

Zoltan Menzel



This is Zoltan Menzel, my husband, in 1933, when he graduated from Honterus High School, in Brasov. He's wearing the school uniform, and they also wore blue peaked caps.

Zoltan was born in Budapest in 1915, but after World War I he moved with his parents to Brasov, when he was in second grade at elementary school. He went to a German High School here in Brasov, called Honterus. He graduated in 1933, when Hitler came to power and anti-Semitism started to spread. I think he was in a special class: all of them remained united and close until they grew old and died. Every year they celebrated the anniversary of their High School graduation, either in Munich, Germany, where some of his former colleagues were living at the time, or here, in Brasov. My husband also went to the Jewish school here, he took some classes while at High School; he was Rabbi Deutsch's favorite student! His mother tongue was Hungarian.

His father, Iulius, worked as a commercial manager at a wood factory, and his mother, Etelka, was a housewife. At first, his mother didn't like me much: I was brought up to be an honest and dignified person, and she was used to all the Hungarian girls who were pursuing Zoltan, and who were buttering her up all the time. Zoltan was a handsome man, and women were crazy about him: he even had a photo album with all his former lady friends! I needed a lot of patience, I even tore up a few photos of some good-looking girls, but my patience paid off: we married, and had a very happy marriage.

My mother-in-law was a religious woman, but it was a different story with my father-in-law, who got baptized. It was such a scandal! When he came to Brasov, he made friends with the Lutheran priest, and he finally got baptized, I believe the priest persuaded him. His wife was so angry with him, she didn't speak to him for weeks. He did it when anti-Semitism started, maybe he was afraid, but when I asked him why he did it, he said that with Jews he had to wash his hands too often! It was a joke, of course, I think he was referring to the mikves, or to the fact that Jews were very clean people, and every time they used the toilet they washed their hands. My mother-in-law felt stranded from the community with such a husband, so she didn't go the synagogue anymore.

I met my husband, Zoltan Menzel, during the war, in 1940, in this very house I live in today, just upstairs, in a Jewish club called Ahava. I don't know if it was a Zionist club or not: it had several rooms, in some the ladies drank tea, and in others the men played cards. They organized balls from time to time, but that's all I know about the club. Zoltan wasn't a Zionist though, and neither was I.

During the war, Zoltan was drafted to forced labor, together with other young Jews from Brasov, and he had to go to work in construction, digging all over Brasov county. We got married when the war was over, in 1944. I don't know if it mattered so much to me that he was a Jew, but I didn't like anybody else. We didn't have a religious wedding, that cost money and we were broke, both unemployed.