956 revolution about 200000 people left the country, defected.] So when they left we moved here, but at that time there was an ordinance that 2 persons were allowed live in a one-bedroom apartment at the most, and this was a two and a half bedroom apartment. Then I talked with my parents on the phone and asked that at least one of them should come to Pest. Both of them came, because my mother and my father were party members, my mother was also a lay judge and they had a lot of hen thieves and others imprisoned. And those vowed vengeance against her, that if they came out of the prison they would slay my mother or do I don't know what to her. And really, in 1956 the criminals were also released from prison. My mother was frightened and they left the apartment in Nagykanizsa together with my father and came to live with us. So there was enough of us in the

apartment. They allocated it to us, we got the paper on my wife's birthday, on the 22nd February 1957. My parents lived here until their death, until my mother's death I mean, which happened in 1970. My father died in 1974, but he lived with us until 1972 because he remarried.

Not long after my parents had come here with two truckloads of furniture, and a piano, which they brought for someone as a favor and it stood in the middle of the room, and we didn't have enough room to move because of it until it was taken, both my mother and my father got a job. My father was 52 years old, my mother was 51. They couldn't be bakers anymore because the doctor had forbidden it, but my father went to work at the Chinoin [Factory of Medicines and Chemical Products], as a warehouseman, and my mother went to the Vasedeny [hardware store chain] as an inventory maker, because its chief accountant was the second husband of my father's sister. My parents were physically extremely strong, my father knocked me down so at the age of 56, when I was 32 that I thought the floor would break in. And my mother was very good at counting, but she only knew the four sums. At that time there wasn't a calculator to make the inventory, so what they did was that they looked at how much an item costs and how many items were left and multiplied the number of items with the price. If they took an inventory in one of the shops there was an entire group of inventory makers, my mother among them, who was by far the best. She added up four digit numbers amazingly fast, and later when the Holerit, the punchcard computer was introduced they kept her in her job for another year so that she could check if the Holerit functioned well. She usually finished before the Holerit. She could have become a mathematician if she had studied it. Otherwise they were fine here. Juliska and Olga [Editor's note: The sisters of Ferenc Leicht's father.] still lived at that time, and they used to get together. Budapest was full with people from Nagykanizsa whom they knew. They went to play cards, and people came to play cards at our house. So they had a good time. Only my mother was already ill at that time. We had to take her to the hospital for a control every 2-3 years. She had organic heart trouble and she had a lot of illnesses, aortic stenosis and other things. But if she was healthy she was the most pleasant person in the world.

When we moved here a man called Sajti, whom we inherited, lived in the personnel room in the lodgings. Then Mr. Sajti got married and moved to the country. Then another man came, whose name I forgot. He also moved away, we didn't dismiss anyone. Then my wife said that for the next time she wouldn't want a male subtenant, because she had to clean after him, but a woman would clean her room. From then on only girls came to live at our place. They usually stayed for 2-3 years, and all of them got married from here. In the mid 1960s there was a girl here called Pottyi, who also got married from here, and who recommended us Miklos Horthy's nieces, Eva H. and Emese H. They lived together in the room, but there was such a big bed there that it was enough for the two of them. They were phenomenal girls, I liked them very much. Eva H. was my colleague, she was also an electrician. She married a man called Peter P. Many girls lived here, the last one was a hair-stylist called Marika, who got married from here at the end of the 1980s in Sweden. We exported her.

My wife Vera gave birth to Laszlo, the first child at the end of 1957, on the 14th December. At that time the state did not give mothers any child benefit, but she could only be at home about 3 months, in case she didn't take holiday before the child bearing, but she took 3 weeks, so she could stay home for 2 months and a week perhaps. But the child had problem with his ears, he had otitis and Leiner-disease. The Leiner-disease is a very dangerous skin-disease for infants, and

he was in the hospital for 6 weeks in a critical state. My wife had to go in to nurse him. She got a paper from the hospital that because she had to nurse I don't know how many times a day, they asked the local doctor to give her sick-leave. He did. Vera spent about 1 year on sick-leave. In 1958 she went back to work, but not to the United Lamp Factory, but first an acquaintance of mine boosted her into a position at a so-called protected workplace where handicapped people worked. Of course she wasn't handicapped, but she did what the handicapped did, she sewed dolls and she got as much money as the handicapped, so she quit in 3 months. They didn't even write these 3 months in her employee card. She went to work at a Vasedeny store as shop assistant, thanks to my mother.

There were all old women in the shop, my wife had to climb up and down the shelves, pack down the delivered goods. They made her work terribly much. At that time I enrolled to the university, because I had graduated the technical school and I wanted to continue my studies. For half a year, while I went to the university, my wife had to take care of the child and of me, because I went to the university after work, and I didn't have time to cook, to do the shopping or anything. I expected my wife to serve me lunch at half past 2 because university started at 4. In half a year my wife lost 9 kilograms, and despite the fact that I was good at mathematics they kicked me out, because I didn't remember some high school material because I was too nervous. I quit the university and also because I didn't want my wife to lose more weight than the 9 kilograms, because she wasn't that big anyway.

In 1960 I left the United Lamp Factory because I earned very little money, about 1250-1300 forint. In 1960 this wasn't much at all. There was an opening for an overseer with a salary of 1600 forint per month, which I applied for, since I was a technician already at that time, but they told me that the 1600 forint jobs were not kept for me. I went to the Beloiannis Factory [Beloiannis Telecommunication Factory], I introduced myself, showed them what I had, that I had worked for 10 years at the Lamp Factory. And that I was looking for a job. They said that I couldn't handle the telephone exchange, but they would employ me to the technical inspection department as a so-called foreign goods inspector. My task was to control the parts and goods bought from other companies according to certain parameters to see if they met the Hungarian and international standards, and if they met the conditions stated in the contract between my company and the seller. There I started at a commencing salary of 1600 forint.

My second son was born on the 8th July, 1963, his name is Gyorgy, because both of us had a cousin called Gyorgy who was killed. We were going to call our first son Gyorgy, too, but when my wife was pregnant her father was hit by a truck on the pedestrian crossing and he died immediately. His last deed was that he pushed a pregnant woman away, so the woman was saved, but the car drove over Vera's father. That's why we called our first son Laszlo. While Vera was pregnant with Gyuri [Gyorgy] we were examined and it turned out that my wife and I were RH incompatible. She was 7 months pregnant when they did the test and it turned out that there would be problems with this child because they found a certain amount of anti-bodies in his blood. Otherwise Gyuri was born with 3,6 kilograms, 52 centimeters. He was a standard child, Laci [Laszlo] was just like him. He was a cheerful and seemingly healthy baby, we couldn't tell by looking at him that he had some problems. But by the time I went to visit them for the second time the ambulance had taken him to the Heim Pal hospital. They transfused his blood and said that everything was alright.

We brought him home and we saw that at the age of 6 months he still didn't turn to his stomach and didn't move. We took him to the Heim Pal Hospital, where they gave us a paper that the child was asymptomatic. But he never moved, he wasn't inquiring, he just lay like a small toy doll. And when he should have walked he couldn't even stand up yet. He was very much underdeveloped compared to children of his age. And as time went by we could see in more and more things that he wasn't healthy. Otherwise my wife wrote a study about this, because my daughter-in-law asked her, who had studied remedial education and she needed the study for a remedial education analysis. They first thought about Gyuri that he was physically handicapped. Vera took him to the predecessor of the actual Peto Institute where it turned out that he could move brilliantly, he only didn't get instructions from his brain to move. If he wanted to he could. With appropriate motivation, by which I mean a spoonful of pudding, he could be convinced to climb up on the bench, which the physically handicapped children couldn't do. He was about 5 years old by the time he became house-trained and learned to speak.

So my wife stayed home with Gyuri, when my son Laci was 7 years old and Gyuri was 1 year old. From then on the doctor couldn't give her sick-leave. She quit her job. I earned about 2000 forint at that time, which was only enough to famish. My parents helped us sometimes. Until then we were in the same household, but when my wife quit her job I told my parents that it would be best for all of us to have separated households, because I couldn't expect them to starve just because Gyuri was the way he was. And then we tried to live off my salary. My mother helped my wife very much, she taught her already when Laci was born, how to bathe a child. My wife was 20 years old at that time, she didn't have much practice and my mother adored the little child, especially her first grandson, and she bathed her, fed her and did everything. There is a note from that time, because at that time we communicated through letters because everyone was busy, on which my mother wrote my wife: 'today I am going to pick Tapsi up, your father is going to come home at this and this hour.' She called the child Tapsi, because one of Laci's ears was bigger than the other, he was like a bunny. Well, my mother was a phenomenal woman.

My father was also a very decent, honest man, but sometimes he had primitive thoughts so to speak. My wife was at home with Gyuri, we lived off one salary for 7 years, and Gyuri kept shouting all the time, he threw his toys about, so in the end we put him in the other room for the day. I put wire guard on the window, so that he wouldn't break it, because Gyuri was very strong. He shuffled the heavy wardrobe and the couch. Then my father, who had got used to sleeping during the day, and woke up very angry (he was always angry when he woke up, when I was a child he used to beat me when he woke up), said that Gyuri was an animal. Well, I wasn't in a really good mood, and I gave him a roasting. I told him to back off, that I was sorry that he was bothering him, but that was the situation, we lived together. My father got angry and he moved away to his sister in Pest. My poor mother turned on the waterworks, but she stayed here, so I didn't have an argument with her. And she helped and kept crying. She tried to reconcile us with each other. She told me to apologize my father. I? He should apologize, because he insulted my son. The point is that after about 2 weeks my father moved back. How do they say it? We sank our differences. We never spoke about this, but he didn't insult Gyuri either.

I had been working at the Beloiannis for 6 years when my friend, with whom I had been in Israel together, and with whom we came back together and who also became a technician, convinced me to transfer to where he worked, to the Food Processing Industry Engine Works And for a couple

hundred forint more I went to work there and I became a production programmer. Not long afterwards I transferred to a Transformer, X-ray, Industrial Apparatus Co-operative called TRAKISZ as an end-product controller. That work was extremely complicated for me at first. I had to attend a 2 year course, which the Ministry of Furnace and Engineering organized, because they said that my technical qualification wasn't enough. Then I worked there for 15 years in different functions. And when Vera started to work again then we were better off financially.

When I started to work at the Beloianisz they started with giving me a voucher to the Balaton, to Szantod-Koroshegy [see SZOT-holiday vouchers][17](#). The Beloianisz had a summer house there. Laci was 2 and a half years old at that time, and we went together with the family for nickels. From then on we went camping. We were in Surany, we pitched a tent on the beach, and we were there for 10 days, a week, we were in Balatonoszod, where now there is a government summer resort, there was a nice camping at that time. We always went with borrowed tents, we didn't have our own tent. We regularly took Laci along, too. At the Beloianisz they also organized trips, the factory had a bus, which took us to a point of the blue walk, to Paradfurdo, Kekesteto for example, we set off from there, the bus left and waited for us at another agreed point. By the time we got there we were very tired, because the trip was usually about 25 kilometers, and we were so happy to arrive that we wreathed the bus with the wild flowers which we picked on the way. And Laci always came with us there, too. [Editor's note: The touring of the Blue Path, which runs across all Hungary was announced by the tourist section of the Budapest Lokomotiv Sports Association in 1952. This hiker path is called blue walk.] We went to many places, but on a real holiday, especially because of Gyuri and because of financial reasons, too, we only went to Noszvaj and Balatonszabadi-Sosto.

We were in Czechoslovakia, in Prague for the first time abroad in the 1970s. That was possible, because a round trip plane ticket cost 1500 forint. And with the help of the Jewish community in Prague we got a quite cheap accommodation and we ate at the Jewish community. As soon as we arrived with Vera we looked for the Jewish district where I went to the kosher canteen and told them that we had come from Budapest and that we only had a little money and we were looking for an accommodation. Then an old women volunteered and we lived at her place and ate at the kosher canteen. We were in Italy, in Venice the same way, where, because we arrived on Sunday and the synagogue was closed I went in to the Jewish museum near the synagogue where I found a young man who spoke Hebrew. I told him that we had just arrived and were looking for accommodation, and he walked the town with us until we found a cheap place. While I paid for the accommodation the young man disappeared so I could never thank him for his help. This is why people say that Jews stick together. In my opinion not the Jews stick together, but men do. I went there, they saw that I had a problem, so they helped. That's it. Otherwise I also did others favors, I arranged accommodation many times, or if there wasn't room I accommodated people and they never paid me for it. We have been in Greece, too, but on an organized trip.

Because I had nothing to do with politics at the United Lamp Factory and at the Beloianisz I tried not to go to the ceremonies, but I had to go on the 1st May for example. That was obligatory. We had to take part in the procession, that was it. The others went to drink afterwards, but it upset my stomach and I wasn't used to it anyway. Then I cleared out. But there were a lot more private festivities than official ones, birthdays, or when they celebrated someone. They always asked at those occasions what everyone wanted to drink. I said milk. They laughed at me and said that they wouldn't bring any milk. I said that I wasn't going to go. Two times I didn't go, and the third time

they brought half a liter of milk. And happy birthday, I celebrated it with milk. And I wasn't very happy, because everyone got drunk and clamored, and they said all kinds of things which weren't really pleasant for me. But what the hell! Otherwise in our family it wasn't really important that our friends should be Jewish, it isn't important now either. Among our close friends there are barely any Jews. My friend with whom I was a soldier in Israel and with whom I came home almost at the same time married a non-Jewish woman, and during their marriage we only socialized with them. He didn't know the Jews from Pest and he wasn't really interested in them either. I had this only one friend, my parents were here and Gyuri was here. Once my friend, his family and his grandmother, who was a typical Jew from Galicia, an old woman, her mother tongue was Yiddish, she didn't learn Hungarian, so it was quite difficult to understand her, came over to our place at New Year's Eve.

When my wife and I met she was a convinced atheist, and I didn't want to rush her, but when I went to college where they put a great emphasis on physics I bought a series of books with the philosophical thoughts of physicians. These physicians were the brightest minds of the 20th century, and all of them proclaimed an idealistic philosophy, so not materialistic. Vera and I read through these things, and in the end she realized that she had an identity crisis in her childhood. So she first considered herself a human, then a Hungarian and barely or at all Jewish. Otherwise she wrote brilliant short stories about her parents and about the foolishness of her parents that after the war they left her in a complete identity crisis. But they taught her that this wasn't important, she didn't have to care about it. While she was the caricature of a very sweet Jewish girl. And slowly she admitted that I was right, that unfortunately we were Jews whether we liked it or not. What we considered ourselves that was a different matter. But who cared? If others considered us Jews we had to acknowledge.

I started having a Jewish identity when they took my Bocskai-cap - in the Lager, on the 2nd May exactly. [Editor's note: The Bocskai suit was a black textile suit with black frogged buttoning, fashionable in the 1930s. The cap, which belonged to the suit was a cap without a border, made out of long-shaped parts, embroidered with frogging on the side.] The wearing of the Bocskai-cap, which was typical of the Hungarian middle-class indicates the success of the assimilation] This identity meant that I had to do everything I could to help the Jewish people. Not the Jewry, because that's a different concept. Because that isn't united just like any nation. The Jewry for me isn't religion, but an ethnic group or even more a way of life. I didn't start keeping the traditions because I wasn't raised in them, I had neither the knowledge nor the urge to do so. But when Vera was still home and my parents lived my wife and I went to a lot of synagogues, once we went here, then there, Friday evening we went here, on Saturday we went there, but not to make friends, only to look around. We went to almost all the synagogues, because I wanted to know what kind of people go there. And to be honest, most of these places got on my nerves.

At the Dohány Street Synagogue there was a rabbi called Henrik Fisch at that time, [Editor's note: Neolog rabbi from Kápolnásnyék.], who had an organization called Leányegylet [Girl's Association], led by a very funny girl called Kato R, and Vera and I helped her from the end of the 1950s already. This Leányegylet organized coffee or cocoa hours once a month for solitary old women in the cultural room of the Jewish community called Goldmark Room, which held 250 people, and which is a on Wesselenyi Street no. 5, on the second floor. There were barely any men, but men could also participate. They paid a symbolical amount of money, and for that they got a cookie and a cocoa. We helped in the organizing: my wife lay the tables, served, and I stood

in the door and arranged the rows, seated everyone. And I had another task, namely Jewish artists regularly came there to perform for free. The most famous ones. Lajos Basti still lived at that time, but non Jews also came, Imre Sinkovits for example, who was known as a rightist, also came there voluntarily and performed for free. And I discussed with the artists, who got a bottle of kosher wine after they were done. Everyone performed what he wanted, it was a completely mixed program, they told me ahead of time, and I compared them. We worked in this for years. This was our social work, and the social work of our parents was that they babysat our children. We participated at the events of the Jewish community until chief rabbi Fisch left to Germany, because he had been invited to the German Jewish community. Then doctor Laszlo Salgo came [Editor's note: (1910-1985), national chief rabbi, the chief rabbi of the Dohany Street synagogue from 1972.] who was a party member and a chief rabbi at the same time at the end of the 1940s. He changed the system that the women could have a coffee at the long tables. He had the chairs put in rows, just like in a cinema, and he didn't give any coffee or anything, but the artists performed and that could be watched. But he still collected the money for it, he even made it more expensive. I hated him very much already at that time, and Vera and I left him there.

When my son Laci was 7 years old I had a thought that my son shouldn't have two roots. I would raise him as a Jew, and I wouldn't allow any kind of deviation from this. Well, at the Dohany Street synagogue there was a shammash, he has died, he was called Uncle Zoldan. I sent my son to this certain shammash and asked him to be so kind to teach him. He taught him Hebrew, and they didn't learn the Talmud, but they did learn the Torah. He learned the basics and learned that we didn't pray and live like the others. That we had to do what the Torah prescribed. And that we must try to observe what we can. Then my son asked why we didn't live as I was written there. Why wasn't our household kosher. We discussed it and I told him that because we couldn't afford it. A kosher household cost a lot of money. So my son was completely aware of who he was and what was it that we didn't observe but we should have, already when he went to middle school.

Otherwise in our family we didn't celebrate any holidays which were not Jewish at all, Christmas tree, Easter egg dying. We observed the Jewish holidays, on Friday evenings we went to the synagogue, lit Chanukkah candle, we even held the Seder and the Passover dinner, and when my son could already play the guitar he accompanied the songs. Otherwise he never missed the Christian holidays, he was a very conscious little Jewish child. Though we didn't have him circumcised when we should have had to, because we were afraid that he would be exposed to aggression at school. But it wasn't a problem in any of his schools that he was Jewish. Partly because he was a very good mathematician, and he was good at the other subjects, too, and he was good also at sports, so we can say that he was popular. Our son Gyuri wasn't circumcised either, because we found out already before he was born that he wasn't going to be healthy and that he would have to live at an institute, and didn't want him to have problems because of this. Though Laci wasn't circumcised he did have his bar mitzvah exceptionally, with his good connections, and at the age of 26 he organized the circumcision ceremony and a doctor circumcised him here in the apartment. About 10 people came with all that was needed for the prayer and everything that was needed, and the circumcision happened as if Laci had been born then, and he got his Hebrew name, Dan, at that time.

And then I enrolled to college, in 1964 I attended the initial course, and from 1965 until 1969 I attended and graduated the Kando Kalman Technical College. My wife, who had only graduated

high school, completed a 2 year differential economic higher technical school. We studied in turns. First I learned to become a technical inspector, then she studied at the economic higher technical school, then I went to college, and when I graduated my wife enrolled to a system manager course, and when there were too many system managers and one needed a college degree for it she went to the Finance and Accountancy College.

It turned out about Laci already when he was at elementary school that even though he didn't inherit a corner house from my mother, he did inherit his ability for mathematics, and at school they did take it seriously. And they sent him to mathematics competitions, and when he was in 4th grade he became number one in Budapest. He was admitted to the Fazekas [Editor's Note: One of the best schools of Budapest, strong at maths.], and when he was in the 1st grade of middle school I understood what he was doing, but from the 2nd grade onwards I didn't understand a thing, even though I coached the high school children in mathematics, and I did it quite well. I was much better than the average mathematics teachers at that time. So Laci was a brilliant mathematician, and very intelligent. He never said a word against Gyuri, but we never put Gyuri under his care. It wasn't his task.

He was living peacefully side by side with Gyuri. This went on for 7 years until Laci turned 13 and in the next year he was going to go to high school. Then it became perceptible that Laci couldn't study anymore. He didn't have a place to study. Because my parents were here in the other room, there was a subtenant in the small room, because for 7 years only I worked and we needed some complementation, and the 4 of us lived in the smaller room. Laci couldn't be in peace anywhere, either because of Gyuri or because of my parents. He studied in the kitchen in the evenings, but the poor thing suffered. And it also turned out that my wife couldn't take it anymore either, because at the age of 7 Gyuri was quite hard to handle. I saw that Vera was crying all the time, I saw that she had completely shattered nerves. My wife was already ill at that time, she was critically ill, and my wife was at the edge of a nervous breakdown, nobody could take care of Laci, because I was going to college. I saw that this couldn't go on like that, it was difficult for my wife. The 4 years when she had to serve me, too, were enough for her. Then we decided to send Gyuri to an institute.

At this time I was recovering from measles which I got at the age of 41. And this that put the lid on it for the family. My father worked, but in the apartment he was like a ghost, he didn't know what to do because my mother was dying. They lived together for 41 years and they adored each other, they kept fooling about even when they were old. I convinced my wife to go to the neurology at the national health center. They examined her at the neurology, but she cried all the time there, too. From September they hospitalized her to a sanatorium on Rozsadomb. And me, half recovered from the measles, started to arrange Gyuri's boarding out, and after long protraction Gyuri was accepted to an institute in Nagyteteny. He lived there for 26 years. Now he is at the social department of a Jewish rest-home in Ujpest, the establishing of which Vera and I initiated in 1991-1992, and practically the two of us carried it forward until its realization. Moreover, after Vera retired, she worked there for 1 year in her profession.

When I was already an interpreter at the Israeli Embassy and I arranged the moving of the Russian Jews to Israel the head of the Joint came to Hungary. I took a deep breath, went up to him in the lobby of the embassy and said: 'Listen up, Boaz, - he was called Boaz, as far as I remember - if a Jew wants to eat kosher, does he have the right to do it?' He said yes. 'And does this depend on the

fact whether he is intelligent or not?' He said no. 'Well, in Hungary quite a few handicapped Jews live, who can not be at home, because they either don't have parents, or they must live at an institute, and who have to eat treyf, because the state institute doesn't cook them kosher'- I said. 'And all the denominations already have an institute for the handicapped and a rest home, but the Jews only have a rest home.' Then the man from the Joint told me that they didn't have money anymore, but he would help, and that he only needed a computation of how much the support of such a home would cost. My wife, who was a professional system manager, and whom I told all this, first posted an ad in the 'Uj Elet' [New Life, the biweekly of the Jewish Community] that those who were interested should get in touch with us. It turned out that there were about 15-16 people who would have applied for these places. Then my wife made a computation of how many rooms, bathrooms, how much bedding, how many towels, social workers etc, would be needed and how much the rent would cost, so she made a serious calculation and a young friend of ours translated it to English for free. I gave this to the man from the Joint and approximately a month later I was summoned to Gusztav Zoltay [the acting director of the Association of Hungarian Jewish Communities], and there we discussed the thing with him and a very popular remedial teacher, Eva Krausz. The place was provided by the Jewish community, they partitioned off empty rooms of the Ujpest rest home, about 10 rooms, the Joint had the Jewish community buy what was needed, and they got the food from the Scheiber high school where there was kosher kitchen.

My mother died in 1970. She was buried in Rakoskeresztur at the Jewish cemetery, in the same grave with my father. I still miss my mother, even though she died 34 years ago. I still come home if I heard a good joke, that I would like to tell it to my mother. She could appreciate that very much. Vera is very much like my mother. So much so that when she was a shop assistant at a Vasedeny store and my mother was also there, they thought that she was her daughter. Yes. One marries a woman, who resembles his mother. If he loves his mother. If not, then he chooses someone totally different, or just anyone.

When Laci graduated high school at the Fazekas, I was worried that he would get into a bad company, I didn't know my son well enough at that time. Though I should have known that it wouldn't happen, but I really wanted him to have a Jewish company because of his farther relationship. I didn't want to interfere directly, but when he was 17 I took him to professor Scheiber [see Sandor Scheiber] [18](#), who held a so called kiddush every Friday after the prayer, which meant that they blessed the wine, blessed the challah and passed out the challah among those present, which were sometimes more than 100, and many young people among them. And Scheiber delivered some kind of lecture, he was famed for being erudite, he was excellent in Hungarian literature, and besides that the ancient and mediaeval Jewish literature was at his finger's end, so to speak. He sat down and talked, and those who were interested came there, and after half a year there were so many people like the Chinese. Nobody had any idea anymore who were those with whom he was together at the same place. Some of them, who knew each other more or less went to the cafe called Dunapark, and then to Szent Istvan Gardens. When they arrived the band started to sing the 'Chava nagila' immediately, which is an Israeli song. Many people went there, and many didn't go, because they didn't know anyone or had to money.

Scheiber delivered his lectures in the auditorium of the National Rabbinical Seminary. There was a piano in the corner and I sat on the piano stool, because there weren't enough seats. And the other ones sat and stood around me, about 8-10 of them. We sat there together, then we left together,

and some of those, who didn't go to the Dunapark also came with us. And then some of the kids who fidgeted about there, and I knew them more or less, came to my place. We started talking about all kinds of things, strictly Jewish-related topics. First we arranged to meet at my place on Sunday, there was the 6 of us, Vera and I and the 4 guys. Two of the guests were students at the rabbinical seminary. And we talked about everything, and we realized that it was stupid to meet on Sunday night, because we were together on Friday at Scheiber's anyway. And we put this on Friday, too, already at the beginning, after our 2nd or 3rd meeting. But these couple guys also had their friends who said that they also wanted to come, and shortly the number doubled. And I saw that these kids were very neurotic because of their identity crisis. There are some who still suffer because of this. These were the second generational children of the victims of the Holocaust, who either knew or not that their grandfather was killed here or there, or children about whom people usually say that everyone knows that they are Jewish apart from them.

About 250 people were at our place during these years. Those who used to come here were all intellectuals. Young doctors, young economists, university and high school students. The first company got married already, they had children, but new ones always came. And there are 4 couples, which met here, at this table. Important is, that on Fridays 10, 12, 15 people came in seconds, sometimes 6 and sometimes 26 of them. And we always bought a kilogram of biscuits and tea bags. They sat down, and if someone had a topic and some people were interested in it they sat down in a corner and talked about that. The other company talked in the other corner. I forbade them very strictly to talk about the Hungarian political situation even a word. One of the guys once came with a Danube Circle badge, and I simply made him take it off. [Editor's note: The Danube movement was the precursor of the change of regime. The Danube Circle, founded in 1984, came to being as a protest against the building of a barrage system on the Danube.] I didn't take sides either in 1956, and I didn't want even a word to be said about the Hungarian internal affairs. We did talk about what was in Israel. About why the Jews from Brooklyn wore earlocks, for example. The students of the rabbinical seminary knew a lot of things, which I didn't know, so we mutually learned from each other. They didn't know what Auschwitz was like. So we talked a lot. Every Friday, for 10 years. My son was in this company, too.

I ended these Friday gatherings when my son and his wife emigrated to Israel in August 1985. My son and my daughter-in-law started liking each other at professor Scheiber's. They told me later that they fell in love with each other at the first sight. I had never seen such thing in my life. I must knock on wood that they will celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary next year and I have three beautiful granddaughters. My daughter-in-law was born in 1960, she is originally a teacher of Hungarian language and literature and history, but in Israel she studied to become a nursery school teacher and she also studied remedial education. At first I was a little bit afraid of her, because her parents had divorced and I feared that the example would be contagious, but I was agreeably disappointed. Otherwise her parents didn't raise her Jewish either, she also realized her identity later. We had been in Israel with the family in 1983. Laci, Vera and I. My daughter-in-law started dating Laci at that time, they met at that time. But we didn't tell her either where we were going. Because our passport was for Greece, for 4 weeks. And from Greece we went on. This was quite risky in 1983 [Editor's note: Hungary didn't have any diplomatic relationship with Israel between 1967-1989.] If one didn't make phone calls or didn't write it didn't turn out. Supposing that one didn't set off from Vienna. Because the Hungarian authorities rented the apartment across the embassy in Vienna, and they took a picture of everyone who went in or came out. And if one asked

for a passport after that they showed him the picture of where he had been in Vienna. At that time one could go in every three years, and they gave 200 or 300 dollars for shopping. [see Blue Passport]<sup>19</sup>. But I had my connections in Israel already at that time, which I had built out earlier, since I had been a soldier in the Israeli army together with people who had been deported with me, and with whom I had gone to school together in Nagykanizsa before the war. We were in Greece for one week, and 3 weeks in Israel.

My son Laci probably liked this thing. I think so, because here at home it wasn't customary to wear a kippah, he put one on when we arrived there, and he didn't take it off, as it had been pinned there with a thumbtack, until we left. Since he lives there he never wears one, but he did at that time. Because he enjoyed it that it was possible. And when we came back he told about it later to my daughter-in-law to be, who went to Zurich in 1984 and he went to Israel from there. This was in 1984. In the summer of 1985 they got married. One the 6th July they had their civil marriage, and after 3 or 4 weeks rabbi Landesmann wed them on Jozsef Boulevard 27, at the synagogue, then there was a small party in the auditorium of the rabbinical seminary, where the Friday evening lectures used to be. They had a wonderful little wedding. We sent out 200 invitations, and besides rabbi Gyorgy Landesmann there were 3 other rabbis among the guests - Schweitzer, who was the principal of the rabbinical seminary at that time and let us use the room for free, Tamas Raj and a rabbi called Istvan Berger, - which was a great event at that time.

As it had turned out my a grandmother of my daughter-in-law still lived in Paris. And they told me that they would go on honeymoon to the grandmother. But the morning before they set off my son told me that they were going to move away. I asked where. To Israel. That was it. My wife and I turned a little bit green, a little bit blue. Interestingly the family of my daughter-in-law had already known 1, one and a half days before. My daughter-in-law couldn't resist telling them. Well, I kept a low profile. What was I supposed to do. My son was 28 years old, a married man, an independent man, with his own salary. My daughter-in-law was a teacher, a self-dependent woman, a self-sustaining woman. What was my role in how and when, where and how wanted to live? I could have interfered if I had given them up. But on the one hand I wouldn't have given up my own son, on the other hand I had no right to interfere in what he wanted to do. They emigrated, and since they have lived there either they come home, or we go to visit them. We were in 1988 got the first time, when Moria was born, and latest we were there 4 years ago.

I worked at the TRAKISZ until 1983. When we placed Gyuri to an institute my wife also went to work. There was an office nearby at the Üvegipari Co-operative, where one of her earlier colleagues also worked, and they employed her with a very good salary of 1700 forint. But she soon left from there and went to work at the Fotaxi as a system organized, then in a couple years to a company called Organizational Institute of Council Industrial Companies, which did salary organization. I went to work at a gmk in 1983 which I quit very soon, because they cheated very much with the receipts. My wife had already pulled some strings at the Metropolitan Sewerage Installation Company, they needed an architect. I had never worked as an architect in my life, but I said that I would rather be a beginner architect at the age of 55 than to cheat. I retired from there, at the age of 60 exactly. But I knew that my pension was very low, 7444 forint after 40 years of labor relations, but I knew Hebrew and besides that I had been dealing with the Hungarian and Jewish culture, buildings and institutes from Budapest. I took the Hebrew proficiency examination, and as soon as I retired I enrolled to a guide course. After a year I took the exam, and from then on I could

work as a guide. When the IBUSZ [Hungarian socialist travel agency] was liquidated, my employment also ceased.

At the end of 1989 they started to let the Jews from the Soviet Union go to Israel. In the time of Gorbacsov they said that those who wanted to leave were free to do it. And 2 million Jews wanted to emigrate from the Soviet Union at once. For a while they went to Vienna through Varsav [today Poland], Bukarest [today Romania] and Budapest, and the majority went to America. 250 thousand Soviet Jews went through Budapest from the end of 1989 until the summer of 1991 when they allowed the Israeli planes land in Moscow and the Soviet planes could also fly to Israel. In the beginning one-two families came, went to the Israeli Embassy and got a place ticket to the next Malev flight to Tel-Aviv. But in a short time many people came, and there was a problem at the embassy, because they didn't have apparatus for this. There was a consul, doctor Gordon, I don't remember his full name, he summoned me and asked if I wanted to work for them, just when I had been dismissed from the IBUSZ. I took it on and worked at the embassy until the Soviet Jews started to come by hundreds. Then they established the Jewish Agency, which is called Sochnut in Hungary. And the Szochnut found an office here, and I was one of its first employees, who helped to furnish this, and I worked a lot there, too, I arranged the transportation of the families. By this time they had employed a lot of Russian interpreters, mainly non-Jewish, but those who were born in the Soviet Union but whose father, mother lived in Hungary and spoke both Hungarian and Russian. And the Israeli security people also came here. The Hungarian police started to guard these, and because not many policemen speak Hebrew or English, they needed an interpreter, which I became. They took me from behind the desk and sent me to the Soviet barrack near the airport, which was empty at that time. And they equipped it with beds, blankets, kitchen, so at least 100 people worked there. Cleaners, cooks, waiters, and usually about 1000 Jews came there every day from the Soviet Union, which had to be fed and sent so that the next plane would take them. After a while we needed charter flights, because on the regular flights there was never enough room for them. There were days when 5000 people transited Budapest in one day. This lasted for 2 and a half years, and my task was to maintain the verbal communication between the policemen and the Israeli security men.

Then I was a guide on contract, I occasionally showed Budapest to groups from Israel. Nowadays I don't have any work anymore, because the Israelis rather go to other places, to the Croatian seaside for example. It's bad that really I have nothing to do. My wife usually says that I am the best when there is an emergency. At those times I become active and resourceful, otherwise I just live to myself. But nowadays I am reading with pleasure the policeman's notes and reports which I asked from the Historical Office, and which were written about us, about the Friday evening gatherings organized at the middle of the 1980s. These meetings were reported throughout, and now these reports are my favorite readings. Otherwise we are fine with my wife and we wait so see our grandchildren, my son and his wife, and we focus on what happens with them, because, so to speak, we are running out of time. My grandchildren, Moria, who was born in 1988, Yael, who was born in 1990 and Noa, who was born in 1997 are phenomenal. Yael was born one week before the gulf war/öböl-háború [1991], my daughter-in-law had a high-risk pregnancy, she had to stay in bed, so I went to their place and managed their household because my wife still worked at that time. My son and his family is what I care about the most. The entire political situation, whether Arafat or not, whether Diana Bacsfy [Editor's note: One of the advocates of the Hungarian movement.] or not Diana, whether Hussein or not Hussein, is an obscure question to me. I only care about my son

having a job and raising his daughters in good health.

## Glossary

### **1 The massacre of Kamenetz-Podolsk**

In 1941 approximately 18,000 Jewish people were handed over to the German army upon the order of the KEOKH. On August 27-28 SS-units gathered Jews brought from elsewhere to Kamenetz-Podolsk and shot them with machine-guns. The number of victims is difficult to determine. The SS district commander reported 23,600 dead, with the number of those transported from Hungary possibly exceeding 16,000. Some survivors returned to Hungary. Influenced by their evidence Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, who did not know about the mass murders, had the transports headed for Subcarpathia stopped immediately.

### **2 Hungarian Soviet Republic**

The Hungarian Soviet Republic was the political regime in Hungary from 21st March 1919 until the beginning of August of the same year. It was also the second Soviet government in history, the first one being the one in Russia in 1917. The communist government nationalized industrial and commercial enterprises, and socialized housing, transport, banking, medicine, cultural institutions, and large landholdings. In an effort to secure its rule the government used arbitrary violence. Almost 600 executions were ordered by revolutionary tribunals and the government also resorted to violence to expropriate grain from peasants. Only the Red Guard, commonly referred to as "Lenin-boys," was organized to support the power by means of terror. The Republic eliminated old institutions and the administration, but due to the lack of resources the new structure prevailed only on paper. Mounting external pressure, along with growing discontent and resistance of the people, resulted in a loss of communist power. Budapest was occupied by the Romanian army on 6th August, putting an end to the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

### **3 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

#### **4 'Levente' movement**

Para-military youth organization in Hungary from 1928-1944, established with the aim of facilitating religious and national education as well as physical training. Boys between the age of 12 and 21 were eligible if they did not attend a school providing regular physical training, or did not join the army. The Treaty of Trianon barred Hungary from keeping universal conscription and so this movement aimed to compensate this, too. On weekends, the boys not only took part in sport activities and marching drills, but also in practicing of the use of firearms guided by discharged or reservist military officers.

#### **5 Trianon Peace Treaty**

Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on 4th June 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries concerned. The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary). The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia). Hungary lost 67.3% of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4% of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian regimes.

#### **6 Air-attacks against Hungary**

The first air-alert in Hungary was on the 6th April 1941 in Budapest, when the Yugoslavian bombers approached the capital. In the following days many Hungarian towns suffered air-attacks. On the 26th June 1941 Kassa [today Slovakia] was bombed from battle planes of still unclear nationality. Budapest was first bombed by the planes of the Soviet army at the beginning of September 1942. In the second half of 1943 an aerial survey against Hungary began, and the allied air-arms regularly overflew Western-Hungary. The regular bombing of the country started in April and the target of these attacks were mainly the oil and armaments industry plants, the railroads and airports. In September 1944 a series of intensive bomb attacks started, during which American planes attacked the Hungarian cities during the day, and British and Soviet planes attacked during the night. The last attacks hit Sopron and Szombathely in March 1945. – andrea, please correct this when you are working on this material and send me the corrected glossary item. And the same goes for the other yellow ones. Thanks a lot. eszter

#### **7 Ration card system in Hungary (1940-1951)**

The ration card system was one of the bases of the public supply during WWII. Starting with the end of 1940 the supply was organized by the Public Supply Ministry. The government blocked the farm produce already at the beginning of the war; they distributed most of them centrally. The ration card system was only ended in 1949, but because of the wrongly-headed economic policy

there was a serious scarcity of goods in the second half of 1950, so they set the ration card system back partly: between January and April 1951 they introduced the sugar and flour ration card, the lard and soap ration card (February), the bread ration card, then meat ration card (April). In December 1951 they abolished the ration card system.

## **8 Yellow star in Hungary**

According to the order issued by the Hungarian government on 31st March 1944, all Jews over the age of six were required to wear a clearly visible yellow star (10 x 10 cm) on the left side of their clothing 'outside the house'. Doeme Sztojay's government, helped to power by the German invaders, announced dozens of measures to segregate and shear the Jewish population, serving as preparation for their deportation. Accordingly, Jews were forbidden to have or use a telephone, a radio or a car as well as to change dwelling. Non-Jews were forbidden to work in Jewish households; Jewish civil servants were fired - among others. War cripples and decorated veterans of WWI, Christian pastors, widows and orphans of both world wars, Jews married to Christians and converted as well as foreign citizens were exempt

## **9 The malenkij robot**

This was the term used for forced labor of the women, children and men who were deported from Hungary by the Soviet army to forced labor camps and prison-camps. About one third of the Hungarian prisoners were civilians. The deportation of the civilians happened in two waves. First they deported people right after the operations under the pretext of having to clear away the ruins, and 1-2 months later they gathered the civilians with a carefully planned action. In the background of the deportations, besides the need for man-power, there was the intention of collective punishment as well.

In the first wave the Soviet soldiers mislead the civilians, telling them that they would have to do urgent road reparation and ruin clearing labor service, and encouraging them saying 'malenkij robot,' which means small job. This term first became a household word, and then entered the academic terminology.

In principle the deportations only concerned the Germans in Hungary, but in fact most of the deportees were Hungarian.

The deportees were put in concentration camps, where they spent about 1-2 months, and from there they were transported to transit camps which were on Romanian territory. They got to one of the Soviet camps after several weeks of traveling in cattle cars. Most of the Hungarian prisoners of war and internees got to the GUPVI camps. They only took those to the GULAG who were condemned because of war crimes at the Soviet court-martial with the contribution of the Hungarian authorities. Those who returned from Soviet captivity were registered from 1946: about 330-380 thousand returned, and about 270-370 thousand died in the camps and during transportation.

The labor camps were usually just like prisoner of war enclosures. The prisoners worked at the mines in Donetsk [today Ukraine], lumbering and turf-cutting places in Siberia [today Russia], in collectives and bigger constructions. They usually got back to Hungary after several years. (Source: *Magyarország a második világháborúban*, Lexikon A—ZS, Budapest, 1997; Tamas Stark: „Magyarok

szovjet kenyszermunkataborokban”, *Kortárs*, 2002/2-3).

## **10 DEGOB**

founded in Budapest in March 1945, DEGOB joined the OZSSB (National Jewish Aid Committee) in August of that year (the latter coordinated the work of aid organizations). It helped deportees who were stuck abroad with getting home and gave widespread assistance during the critical years of 1945 and 1946. Last but not least it also documented data on the dead and those who survived. (DEGOB's information branch was co-opted by the relevant department of the World Zionist Congress in 1946.) DEGOB continued its social and aid activity until April 1950, at which time the OZSSB ceased to exist. The task was taken over by the central social committee of the National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites.

## **11 Tattersal (Horse racetrack on Kerepesi Street)**

After the arrow-cross takeover in October 1944, a systematic campaign against Jews began. Arrow-cross men and policemen together intruded into yellow-star houses and announced that men between the age of 16 and 60 were to leave within an hour. Later Jews selected by arrow-cross men and policemen were taken to the Tattersal or KISOK sports ground. Criteria and age limits specified by the authorities were often neglected and documents of exemption destroyed. The thousands of men who had been gathered were organized into labor companies and directed to dig trenches and to work on fortifications. Many died of starvation or exhaustion, as well as from torture by arrow-cross men, on the way to work.

## **12 Budapest Ghetto**

An order issued on 29th November 1944 required all Jews living in Budapest to move into the ghetto by 5th December 1944. The last ghetto in Europe, it consisted of 162 buildings in the central district of Pest (East side of the Danube). Some 75,000 people were crowded into the area with an average of 14 people per room. The quarter was fenced in with wooden planks and had four entrances, although those living inside were forbidden to come out, while others were forbidden to go in. There was also a curfew from 4pm. Its head administrator was Miksa Domonkos, a reservist captain, and leader of the Jewish Council (Judenrat). Dressed in uniform, he was able to prevail against the Nazis and the police many times through his commanding presence. By the time the ghetto was liberated on 18th January 1945, approx. 5,000 people had died there due to cold weather, starvation, bombing and the intrusion of Arrow Cross commandos.

## **13 1948 War of Independence in Israel (First Arab-Israeli War; May 15, 1948 - January 1949)**

The UN resolution of 1947, which divided Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, was rejected by the Arabs. After the British withdrawal and the proclamation of the State of Israel (May 14, 1947) Arab forces from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Transjordan (later Jordan) invaded Palestine's southern and eastern regions inhabited chiefly by Arabs. On the initiative of the USA and Great-Britain, since they were not interested in the formation of a strong Jewish state, peace talks resulted in armistice agreements between the hostile parties by February-July 1949, but no formal

peace. A sovereign Palestinian state was not established. Israel had increased its territory by about one-half. Jordan annexed the Arab-held area adjoining its territory (West Bank) and Egypt occupied a coastal strip in the SW including Gaza. In addition, about 750,000 Arabs had fled from Israel and were settled in refugee camps near in the neighboring countries.

#### **14 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 June 30, 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 members 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.

#### **15 1956**

Refers to the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November, and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

#### **16 AVH (and AVO)**

In 1945, the Political Security Department was created under the jurisdiction of the Budapest Police Headquarters, and directed by Gábor Péter. 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.

### **17 SZOT-holiday vouchers (SZOT = National Council of Trade Unions)**

The state ensured rest for those who worked in the state socialism, or at least it tried to keep up the appearance of doing so. The bigger factories, ministries had their own summer resort, the smaller factories, the companies got holiday vouchers based on the number of staff at the holiday resorts owned by the Trade Union. The vacation was a right, a privilege and the means of blackmailing the worker (the employee) at the same time. There were vouchers of different classes. Partly the quality of the place, the time of the voucher (big season, off-peak period), and partly the number of persons (for one person, for married couples and for people with child/family) determined its value which could not be expressed in money. The most valuable was the family voucher for big-season at the Balaton. One had to pay a symbolic amount of money for it, formally that was the price of the holiday, but in reality the one who got the voucher got manifold the paid amount ( accommodation of good quality and full board). There was a big fight for the vouchers because this was the only possibility to go on a holiday for most people. There were some SZOT vouchers available to foreign countries, too (to socialist countries of course). (Kozak, Gyula: *L abjegyzetek A hatvanas evek Magyarorszaga monografiahoz* /Manuscript/)

### **18 Scheiber, Sandor (1913-1985)**

Rabbi, literary historian, and doctor of linguistics. A descendant of rabbis on both parental sides, he was ordained in 1938. From 1938 to 1940 he studied Medieval manuscripts in libraries in Oxford, Cambridge and London. Between 1941 and 1944 he was the chief rabbi of Dunaföldvár. He lost both parents almost simultaneously: his father died in a hospital on December 28, 1944; three days later his mother was shot by arrow-cross men before his very eyes in a protected house (the so-called Glass House). Beginning in 1945 he reconstructed the Hungarian Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest, the only one in Central Europe, and was its head from 1950 until his death. Though he received various invitations from abroad, his parents' memory kept him home. His publications number 1600, and his main work was *Geniza Studies* (Hildesheim, 1981). By applying his method of comparative tradition and material history, he created an independent school of thought.

## **19 Blue Passport**

Valid for travels to the Western countries, the blue passport was applicable from the 1960s-1970s. The application form (in use up to the 1989 political changes) had a long list of questions to be filled out and it had to be signed by the leader at the workplace, the local party and labor organization secretaries, in case of young ones by the communist youth organization' secretary, and in case of applicants of military age the approval of the recruiting office also had to be attached. The valid passport in itself was not enough: for private individual traveling the Hungarian National Bank had to guarantee \$70, later \$100 allowable per person and its official promissory note of the foreign exchange had to be attached, too. The maximum duration of stay abroad was 30 days and only those countries could be visited that the applicant marked on the form. Anyone staying abroad longer, or visiting other than the marked countries, was excluded from traveling possibilities for five years. For "travel on invitation" purposes the same formal requirements existed but the allowable spending money was only five (5!) dollars and invitation letters were accepted only from relatives in theory.