

Zsuzsa Diamantstein

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Marosvasarhely

Romania

Interviewers: Julia Negrea and Vera Badic

Date of interview: March 2004

Zsuzsa Diamantstein is an agile, open view woman. She related gladly about her family and herself, animating the stories with humor. She lives alone in a three room apartment in the nicest place of the town, in the neighborhood of the Faculty of Medicine. At home she is surrounded with old and comfortable furniture, and her favorite is an old rocker chair, she got it from her sons. There are amateur paintings on the walls, plenty of books on the shelves. Her husband died, she has a close relation with her sons, grand-daughters and relatives. She has a very active life, two nephews eat daily at her place.



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My family background

From my father's side, the Riegelhaupt family was from Zakopane, so they were originally from Poland. Interestingly, in the camp where I was [in Cracow-Plaszow in Poland], I was together with Polish people – I spoke German, so I could talk with them – I told my name and a man told me that there was a street in Zakopane, Riegelhaupt ulice, 'ulice' means street, and a cobbler called Riegelhaupt. My paternal grandfather's name was Samuel Riegelhaupt, 'Riegel' means lock and 'Haupt' means main. I have no idea in which year my grandfather was born and when did he move near Olublo. My grandparents lived near Olublo in Czechoslovakia, or rather once it belonged to Poland, but now is in Slovakia. [Editor's note: Olublo, Stara Lubovna today, together with other towns from Szepes region was pawned to the Polish king in the 17th century (Hungary was under Turkish domination then).]

My grandmother's name was **Regina Riegelhaupt**, and I know she was born in Slovakia, but I don't know when. Her maiden name was **Goldman**. She was a housewife. I don't know how much education did she have, but she spoke German and she was religious. She had many brothers and sisters, but I only know about three of them. One of them was **Fulop Goldman**. He was a timber-merchant, and his brother **Henrik Goldman**, who also was a timber-merchant. They established the lumber mill in Lonya. Later they moved to Budapest, I don't know when, and both of them died there. When the Hungarian Soviet Republic [1](#) was established Fulop already lived in Pest, changed his name to Gati and convert to Unitarian religion. He had a wool-combing factory. He survived World War II. Henrik didn't convert and didn't change his name. The two brothers married accidentally two sisters, their name was Berger, if I remember correctly. They were originally from the Hunyad county, from around Hatszeg, but I'm not sure. From Fulop's marriage resulted a daughter, Agnes. She got married in Budapest. She had no children and unfortunately she died after World War II. Henrik had two sons, Sandor and Karoly. Sandor had no children, Karoly had a daughter, who lives in Budapest. I keep in touch with Karoly's daughter, whos name is **Vera**. She is single. We rarely talk, on the telephone, or sometimes when I go to Budapest we meet. I know only about one sister of my grandmother, her name was **Szabin**. She moved to Hatszeg, she got married there with a timber-merchant called Jozsef Abraham. They died after World War II. Their only daughter, Erzsebet, got married in Deva. Erzsike [Erzsebet] had two daughters, they live in Israel, but I don't keep in touch with them.

My paternal grandparents had two sons, my father, **Fulop**, and his younger brother, **Sandor**. There were no more children, because his first wife died in 1890, when the younger boy was born. My grandfather remained alone with two little children, he got married with a widow. I don't know the name of my step-grandmother, she was called Mrs. Friss, she was Jewish. I don't remember her at all, but I know she brought up her stepsons very fine, just as like her own child whose name was Armin Friss. He was older than my father, but they grew up together, like full brothers.

My [paternal] grandfather was the under-steward of a landlord. When I met him, that is as I remember him, he was an old man, he was already retired, he got a pension from the landlord, because he managed so honestly for so many years the estate. He lived in a village near Olublo, but close [to Olublo], because we went by carriage to this village, which if I remember correctly was called Kneza. [Editor's note: it's unlikely that the name was Kneza (in Arva county), but Gnezda (today Hniezdne, in Szepes county) which is 3 km from Olublo.] It wasn't far from Kassa [99 km far] because we went there to buy good things, and there was a bus service between Kassa and Olublo. My grandfather had a nice three rooms apartment, the local building style is very interesting. As I remember it, it was a direct entrance from the street into the house, there was a long corridor, and the rooms opened from the corridor, moreover, there was a stove in the corridor they used to bake bread during the winter. At the end of the corridor there was a door which gave onto the yard. There was a little garden, they even had a cow. A maid was hired to take care of these things.

My grandfather was an observant Jew, he had no payes, but he observed strictly the Jewish rules, he used to put on the tzitzit. I remember, he prayed every day. I remember the chamber my grandfather used to pray in the morning, it was a cool, big room. He observed the holiday rituals there. I can't tell whether there was a synagogue or not, but he prayed at home and I also remember that he was a well-respected man. The people from the village came for advice to my grandfather, because he was a smart, clever, old Jewish man, and they gladly listened to his

opinions and advice. Not only Jewish people came to him, the dwellers of the village came as well. As a matter of fact, 'Tots' lived there – 'Tot' is the Hungarian name for Slovaks – and as far as I remember, they discussed in German. I remember that at my grandfather's home we discussed in German, not in Yiddish, because none of us knew Yiddish. We were there just once, after my father died, and we didn't go there anymore. He had a kosher household, even now I feel the smell of the cake with cinnamon they baked for Sabbath. His wife didn't wear a wig, but they were religious people. When they arrived to us in Lonya – I know this from family stories, I was too little then – my mother changed all the dishes, because they were kosher. We weren't kosher, but in their honor they observed the kosher rules.

My father died in 1928 in Marosvasarhely, and then mom, my uncle Sandor, my aunt Regina, Sandor's wife – they had no children – and I went together to tell to my grandfather that his son died. That was the last time when I saw my grandfather. Considering that I was the only Riegelhaupt grandchild, and for comfort, they took me with them. We were there for a few weeks, we stayed at my uncle Armin Friss in Olublo and at my grandfather's house as well. My grandfather died shortly after, approx. in 1930 in Olublo. I think nobody [from Romania] attended the funerals. I think not even my uncle, Sandor. There was already a border separating the countries, and it was quite difficult to travel. So, Armin Friss, the stepson [of my grandfather] and his two sons were there [probably they buried grandfather].

Armin Friss was older than my father. He lived in Olublo, he had a prosperous lawyer's office there. He was a very well-situated man, he had a nice house, almost like a mansion, with a large garden, a carriage and a coachman. I remember I was there in 1928, after my father died. Armin had a very kind wife, I know only her surname, Aranka. She was also Slovak, she came from around Kassa, she was originally from there. They had two children, a boy called Odon and a girl called Marta, they were much older than me. As far as I remember, Marta was in a ballet-school in Dresden, but she had an accident and she couldn't continue the ballet, so she entered the faculty of philology. The son graduated in law, like his father. Armin Friss had a very interesting life, because after his wife died, I don't know when, and he remained widower, he became depressed: he had a breakdown and he became a religious maniac. In the 1930s he came to Romania and I met him and his daughter by chance in Kolozsvár, and we spent some very pleasant days together, he has fully recovered by then. Armin was deported during World War II, and he perished, so we don't know anything about him since. His son Odon, who was a leftist, got married with a Czech woman and fled to the Soviet Union before the war. We found out later that he went back to Czechoslovakia and he had given a high function in Pozsony, he was secretary general. He didn't keep in touch with my uncle Sandor because he was afraid that in his position a timber merchant could cause problems to him, although nobody persecuted my uncle, they liked him very much, he had no problems. Odon divorced his wife, and in the meantime the regime from Czechoslovakia changed, and he wasn't secretary general anymore, he worked in a history museum in Pozsony. Armin's daughter, Marta, fled to Budapest when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia [in 1939], thinking that there would be no problems, but the Arrow Cross [2](#) men caught and killed her there. My uncle Sandor found out [all these], so Marta didn't survive the Holocaust, neither.

Together with my husband we made a very nice trip [in the then Czechoslovakia] in 1980, and on this occasion I wanted to visit my predecessors' residence, and to find my grandfather's grave. I knew that I wouldn't find anybody alive, because they all perished, some of them by natural

causes, others as the victims of the Holocaust, but I wanted to see. I got to Olublo, I saw the little town was the same, only developed with huge blocks of flats, of course. I remembered when I was 6 there was a little park and a church in the main square, I only guessed where Armin's house was, because I couldn't speak with any survivors, and people told me that was a movie theater then. I insisted on going to the village where my grandfather lived and look for his grave. On the bus that took us from Kassa to Olublo I wanted to inquire about the village, but the Slovaks wouldn't speak in any language, no German, no English, no other language, so I wasn't able to find out anything. On the way back, at the bus station I heard a Hungarian conversation, and this is how we found out that the bus went to the village where my grandfather lived, but we didn't know about it [before] and we couldn't go back.

My father, **Fulop Riegelhaupt**, was born in 1887, near Olublo. My uncle Sandor related that an educator came to their home, I don't know whether one or more, but they learned to write, and in the meantime they also attended the elementary school in the village, but I don't know exactly how they finished school. Anyhow, both of them were very educated, even though they didn't had any higher education. I don't know in which language they studied then, most probably in German or Hungarian, but they had a beautiful writing. I wish the children of today could write as my father (I have one of his letters) or my uncle. My uncle was very cultured, he owned a big library later when he established in the Zsil valley, and he founded a family. My grandmother's siblings, the Goldmans, built a lumber factory in Lonya, Lonea in Romanian. This is a coal mine settlement in the county of Hunyad. Lonya is near Petrozsény, a few kms away, then comes Petrilla [the distance between Petrozsény and Petrilla is 5 km]. These are all coal mine settlements in the Zsil valley. There was this lumber-mill and this is how my uncle Sandor ended up there at the age of 15 to learn timbering. I don't know exactly how their life went on, but it is a fact that they got to the Zsil valley [together with my father] when they were already adults, and it was still a Hungarian world then [Editor's note: Zsuzsa Diamantstein refers to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy] and so they remained here, in Romania [Editor's note: that is Lonya got under Romanian authority after the Trianon Peace Treaty.] ³ My father was the manager of the lumber-mill and my uncle did the business part, he traveled, he was a timber merchant. The timber merchants had to bargain all the time, but this was only for a short period, because my father got sick and slowly the mill was closed down.

When my father wanted to get married, he came to Marosvasarhely, mom was introduced to him, and they ended up together somehow and mom got married in 1919. The fact is they were brought together. The marriage took place in Marosvasarhely, I don't know if it was a religious wedding with a rabbi, but I'm sure it was. I'm pretty sure because my mother's youngest sibling wedded there as well, and it was a normal wedding with a rabbi and chuppah. Mom never related about the wedding, I don't know why. It was such a short and sad marriage, they lived together only nine years of which four or five they spent going from one hospital to the other.

My maternal grandfather's name was **Armin Mittelmann**. He was born in Lippa, near Arad, in 1863, and from there he got to Marosvasarhely, in fact first to Szaszregen. My grandfather was a tall, slender, handsome man, he had a moustache even when he was old. He was handsome even when he became old. I have memories about him from when I was around 4. They loved me very much, I was the first grandchild and especially later, when my father got sick, my mother went to the hospitals with my father, I spent a lot of time with them. So I became very fond, especially to

grandpa, because grandma was already dead by then.

Grandpa graduated middle school, and this was something then to finish middle school, even without having a diploma. That's why he was able to work at a bank, he was the manager of the savings bank from Marosvasarhely. Today the Casa Armatei [the Army House] is there, on the corner [on Petofi square]. This was a highly placed institution and he had a high position. He was very appreciated because he was a very honest and intelligent man. He wasn't rich, he had a fixed wage, and he sustained his five children and his wife with it. My grandparents were Neologs. Grandpa didn't pray at home, at least while I stayed there. He probably did it when he was young, but the Jews from Arad's neighborhood were usually assimilated who stayed with their religion, but they grew up in the Hungarian culture. Grandpa Mittelmann used to go to the synagogue on high holidays with a hat on his head, they had a kosher household at home while grandma lived, but after she died, when he got married for the second time, he married a Protestant woman so they didn't have a kosher household anymore, but he always observed the high holidays.

My grandparents' house was in Marosvasarhely, grandpa stayed in Regen only until my mother and his brother, Sandor were born. My grandfather had five children, the other three were born in Vasarhely. I don't know which year they moved to Marosvasarhely, but mom went to school there, so it means they moved when she was still very young. My grandparents didn't have their own house in Vasarhely, they lived in the Mestitz house, on the Dozsa Gyorgy street - today it's the dermatology clinic. The Mestitz family lived upstairs [Editor's note: Centropa made an interview with Julia Scheiner (nee Mestitz). Zsuzsa talks about her parents here] and my grandparents downstairs, they were on very, very good terms. When mom remained a widow, we lived there together with the grandparents, until mom, after two years, got married for the second time. My grandparents - interestingly, I remember very well the apartment - had three big rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. Grandma took care of the household. There were two maids [helping her], Hungarian girls, they came from the countryside, one of them helped out in the kitchen - there were three normal meals and a hot supper, so they had to cook - the other girl cleaned, and she probably supervised the children.

My mother had four siblings, she was the eldest. The next was **Sandor** Mittelmann, who was born in 1898 in Szaszregen, like mom, he graduated high school and worked as a clerk, I don't know where. He married a Roman-Catholic girl from Marosvasarhely, called Iren Dudutz. They moved later [after World War I] near Regen, to Marosfelfalu. There was a mill my uncle managed. During World War I Sandor was in Italian captivity, he was a silver medalist lieutenant or chief lieutenant, I don't exactly know, but it is important because he was deported anyway [during World War II, even though he should have been under exemption from deportation] [4](#) and he perished there. In spite of the fact that he had Christian wife, he was a white arm-banded forced laborer first, and then he was taken to a camp in Austria where he died. They had a son, Istvan, he was born in 1927, he still lives in Szaszregen, he is single and retired.

The next child, **Agnes**, was born in 1903. She graduated high school and married quite young a bank manager from Szaszregen, Sandor **Mendel**. They had two children, a daughter, Johanna, who was born in 1926, and a son, Tamas, who was born in 1929. Unfortunately Agnes, along with her husband and Johanna, perished in Auschwitz. Tamas lives in Kolozsvar, he is an engineer and he is retired now. At the age of 15 he was deported, he was a bright boy and miraculously he survived. He was together with Laci Grun [Editor's note: Centropa made an interview with Laszlo Grun, as

well]. A German foreman from there liked him very much, and he saw Tamas was a single child so he tried to help him as much as he could. Tamas lives in Kolozsvár, he has two sons, both of them live in Israel.

The next child was **Aliz, Vertes** after her husband. She was born in 1911 in Marosvásárhely. She married a merchant, Gyula Vertes, in 1933 in Arad, and they had a paint store there. Her husband died in 1955. Aliz wasn't deported, she had two children: Adam Vertes, born in 1936, and Eva, who was born in 1939. Both of them live in Bucharest, so around 1960 aunt Aliz moved to her son, Adam. Poor her died in 1986. My two cousins live in Bucharest, I keep in touch with them.

The youngest son, **Gabor** Mittelman was born in 1912, he was a merchant, a charming, very kind boy, he was single and he perished in the Bor camp [in Serbia], supposedly he was shot.

Grandma and grandpa both had two siblings, who used to visit each other. The family was big, so they had quite a family life. Grandpa had two sisters, one of them was called **Dora Mittelman** while the other was **Rozsi**, and she was even younger, but they seemed so old to us. I loved them very much. Dora married József Lazar as a 'spinster' and they lived in Vasárhely. They had no children because her husband was an old Jewish man, but he was a very honest, straight and religious man. He was an egg merchant, he had an egg warehouse in Marosvásárhely, but I don't remember where. They were Neologs too, Dora didn't wear a wig, but they observed the Jewish rules, they had a kosher household, and they went to the synagogue on holidays, of course. At that time, while József Lazar was still alive, they had a house on Hosszu street [today it's the December 1st 1918 boulevard]. The house is still there, on the side where the Radio Studio is, I can't tell which one, but it had a typical way up. They had a very nice, shiny, tidy home, furnished with contemporary furniture, and they had a bedroom, a dining room, and everything a middle-class house used to have. They had no maid.

The name of Rozsi's husband was **Jakab Spitzer**, he was originally from Arad, they lived there for a while, too. He died in World War I, as a hero. Aunt Rozsi, as a young widow, moved to Marosvásárhely. She took care of the household in my grandfather's house, after grandmother died young. Auntie Rozsi cooked very well, nobody could bake so good like her. I remember she could bake very delicious Purim cookies. When grandpa got married, she moved to her sister, Dora. They lived together because József Lazar was very old and he died shortly after, so they lived together with the help of grandpa. Grandpa assisted them financially because there was no pension then and they weren't rich. They moved from there [from Hosszu street], the house was sold and since they had no income, grandpa supported them. They moved to a little apartment in the so-called Fogház street [today it's Retezatului street], opposite to the prison. There was an apartment house there, and they lived together in a one room apartment until they were deported. They were younger than grandpa, but even so they were over 70 when they were deported from Marosvásárhely. They used to visit grandpa on Friday evening, and we used to chat then – there was no radio then, it was a big deal to have one then. When grandpa got his first radio, one with an earphone, I was still a little girl, it was around 1929, and the whole family gathered around the earphones and listened to the radio.

My grandmother, **Sarolta Mittelman**, grandpa's first wife was a Jewish woman, her maiden name was Sarolta Weisz. She was born in Belényes [Bihar county]. I don't know how they got acquainted with each other, but it was a love match, not an arranged one – grandma was a pretty,

charming and nice woman. While she was still alive, they observed the Jewish traditions, they had a kosher household. My grandpa wasn't a religious Jew, he wasn't Orthodox, he was Neolog. Grandma died very young, in 1926, she had brain tumor. Grandpa's sister took care of the household for a while, but even then we used to observe the holidays, for example the Pesach with changed dishes, without bread, and the eves of Seder. A garniture of dishes and china for the dinner was put away, and when Easter came they put the dishes what we used normally in a chest, and they took those which wasn't chometz. The family came together, at least who remained, and my grandpa leaded the Seder eves.

What I know about my grandmother's family is that they were perhaps six sisters. One of her sisters, **Rozalia Weisz**, lived in Vasarhely. She got married, and just like her husband, died very young. A daughter resulted from this marriage, Erzsebet, or Boske [which was her nickname from Erzsebet], who was adopted by my grandparents after she remained orphan. I was already a big girl when I found out she wasn't mom's sister, she was my aunt. She was older than mom with one or two years, she grew up in my grandfather's house and grandpa married her off. **Boske** married **Jakab Laszlo**, a Jew. They had three children, Miklos, Pal and Katalin. They lived in Meggyesfalva [Meggyesfalva, Mureseni in Romanian, is a suburb of Marosvasarhely today]. Jakab was the manager of a distillery there – he didn't own it, just managed it. When the family came together on holidays, they used to gather at grandpa's house, and Boske used to come with her family, as well. They slept at grandpa's, they didn't want to go back by carriage in the night to Meggyesfalva. So the family came together and we had a very nice Seder eve. When the distillery closed down, Boske's family moved to Vasarhely, I think Jakab took up accounting, but I don't know precisely. Boske, together with her husband and Katalin, perished in Auschwitz. Miklos, the elder son, came home from forced labor to Vasarhely, he got married and emigrated to Israel. They had a child. I didn't keep in touch with Miklos, he died in Israel in 1986. Pal, the younger son, also came back from forced labor, he got married and they lived for a while in Marosvasarhely. They had a son, Andras. Andras was the age of my elder son. They emigrated to America in 1960 or 1961. Pal died in 1986. His wife, together with his son, still live there. I keep in touch with them through letters.

Grandma had another sister, **Berta Weisz, Konig** after marriage. She remained widow very young and she raised her five daughters. They lived in Marosvasarhely, she sustained her family from sewing, the girls grew up slowly and all of them worked. The eldest, Piroska, married a Romanian pharmacist. They lived in Marosvasarhely, and they had a daughter, she was my age. Ilonka **Konig** wasn't deported because her husband was Romanian, and they moved to Temesvar for the period Northern Transylvania was reannexed to Hungary [according to the Second Vienna Dictate] [5](#), so aunt Ilonka wasn't taken away. Unfortunately she deceased, she died of natural causes. Then came Piroska **Konig**, she had no children. Paula **Konig** was married, she had no children, **Margit** Konig was married and she had two daughters. The youngest sister, **Dora** Konig was divorced. So, from the Konig family four daughters and their mother, not to mention Margit's children, perished in Auschwitz, none of them survived.

Another sister was **Gizella Weisz, Abraham** after her husband, I think she was the eldest, I don't know exactly. She also was a widow, when I met her, I only knew her as a widow. She had two daughters. Before World War II they moved to Bucharest and all the family died of natural causes there. The next sister was **Lujza Weisz, Nagy** after her husband, who was a Jew. She remained a widow, as well. She had a daughter, Lili, and they lived in Marosvasarhely for a while, but then they

also moved to Bucharest, and died of natural causes there. My grandma probably had another **Weisz** sister, but I don't know her name, she was married and she had two sons. One of them lived in Marosvasarhely, he was a lawyer, and together with his wife perished in Auschwitz. Their two daughters came back, but they emigrated to Israel.

On holidays, at the Pesach dinner, there wasn't a great strictness in my grandfather's house, the youth was joking, there was a good atmosphere, and considering that there were no boy-children, I was the young child who said in Hebrew the 'Mah nishtanah'. I attended the Jewish elementary school, but now I don't even know a letter today, although I could read well in Hebrew. Unfortunately we did not know the language, we learned automatically [memorized] the prayers, but we didn't understand what we were reading. We just said the prayer for the respective occasion, without understanding it. I had to hide the matzah [the afikoymen]. I remember I had a medallion with Moses and the Torah, I asked for it on one of these occasions, and once I asked for a pair of shoes, as well.

Grandpa went to the synagogue on holidays and we had the afferent dinner [at home], what was prescribed to eat: meat-soup, kremzli, 'yellow cake' with caudle, I didn't like it, but my mother baked it for those who liked it. The yellow cake was in fact a sponge-cake, flushed with a flavoring sauce to prevent it from being clammy. The sauce was made from sugar, egg and wine, this was the caudle. Not to mention the delicious dinner on Rosh Hashanah. The meat-soup was made before Yom Kippur, together with the apple-sauce and the apple-pie – this was the evening before the fasting. On the next day, when the fast ended, when we came back from the synagogue, after Yom Kippur, everybody got on an empty stomach – including the children – a drop of spirit, to keep them from eating immediately. They told this is the healthy way, and we all drank the coffee with milk and ate the delkli with curd then, and later, after a while, when we digested the first meal, we had paprika chicken. When grandpa's sister stopped taking care of the household, this habit disappeared [the family gathering to observe the Jewish holidays].

Grandpa's second wife was, **Viola**, a Protestant woman, her maiden name was **Tavaszi**. I know about one of her sisters, Margit, Rostas after his husband, they lived in Marosvasarhely. They had two daughters: Klara, who was my age, and I don't know the name of the elder sister. Both of them married Protestant priests. Klara Rostas lived in Marosvasarhely, she divorced and died young. Her daughter and her son live in Marosvasarhely.

Grandpa married Viola Tavaszi in 1928, she was an extremely decent woman, she adapted herself to the family very well. She lived in Marosvasarhely, she was a clerk when my grandpa married her. She was single before, grandpa was her first husband, but she wasn't young when she got married. They lived happily together until grandpa was deported. It didn't matter that his wife was Christian, he remained naturally Jew. They observed the Jewish traditions, Viola was already familiar with the ways how to do them, but because grandpa had his birthday on 24th December, my step-grandmother made her little Christmas tree, and then the family came to greet grandpa and to celebrate Christmas. Our family did it very, very nicely. On holidays, on any kind of holiday, my grandparents used to cook always the meals adequate to the occasion. At the Jewish holidays my grandparents observed the adequate traditions, and on the Christian holidays, Christmas or Easter, they used to cook delicious dinners, as well. There always was a state dinner – auntie Viola cooked it. I didn't call her grandma, I called her auntie Viola.

Before the war [World War II] there wasn't a problem the dual nationality, dual religion. In our family it didn't matter, the essential was to be straight. (When I was in the camp and we worked on Christmas in the factory, I cried awfully. I worked near a Czech woman, she wasn't allowed to speaking to us, but she told me 'don't cry', but I kept crying because I remembered this... [the memory of Christmas times]).

My mother's maiden name was **Paula Mittelmann**. There was no Jewish school at the time my mother was a child, therefore she finished the four classes of elementary school and the four classes of middle school in Marosvasarhely in a Catholic denominational school. The building of the convent is now the art school on Szentgyorgy street [Revolutiei street today]. Nuns managed it, they were the teachers and my mother graduated middle school there. After middle school girls weren't used to attend high school then, there were no girls' high schools, so that was the highest school my mother finished. I don't know where was the girls' high school. Her younger sister, Agnes finished high school.

My mom was considered a beautiful woman at her time. She had white skin, and she hadn't a thin, boy-like stature, flepper as they called it then, but a full figured, tall one. In a word she was a very nice girl, with beautiful blond hair. She had a very long hair. As an adult, she kept her hair in a knot, her knot was heavy, and she told us the heavy knot always gave her a headache. Only after she got married – they were still living in Lonya–, in the 1920s, shorter hair came into fashion, so she had her hair cut in order to prevent her suffering more from the heavy knot. When she was a girl, she was the 'belle of the ball' in Marosvasarhely: she was Miss Ball and Miss Vasarhely. Her story is very interesting: considering that grandpa was a bank manager, thus an important person in a small town like Marosvasarhely, he was invited to the balls. During the war – as far as I know it happened in 1918 – there was a very high-class ball in Marosvasarhely, where archduke Jozsef also made his appearance [Editor's note: archduke Jozsef Habsburg (Alcsut, 1872 – Rain bei Straubing, Bavaria, 1962) field-marshal, governor, member of the Hungarian Academy (corresponding from 1906, full between 1917-1945), nephew of palatine Jozsef, participated in World War I as constable.] and he asked mom the first dance. It meant that mom was a very beautiful girl, she wasn't invited for her social position, but for her aspect, indeed. Mom related this proudly. I think the Palace of Culture already existed, and the ball was surely held there.

Shortly after the end of the war, mom got married in 1920, at the age of 23. She moved near Petrozseny. And since my father was a timber merchant, they lived in a lumber mill in Lonya. Lonya was a mine settlement, but apart from that there was a lumber mill, as well. Some of the clerks who worked there were Jews, on the other hand there were many Jews in Petrozseny, and a synagogue, too. Regarded to those times, uncle Goldman was a manager who had a very high social concern, and built beautiful workers' dwellings. These were storied, beautiful brick buildings. The workers had one or two room apartments, the clerks had a separate building and they also lived in Lonya, but not in the workers' dwellings, but in another area of the mill plant, where there was a separate building for clerks, with apartments with more rooms. A one room apartment was given to two singles and the newly married couples, while those with families got a two room apartment. There was a common bath, because they had a boiler. The guests who came to buy board or were on business trip, were lodged in guest-chambers, because there was no hotel in Lonya.

We had an apartment, too, in the building where the clerks lived. I don't remember exactly if we had one or two rooms. My dad managed the whole lumber mill while he was healthy. All the people had an extraordinary respect for my father. There was a man in Vasarhely, at the Jewish community, uncle Tischler, he also worked as clerk in the Zsil valley and he had business relations with my father, and he told me that when Fulop Riegelhaupt said something [yes or no], one could rely on it, no documents were needed because his word was enough. When my father fell sick and didn't work anymore in Lonya, we had a very nice apartment in Petrozsény then, four rooms, bathroom, balcony, in a word it was a very nice apartment we rented.

They lived very happily there, my mother was well off, she was unbelievably pampered, she didn't work anywhere. She was on very good terms with her sister-in-law, Sandor's wife, they had the same age. Her sister-in-law was born in Vulkan (Vulcani in Romanian). Her name was **Regina Lovi**, she was Jewish. My uncle worked there and they met this way, they married very young.

Growing up

I was born in Vasarhely, on 17th June 1922, in my grandparents' house, in the Mestitz house, because my mom came home from Lonya to give birth, because Lonya was just a mill plant and she wanted to give birth here, near her mother. Women used to give birth at home then, not in the hospital. My mother couldn't feed me because there were no nutriments then, so I had a foster nurse. My grandmother found out in the meantime that in Vasarhely there were nutriments, some Swiss ones, called **Nestle**. This product appeared then and my grandmother sent it to my mother, to try to feed me with it, because I was starving a lot, so I cried almost all the time, because I had nothing to eat, the babies were raised by breast-feeding then. Later I had a governess called **Grete**, she was a girl from Szaszsebes and she remained with us until I started to go to school. I learned German from her.

My parents had a very nice life. There were many young people then. There were no pools then, but at the lumber mill there was tennis court for the clerks, and they used to play tennis. There was a canteen, a shared kitchen, a woman cook, so mom didn't have to cook. There was a jolly life, they used to go with a two-horse carriage to Petrozsény to the candy store and cafe. I don't know if there was a cinema or not, but it was a casino and they also used to get together there to play cards. They had a lot of fun, they lived well.

When my father got sick, mom took him to doctors from Pest to Prague, from Prague to Berlin, she took him to all the possible places. He was treated with radium because they said he had cancer, spine sarcoma, and he ended up in a sanitarium for neuropaths in Kolozsvár, where he was operated again. He was operated before that, as well, I don't know where, but the last place he was in was the Nerva Sanitarium in Kolozsvár. [Editor's note: the former sanitarium now is the building of the CFR (Romanian Railways) hospital today, it was built by the Wesselenyi family, and for a period it was the Nerva neuropath sanitarium. In 1929 it was reopened as a private urology-surgery sanitarium called Charite.] When my father got to the grade where nothing could be done, they took him home to Marosvasarhely to grandpa's house. From the hospital a young doctor and a nurse came together with him. He died after a short period, four or six weeks. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Vasarhely. I barely knew him. I was together with him just for a short period of time, however they said I resemble him. When he died, in 1928, mom moved home to grandpa's house in Vasarhely, together with all her things, furniture and everything. This traveling and all

made mom spend all her money, and moreover, even grandpa's and uncle's money as well.

After my father died, uncle Sandor managed the factory for a while, then it became a stock company. We had no stocks there, but the truth is I don't know what happened after that. I remember that the lumber-mill operated for a while. After that it was closed down, before World War II, already in the Romanian era [Editor' note: Zsuzsa Diamantstein referred to the period between the wars, when following the peace treaty of Trianon, Transylvania returned under Romanian authority.] Each year I used to go to my uncle in Petrozsény, my father was already dead, but we always got to Lonya, to see what's going on. When the holiday began, I spent the summer holiday at my uncle's – I went by myself there. This was my second home. Together with the friends we went to excursions to Petrozsény's neighborhoods, the Zsil valley was beautiful, wherever one went. We went on excursions for an afternoon or a whole day, we didn't spend the night there. Nobody had a car, but we rented one, so we got to the location. There we climbed the mountain, but we didn't do much climbing, we preferred eating. We ate cold meal then, I remember there were delicious salamis and cheeses. I don't know whether we drank alcohol or not, but it was a very jolly company, and we had fun. It was an interesting small town, Petrozsény was a miner town, it was asphalted, had water piping, in a word there was a very cultured life, the inhabitants lived well there. I have nice memories about Petrozsény. I went to my uncle for many years, until Northern Transylvania was reannexed to Hungary [in 1940]. My uncle was like a father to me. My uncle didn't like the timber business, and after World War II he became a photographer, this was his hobby. He became a professional photographer, but he had no private studio, he was the press photographer of the Romanian newspaper from Petrozsény. They liked and respected him all over the town. He was a very honest man. Naturally, after World War II I contacted my uncle. [After returning from the deportation] I visited him, and I was on the point of moving there, but in the meantime I got acquainted with my husband and I married him in Vasarhely. My uncle wasn't religious at all, but he stuck to his Jewish origins. My father's younger brother died in 1981 in Petrozsény, he is buried in the Jewish cemetery. His wife, **Regina**, who died in the 1960s is also buried there.

Mom was 31 when she remained a widow. She came home to Marosvasarhely and after two years married my stepfather. I think he was five years older than mom, and he was a bank clerk here in Vasarhely, but he was born in Fogaras, as far as I know. They knew our family very well, my stepfather's parents and my maternal grandparents were on very good terms. My stepfather, **Karoly Riemer**, graduated the Business Academy from Vienna. He was sent to the front as an ensign, and he was taken prisoner in as early as 1915. He came home from Russian captivity in 1922. He was taken to many places, but in the end he ended up in Tashkent [Uzbekistan]. He played very well the violin, and when they were allowed to move freely in captivity, except from letting them go home, they formed an orchestra. There were only a few people who played the violin and they began to play at the circus first. They began to play in restaurants, at weddings, Jewish weddings, to Mongolian yurtas in the steppe, they played everywhere. They evolved quite nicely, they even held classic concerts after they formed a quartet. Later he entered the music academy of Tashkent as a violin teacher. They were four, I believe they were all Jews, but I don't know precisely, anyway this lasted for 7 years. Mom was already married when my stepfather came home to Vasarhely, I was born just then. He also lived in Pest for a while, he was single. The two families knew each other very well, and so he got acquainted with mom and as this developed into a very nice love story. It was a happy, ideal and beautiful marriage, and I loved my stepfather

very much because he never even said I should move over [he never had a bad word for me]. My step-grandfather had a very nice tailor shop in Vasarhely. He used to order the materials from England, and this was a very good, high class shop. Before mom married my stepfather, he wasn't even at home, but as a little child they used to take me to the tailor shop because my step-grandfather loved me very much, he had no grandchildren. Beside my stepfather, he had two sons and a daughter, but none of them had children. When mom married, my mother's father got scared because my mother had to live together with a man who had a fixed salary, and mom used to spend money like water, in the period when my father was healthy. But what people do for love? My mother became a brilliant housewife, although she barely knew how to cook, because she never had to cook before. At home, until she was a big girl, not to mention that she was the oldest sister and she used to direct the younger ones. The children were awfully afraid of her because otherwise mom was a very energetic woman. She was very severe with me, as well, while I was the only child. They had a beautiful marriage, although they only spent 15 years together.

My stepfather wasn't religious at all. They were assimilated Jews, they had the Jewish consciousness, but they weren't religious. Grandpa Riemer also began from nothing, and according to his wife, my step-grandmother, after the first year of marriage they were very happy they managed to buy a mattress, because until then they slept on a straw mattress. So they achieved what they had with their own hands. But they educated their children, everyone learned music. My stepfather attended the Business Academy in Vienna, and his next son, **Oszkar Riemer**, graduated high school and later he got to the front and died as a hero in World War I. There is a war memorial column in the Jewish cemetery in Marosvasarhely, which lists all the Jewish soldiers who died as heroes. Oszkar Riemer is one of them, moreover, as far as I know there is a memorial in the Protestant cemetery, as well, which also lists the soldiers who died during World War I.

They had a sister, **Ilonka**, who got married in Kolozsvar, she was a beautiful woman. Her husband was Mor Erdos, a Jewish engineer. Ilonka was a housewife, she wasn't entirely healthy, so Mor spoiled her, he was worried about her. They lived a very nice life, but they had no children. She had a beautiful voice, she was a good piano player, and they traveled a lot together. They had a very elegant, civilized home, a home of a couple of high intellect – the husband earned probably well as engineer. He built forest railways, as far as I know, but later he gave up this occupation and (when I was already part of this family) he had an wholesale store in Kolozsvar. They moved from this apartment to another one, which was also beautiful, big and splendid. When I came back from the deportation, I found out she, together with her husband, they were in Kolozsvar during the Holocaust because there was a Hungarian surgery professor, Klimko, who saved them and others, as well. He kept them in the hospital [this was one way of having exemption from the deportations], so he didn't extradite them when they wanted to take them away [to deport them]. So they both survived.

My stepfather's youngest brother, **Erno Riemer**, graduated business high-school, but he also knew how to play the violin, my aunt [Erno's sister, Ilonka] knew how to play the piano and to sing. Erno learned tailoring and he went to Vienna and joined in a very elegant men's wear store. First he was an employee, but later he became an associate. The other associate wasn't Jewish, at least that's what I think, and the company ran under the name 'Stoll und Riemer' [Stoll and Riemer], but then Erno remained alone. He used to order materials from England, he did the tailoring. He did the following: he went to England to learn about English tailoring, ordered a suit, went home and

unwove it to see how they did it. The next time when he went to England he was invited to a distinguished party. The party was organized on a ship deck, and he made a white tuxedo for himself. He was such a handsome man, he could easily be a movie star. London's best tailor also attended that party, and he was looking for my uncle to find out who this elegant man was... So Erno was this type of man, who got married and later he divorced. The Anschluss [6](#) already had taken place, Hitler already invaded Austria. So my stepfather was very anxious – because his parents were still alive then – about what would happen to Erno, but he wrote all the time 'I'm well, I'm very busy...' He didn't write about whom he worked for or who needed his work, because it was prohibited for Jews to work then. Later, one day, they received a notice from him, from Belgium. He did the following: he had a right hand, a woman, who took care of the administration, and Erno used all the stock to make suits. He invested all his money into the suits, he sold them, and he bought a round-trip boat ticket to Australia, which was an enormous sum. And in the last moment he defected to Belgium, but it was really in the last moment, because the Gestapo got there on the next day. So he got to England and he settled there. He was a very good friend of mom's, she wasn't on good terms with my stepfather [in her childhood] due to the difference of age, she was in good relations with Erno, who was the classmate of my mother's younger brother, Sandor. They were good buds from childhood and they loved each other. But Erno didn't even ask me, after I was the only one who came back from the deportation, 'hey you, how are you? what are you living from?'.

Grandpa Mittelman was my tutor from my maternal side, and after my father's death he took care of issues related to the life-insurance by buying a big house in which he also invested this money. This was a corner building on the boulevard, one side was opposite to the building which is the Unirea [high] school today, the other side gave onto the boulevard. The family was big then, the youngsters, Aliz and Gabi were still at home. They held the [wedding] ceremony at home, and considering that it was mom's second marriage they didn't make a big fuss about it. I remember that the chuppah was under the gate and the marriage took place there. I was in the first grade then, and they took me away from home during the ceremony. [Editor's note: according to the Jewish tradition, children are not allowed to attend their parents' wedding.] I know there was a dinner after the ceremony. It was the only time the family gathered. Mom and my stepfather went to Brasso for the great honeymoon. My name remained Riegelhaupt, but mom changed it to **Riemer** after the marriage.

When my stepfather married mom, my parents, together with the Riemer grandparents, moved to the Albina building, opposite to the Romanian Orthodox church. The bank was there, but there were flats as well, not too many, though. Usually the clerks of the Albina bank used to live in the flats, but they also rented them to others, and the Riemer grandparents lived in one of those flats. After mom married, the grandparents moved to Kolozsvár, because their daughter Ilonka lived there, and with the help of their son, Erno, they built a very nice house there. So they left the flat to us. It was a very nice flat with three big rooms, kitchen and bathroom. Heating was a big problem, they used wood for heating with stove, and it was difficult to heat the flat. We lived on the second floor, we had to bring up the wood from the cellar. But we had a maid servant, a household employee, and she used to take the wood from the cellar to the second floor, where we lived. They always ordered the wood during fall, and since there was a cellar, they used to store the wood there. They cut up the wood, there was a specialized company, for example a family who was doing this, they had a sawing-machine and they went wherever they were requested to. There was

plumbing in the building, bathrooms with flushing closet – we lived in civilized conditions.

My parents read a lot, we had a library at home. I usually read Hungarian books, Hungarian literature and world literature. And my parents did the same. In my childhood I read all the novels of Jokai, the children from today consider them boring, but I liked them very much then. [Editor's note: Mor Jokai (1825–1904) is a representative of romanticism in the Hungarian literature.] I used to read books by Jules Verne, and novels for youth, just about anything that that was published. One of my favorite prose-writers is Sandor Marai even today. [Editor's note: Sandor Marai (1900–1989), novelist, short story and memoir writer, poet, journalist and playwright. A true cosmopolitan, he was a protector of civil values; he died in exile in San Diego, and his later writings could only be published in Hungary after the downfall of Communism.] My parents didn't intervene, they didn't tell me what to read. My stepfather was a high-cultured man, he read, wrote and spoke in five languages: he learned Hungarian [at home], he learned German at the Academy, Russian on the front, in captivity he learned English and he already knew French, and when he came back in 1922 he needed Romanian, he didn't just pick up Romanian, he learnt it with a tutor. He played very well the violin, and in our family there was chamber music every week – it was very nice. Many musicians came there, in turns. Dad was always the second violin. Etel Magos was the first violin and dad the second violin. Geza Kozma was the cellist, and a man called Muller was the violist. Sometimes they had a piano in the quintet. They played so well, that in Vasarhely they even had a concert in the Palace of Culture. In the Albina, where we lived, I slept in the dining room, I had my couch there. While they played the chamber music, I used to lie in mom's bed, and when the music was over, while I was still little, my father used to take me out in his arms, or I went there half asleep, because music always made me fall asleep. No other musician came there, they were playing only for their own pleasure.

When grandpa Mittelmann retired and my aunt Aliz got married - because in the apartment on the Boulevard there were six rooms – my parents decided to move there from the Albina flat, and they divided the rooms: half of them was ours, the other half was used by my grandparents. My mother took care of the household, because we had only one kitchen. So we moved in there. We had a housemaid, my grandparents had another one, and then – because the apartment was big, and we were many there – both maids remained to help out mom. One of them used to do the work in the kitchen, while the other one used to clean up the place. It wasn't like today, when they only come once a week, they brushed the parquet daily and there was a serious cleaning. Not to mention that washday was a big deal then. The washwoman came, and they rubbed [the clothes] in two rounds, they boiled, starched and blued them. At that time there was no colorful table-linen, no colorful bed-linen, so the bed-linen and the table-linen was white. To make them white as snow, they put a liquid in the last wash water, it was called starch blue, which didn't stain the clothes, but gave them a nice, white color. The water became blue, and thereby the white clothes became china white. And the underclothes... I remember that I cried a lot in my childhood because there were the so called bodies, made from fine linen, cambric canvas, and they starched them and they hurt me so much I had to wrinkle them before using not to be too rough. It was terrible to wear them, as far as I remember. Not to mention men's shirts, collars, those were really difficult to clean. At that time they used to conserve food especially for the winter, they canned everything, from vegetables to tomatoes and pickles. As far as I remember, the cellar wasn't good in this big building, but there were larders we could use. In fall it was pasta conserving time. A woman, who had different sieves, came and kneaded the farfel, the thin pasta for the meat-soup, the square

pasta and the wide pasta. The whole house was full with pasta, rolled out to dry everywhere on table-clothes, but this is how it all went then.

There was no bus then, it seemed it was so far away [the apartment on the Boulevard], and everybody asked us how was it possible to move so far from the center square, because the market was in the main square [Editor's note: the place is not even half km from the market]. There was a market everyday in the main square, but by 11 o'clock in the morning the main square shined, there wasn't even an apple skin there. I wasn't used to go to the market with my mom, I had no time for it, I had to go to school, but there were times, especially in the summertime, when they sent me there to buy things. But usually mom did the shopping. On Thursdays, when she used to do bigger shopping, a maid helped her, but if she needed only one or two things she went all by herself. I know a villager woman used to bring milk daily, and sour cream and curd cheese weekly. The main market day was on Thursday, and villagers from different regions, such as the region of Nyarad , used to come by carriages and brought lots of goods, but also poultry. The market was held systematically, there was a section for vegetables, another section for poultry and other for animals. The autumn sale, the Marton's day fair was the main market day of the year, and on this day the traders occupied the place between the big [Romanian orthodox] cathedral and the Albina building. It was very well organized then, people brought plenty of vegetables [from the villages], everything one could think of. Back then villagers everywhere were doing agriculture, so there were plenty of goods: fruits, everything one could imagine, eye's and mouth's delight. There were tents with different knick-knacks, candy traders, but there were no [fair] performances. The honey scone traders were also there, for the children's delight, because they sold very delicious scones with honey and nuts. I always waited mom to bring home some scones. There were three or four fairs every year. The big stock-market was in the November 7th district [Editor's note: November 7th was the name communists gave to a district in the northern part of Marosvasarhely, the fair was held there, on Szentgyorgy street].

The main square of Vasarhely was full of Jewish stores. There was Vamos' big textile store, he was a very decent merchant, we loved his store very much because one could buy things there on installments, especially the families with fixed incomes. Every family had a grocer, a store they used to buy from, and ordered the goods they needed for a month, they wrote it down in a book, which everybody kept for themselves, and probably the merchant had one, too. And usually the store apprentice brought the goods to the house, because they didn't buy one kg of sugar then, but a quantity enough let's say for a month. If the customers realized they need something else, they just went to the store and wrote it in the booklet. On the first day of the next month, when my father got his salary, he went to pay the debt and they settled the bill.

We had a sewing woman who used to come to us for many years, she made everything we needed, transformed clothes because my parents didn't buy new clothes all the time, they altered, replaced and fixed the old clothes very often. My mother only had the overcoats sewed by a tailor. Everybody had his own tailor, our was called Bence, and his tailor shop was in a little private house, opposite to the Albina building.

My mother used to go to the synagogue each Saturday, she lit candles on Friday evening, and she didn't cook on Saturday. We observed the high holidays, on Yom Kippur my stepfather also went to the synagogue and we followed the meal traditions, as well. We weren't kosher, but my mother cooked very delicious meals, and she held a light kitchen, not a Jewish one, it was rather a more

modern, lighter one, and we ate lots of fruits. Not to mention that my stepfather had high blood-pressure based on nerve problems, and we already cooked with oil at that time, which was quite unusual then, but one could buy in the stores. Mom didn't buy often fat geese.

Vasarhely was a small town, it was called the barbecue Vasarhely. [Editor's note – in the Szekler region sometimes even today they call Marosvasarhely 'Barbecue village' ironically.] As far as I remember, in my time, when I was in school, it had 50 thousand inhabitants, we learned so. There was a Jewish club in Vasarhely, and a Hungarian casino, as well. My grandfather and my stepfather used to go to the Hungarian casino together. The Hungarian casino was in the Apollo Palace building then. [Editor's note: the Apollo Palace is on Trandafirilor square no. 5. Count Samuel Teleki built it in 1820-22. There were stores on the ground floor, flats on the first floor and a lodge on the second floor, where they used to keep balls and later, between 1824-1923, dramatic performances. The Albert Burger brewery owner bought and altered the building in 1923. On the ground floor of the building the Hungarian Casino functioned from 1923. At the moment different political parties and the Pro Europa league have their headquarters there.] My parents' friends were mostly Hungarians. Many Jewish families went there, mostly men, and the women followed their husbands. They didn't take the children there, it was only for adults. The men went there around 6-7 pm, while the wives at 8 pm, and it was open until 10 pm. There were card-tables and gambling. They used to play with Hungarian cards, they played rummy and bridge, and there was no other type of entertainment, there wasn't any alcohol there. The wives usually 'kibitzed' [they looked at the men play and they kept their fingers crossed] for their husbands, and this was rather a sober entertainment. My parents used to play bridge at home, as well with their friends. There was doctor Metz, and another Hungarian family called Nanasi, they used to get together with them. This was the way of living then.

There was no money left for holidays, and for the holidays my parents went to Kolozsvar for a few weeks to the grandparents – they got there by train. I used to visit them also, not very often though, I've been to my grandparents in Kolozsvar two or three times, during the holidays. My parents only visited once brother Erno, this uncle of mine, in Vienna. They had no money for a holiday at a spa. My father was a clerk, he had a fixed salary, they lived well, but they didn't live in great style, but we lived well at middle-class standards.

I finished elementary school in the Jewish school, which was on Horea street, today it's school number 4. The Jewish school had six grades, and I finished four of them. Usually those who wanted to continue their studies finished four classes, and they entered a local middle school or a high school. Those who couldn't afford this finished the six grades, but it wasn't mandatory to do so, only four grades had to be finished then. It was a wonderful school. We had an educator, Ferenc Rado, you could rarely find nowadays. Uncle Rado was a brilliant man, he was excellent skills in dealing with children, he was a very patient man and had answers for everything, he could tell stories about anything, and I liked him very much. I always used to say that it was him who taught me everything I know now. The director, Jenő Moskovits [Editor's note: he was Eva Deutsch's father, and Centropa made an interview with Eva, as well] was an extremely honest, very kind man, but he taught another form. Ferenc Rado was our educator during the four grades. In the school, in elementary school and middle school, we learned in Romanian, but at religion class we learnt in Hebrew. We learned the Hebrew letters from the prayer-book, and the religious things usually from the Bible – we learned everything from uncle Rado during the religion classes. After I

finished elementary school, I used to go to uncle Rado to chat with him.

They used to organize very nice festivities in the Jewish school. We held the most important performances in the Jewish community center, but during the year there were self-culture clubs in the school, which they held in the Jewish school: they used to read out poems and humorous things. Uncle Rado and another educator, Boske Rosenfeld, poor her didn't come back from the deportation [Editor's note: As we can learn from the interview with Eva Deutch, Ferenc Rado and Jenő Moskovits also died in deportation.], put together once a tale of Purim, and it was a nice performance. Children performed it: one of my classmates was Queen Esther, she was a very beautiful girl, called Eva Citrom (she didn't dare to come back from the deportation because she didn't behave very well there), one of my boy classmates was Haman, there was a Mordecai and another classmate was Ahasuerus. The tale was about Ahasuerus who wanted to get married and different girls were taken to him, a Bedouin, a Turkish and a Jewish girl and he chose the Jewish girl. I was one of the girls, I got from somebody a very elegant Turkish woman's dress, and everybody said he should have chosen me instead of the Jewish girl, because I had such a beautiful dress...

There were very nice balls and performances at the Jewish community center. [Editor's note: the building became later the Progres cinema, on Tipografiei street no. 4. It was built in 1928, with the support of the Jewish community for cultural purposes. It was the scene of many celebrations, literary and religious gatherings. The Yiddish theatres from Iasi and Vilna used to perform there. From the 1930s, a cinema functioned in the building]. Once, the Jewish elementary school performed there the Blue Bird by Maeterlinck. It was a splendid performance. [Editor's note: Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) Nobel laureate (1911) Belgian prose-writer. He wrote symbolic dramas. The mentioned piece is a fairy play with 6 scenes.] The entire school participated in the Blue Bird piece, which did not involve any singing, but dances. Because the tale had many parts, the school wasn't able to perform all of them. The tale was about two children who were trying to find the blue bird, they went to many places and the narrators told things about those places. They managed to link the stories this way. I wasn't a great actor, but I was chosen to play one of the narrators. The other one was András Mestitz [Julia Sheiner's (nee Mestitz) younger brother], who was one grade higher than me. The whole teaching staff of the school helped us to mount the piece. This was a very nice, serious performance. The parents were our audience.

There was a Jewish Women's Association then, the WIZO. Naturally they supported Zionism, so they organized charity performances and balls in the Jewish community center. My parents used to attend them. My mother didn't go to other balls. My parents weren't members of such organizations.

I was in the third form when I began to learn playing the piano. My piano teacher was Piroska Metz from the music academy [they called it in Hungarian playfully 'Zenede' (music factory) by then]. I liked auntie Piroska very much, although she was a very severe teacher, but I, who always had stage fright, I got used to playing in front of audience. She used to teach each pupil one quarter of an hour, but we had to stay there for the whole hour, until the other three pupils finished their lesson, so we played in front of each other, not to mention that we had some internal examination concerts. Then came a period when my parents had no money to pay the school fees, so another piano teacher, Eva Lorand took over, who used to come to our home. In the Zenede we had to pay quarterly, and that was a larger sum to spent for a fixed salary clerk. That's how I ended up with

Eva Lorand, she wasn't cheaper, but we only had to pay monthly fees. The music school was the same as the normal school, with first grade, second grade and third grade. As far as I remember, I attended the Zenede for three years, and I studied another three years with Eva Lorand, but my habit of playing in front of an audience was gone, and I wasn't talented after all. She taught a more modern method – according to the method called Chovan-Czerny. [Editor's note: the name of the method comes from Kalman Chovan and Karl Czerny. Czerny became a world famous piano teacher, he was the teacher of many famous pianists of the 19th century. Ferenc Liszt was one of his students.] So I had to learn the new method, with a different system for the positioning of the hands, which is a very important thing when playing the piano. I didn't like my teacher very much, so this teacher change turned out to be a total miscue [failure] and even though I studied for many years, I discontinued to play the piano.

In 1932 when I entered the Unirea high school – it was the part of the building that gave onto the Boulevard, a university is there at the moment – the high school was a very good school, with an outstanding lady principal, Doamna Georgescu [Mrs. Georgescu in Romanian] who was an extremely decent person. I finished there the four grades of high school. Towards the end, around 1936, there were so insecure years, it wasn't a warlike atmosphere, but anti-Semitism was already present. I can't say they made us feel it, we knew there were Iron Guard [7](#) girls, but otherwise we didn't feel it. There were several Jewish pupils in the class we were on good terms with. At the age 14 I was a backward girl, I always had one girlfriend, and I used to go everywhere with her, I never liked big crowds. I was on good terms with everybody, but I didn't like to go to parties. From this point of view I had a quite difficult personality, I was full of inhibitions. I had a very good girlfriend, a Romanian girl, Margareta Moldovan, and a Jewish one, Juci Traub. Juci was a very clever girl, she was the best in the class in every subject. No matter whether it was arithmetics or we had to write an essay in French, she was always the best. She was a very, very smart girl. Unfortunately her parents lived in very poor conditions, so she wasn't able to continue her studies, she learned sewing. We finished high school in 1936, we had this so called little graduation, and most of the Jewish girls decided to learn a profession. After the little graduation I didn't learn together with Juci, but I know she had a boyfriend with serious intentions, Sanyi Rosenblatt whom we called Kokisch. I know they were in love, but the war came, and then the deportation. Juci didn't come home to Vasarhely after the deportation. She survived the deportation, moreover, she still lives, but we didn't keep in touch. She got married, she had a lot of problems in her life, and finally she settled in Vienna, and she lives there as a widow. Her daughter lives in Vienna, too. This is my last information about her. The last time we met was in 1987.

After the fourth grade of elementary school, when I entered the Unirea high school, we went to rabbi Dr. Ferenc Lowy for religion class. The rabbi had a family in Vasarhely, he had four children, and he was an extremely intelligent man. One of his daughters was a pediatrician, one of his sons was a doctor, the other one a lawyer, while the other daughter finished two or three years at the medicine school, but she didn't graduate it. The rabbi was a member of the Zsigmond Kemeny Society [Editor's note: the Zsigmond Kemeny Society was a literary and cultural society established in 1876 by Lajos Tolnai, a Protestant priest from Marosvasarhely, and by baron Karoly Apor, who became its chairman. There were 42 founder members, 69 regular members and 4 honorary members. The goal of the society was to promote the liberal arts, to study, gather and publish the old and new Szekler idioms, as well as to publish Zsigmond Kemeny's works. They had to organize a monthly lecture and a yearly festivity.] Now, just like back then, it is a literary society. They held

performances within the society, they invited writers and poets who read their works on evenings. My parents used to go there to see the more interesting performances. For example, Zsigmond Moricz came once from Hungary, as well as many other writers. [Editor's note: Zsigmond Moricz (1879–1942) was a prominent 20th-century Hungarian prose writer. He was primarily a novelist and short-story writer, and his work is remarkable for its realistic portrayal of life in Hungarian villages and provincial towns. His finest novels include the historical trilogy Erdely (Transylvania, 1922-35). Moricz was also the editor of the literary journal Nyugat (West), which supported modernist literature and liberal politics.]

It was mandatory to attend the religion class then. Everybody attended the class for their respective religion. Religion class was just like any other class in the school, held weekly. The Jewish religion class, that is the religion class of minorities, was held at the Jewish school. The rabbi taught us the religion class there. We didn't like it, but we attended the religion class. 'Have you said your prayers?' the rabbi asked everybody, and he pushed our nose to see whether we were lying or not. I was too honest to lie, so I always took my prayer-book in the morning, I read the morning prayer, so I could tell him I have prayed. When we came back from the deportation, I came through [Nagy]Varad, we got off the train there and they checked those who got off. There was a Jewish policeman. 'Who are you?', he asked. I said my name, Riegelhaupt. 'This is a German name!' There were other people from Vasarhely. 'She was with us – they said – look, she has a tattoo!' 'Everybody can have a tattoo! Do you speak Jewish?' 'No, I don't.' He ordered me out because he thought I was a 'shady element'. The others I was with asked him not to do that... And I had to guffaw that I was put aside as a suspicious element! I've just came back from the concentration camp and I was a suspicious element! He came back to me after a while and asked me if I can speak Yiddish or Jewish? I said no. He asked me if I could pray. Then I remembered the morning prayer, what I learned like a parrot, because even today I know the first words: 'Majde ani lofonelho...' [Editor's note: It is about the morning prayer 'Modeh ani l'fanecha..., I'm thankful to You...(, ever living King, for compassionately returning my soul to me, how great is Your faithfulness'.)] I only know these words from the prayer even today – thanks to that he left me alone.

The little graduation means graduation of high school. Those four grades of high school meant much more than the eight grades today, they represented a higher degree. An anti-Semitism wave began then, and it was very hard for the Jews to enter the university. Usually we, Jewish girls, didn't study further [at a university], we rather learned a profession – we got to a tailor shop or a hairdresser salon or in other places – because our parents considered thus we will have better success in life. Mom sent me as apprentice in a tailor shop because she thought it was a very good profession, and I would see later I would go to my uncle to Vienna etc., etc. There were two sisters in Vasarhely, the Kun sisters, they were very decent people. They had a tailor shop at the end of the Saros street, upstairs, where the Azomures has a store now. We made a contract, mom paid the fees, but I had to go to an apprentice school, which was a public school. When we went to learn a profession, we made a contract with the employer, which stated that we had to work there three years as apprentice, and only then we got an employment record so we could work there as assistants. Usually, those who went to work didn't pay, but worked there to learn the profession.

I started apprentice school in 1939. It wasn't needed to graduate high school for that, four grades were just enough. We had the little graduation only for ourselves, the girls who finished the four

grades of high school had to finish only two years in the apprentice school. Those who had just elementary school, had to finish three years of apprentice school. The school's building is the fire-station at the moment on Horea street. In one section of the building there were the girls, in another one the boys. There were apprentices for all professions. We had many interesting classes there, nice and meaningful classes, but we didn't learn the profession there. We learned only general subjects there: grammar, history, geography, arithmetics, book-keeping and so on. There was an excellent arithmetics teacher. Learning was serious there. We learned in Romanian because it was a public school, but only an apprentice school. We had different teachers for each class. There was an interesting class, ethics, based on religion, but on the Christian religion.

When a new [ethic] teacher was assigned, Straja, a member of the Iron Guard, he entered the classroom with a Hakenkreuz [swastika]. [Editor's note: The Iron Guard had its own emblem, other than the swastika. Its symbol was composed by three horizontal and vertical green stripes which could fit in a square and symbolized iron bars, and in the center there were three horizontal and vertical black stripes in a circle, which could fit in a square.] We were scared about what would happen. So a handsome young man entered the classroom, and his first action was to put the Jewish girls into the first row – we were five or six Jewish girls in the form who finished high school. He was very smart and he didn't tell bad things after all, he was talking about – in a rather communist manner, so he woke up the consciousness of the girls – not to be shy because we learned profession and we were equal to those who were doing other things. When I came home after the first day, I told mom if the eye could kill Straja would be dead because I was very angry with him because he looked at me all the time and he always asked me from the New Testament when the others couldn't answer. Once Straja 'gave a speech' to the class that if we had a gallant there is no reason to be ashamed, and we didn't have to walk on back alleys, we could use the main streets and not to have any prejudice. He didn't manifest itself in a negative manner towards us, moreover, he appreciated that the Jewish girls were more intelligent than the others. He was a dedicated member of the Iron Guard, but he probably had nothing against the Jews, he probably had something with the regime. He was our teacher just for a short period, because he was removed, they relocated him, but I can't say anything wrong about him.

At the end of the 1930s the Jewish youth still organized conventions, but slowly the atmosphere got worse. Anti-Semitism appeared in Romania, and the Iron Guard began to rule, and this left a mark on the Jewish social life and mood – we could already feel the war psychosis.

I feel I have to tell you that in the meantime my parents decided to build a small house, because they wanted to move out. Considering that my inheritance was also invested in the house on the Boulevard, grandpa sold the big six room apartment and gave the adequate sum to my parents, so they could build the new house – on the Sportivilor street, a bystreet on which the maternity hospital is today. My grandparents moved into a flat on Kazinczy street, Kogalniceanu street today, now the police building. It was a private building then. Our house was built in one summer, and it was a great success. We moved there in 1938, I mean the three of us and one of the girls.

In the meantime, while in apprentice school, my stepfather was relocated to Szaszregen. The name of the bank he worked at as manager was Banca de Scont, a savings bank. It had two provincial branches, one in Medgyes and another one in Szaszregen. The general manager was an evil Jewish man, he was on very bad terms with my stepfather. In summertime, when the manager of the Medgyes branch went to holiday – he was one of the general manager's relatives – my dad had to

go there to replace him. On the Christmas of 1938 the manager of the Medgyes branch committed suicide. I still don't know why, but the general manager was happy that he got rid of dad, and he told him to take over the Medgyes branch. My parents were desperate because they just built our house, so how could they move so far from the family just now? My mother's younger sister, Agnes, and her younger brother, Sanyi, lived in Regen, they settled there. Eventually they solved the problem with the manager from Regen, Horicska, who was single, so he went to Medgyes and we went to Regen. Thus we had to move to Szaszregen in 1939. I continued to learn this 'beautiful' profession, so I remained with my grandparents, I lived with them until I finished the two years of apprentice school in 1941 – I even went to work from there.

During the war

The reannexing [the so called 'Hungarian era'] [8](#) came and my stepfather was soon laid off. There was a law [the numerus clausus in Hungary] [9](#) in the 1940s about I don't know exactly how many percent of the clerks could be Jewish. Instead of divide the sum between dad and himself, or at least giving something to dad, the general manager kept the whole sum for himself. Dad remained jobless. I think he worked in 1940, but in 1941 he became jobless. It was a terrible thing because we weren't rich, and my parents had no money. Dad did some book-keeping at home for a gas station owner then, who wasn't Jewish, and we managed to get by somehow.

When I finished school, I ended up in Regen, and my life somewhat fell apart. I don't have too pleasant memories from this period. I can't say I had a beautiful youth there. I got to a tailor shop, and the salary I got there was minimal. Not to mention that I hated, I hated it so much... An old Jewish woman was the owner, Sari Kraus, and the tailor shop was full of spinsters. They hated me because I was young, and because they knew I didn't really live from what I earned there, I didn't have to slave because I had parents, so it was terrible what I have gone through in that tailor shop. Not to mention that I hated sewing and I wasn't skillful at all, so it was a hard period for me, I cried a lot... Then grandpa said it was enough, and told me to stay at home. It was only for a short period, until 1944. I helped out mom at home. I didn't like Regen. I had a very good girlfriend there, she was a smart, capable girl, she was an excellent piano player. Her name was Miri Szabo, and she attended the music academy in Vasarhely, her teacher was Sari Trozner. She loved Miri very much, and when Sarika had tendovaginitis, Miri replaced her, despite all the Jewish laws which already existed then. Poor Miri perished in the gas-chamber.

The Saxons from Szaszregen respected my stepfather very much. For example there was a Saxon bookseller who on Saturdays, when he closed the store, gave him the German newspapers to read. I had to bring them back. And there was the grocery we used to buy things from, a couple ran the store, they were very decent. My stepfather used to listen to radio London every evening. We learned for the first time about gas-chambers from there, but we didn't believe it. We thought it was just propaganda. When the Hungarian army came in [in 1940], the Hungarian Jews came in officer uniform. Many officers came to my parents, who were in the uniform adequate to their rank. Then slowly they were demobilized. Then began to take the men to forced labor. My uncle Gabi was taken away, my cousins and maternal second cousins from Vasarhely they all went to forced labor. We, the children, adored uncle Gabi. He was a tall, well-built German type young man, he was single – he was taken first to a camp in Bacska, but they were doing well there, they worked and he came home eventually. But he was summoned again to the ill-famed camp from Bor, a cooper mine in Serbia. He perished there after he was shot. The Saxon couple from the grocery

managed to get through a letter to my uncle with the help of a German soldier. So there were decent persons among them, as well. On the other hand, in Regen, which was a small town, everybody knew we were Jews, and when we went to the lido, they threw at us thing, not stones, but green apples or something... So after that we, the Jewish youth, used to bathe in a Jewish gardener's creek. We had a nice time there.

Mom's younger sister, Aliz, lived with her husband in Arad. The first actions of the Iron Guard took place there. They were not allowed to have a maid, they took away their paint store, they had to employ a 'strohman' [10](#) who managed the store, so my parents kept their fingers crossed for them. Aliz's husband, my uncle, was thinking about moving to Northern Transylvania, but my aunt didn't agree with that, so it appears that she had a hunch, she had two little children. Not to mention that here the harder things were just to come. After the Germans invaded Hungary, this was in 19th March 1944 [11](#), we had to wear the yellow star. Terrible things happened after that. They removed us from the apartment, and they told us that if we moved together with others we could remain in the town. Our friends from Regen had a bigger flat, and we, together with another family, moved in with them. I know I slept in the kitchen, my parents in one room, the owners in another room, and the other family, with the children, in a further room. Mom took care of the household because the wife of our friend was sick. But this lasted only for a month. We, the young people, were working in different places from day to day, and once I went on the street and when a spinster from the tailor shop saw me, she spat once. This was the only thing that affected me personally. When I came back I tried to find her and get my revenge, but I forgot her name. After many years, when I remembered it, it was too late.

The ghetto of Szaszregen was also in the brickyard. They told us to pack up our things because they would come for us the next morning. We took with a carriage what was allowed, but we hadn't many things. We didn't have food at all. I remember there was a forced laborer doctor from Vasarhely, doctor Fridler, he brought us a piece of bread. We got into the ghetto of Regen... First they took us to the brickyard, and then they brought the people from the villages, because the Jews from Hargita county, Toplica and Udvarhely ended up there, as well. By the road that leads to the brickyard there were small rural houses, they removed the inhabitants from them and put us in them. The women were in the rooms, while the men in the loft, and we, the young people, in the hayloft. It took one month just to take people to the ghettos. In the meantime they took a few of us, young girls, I don't remember how many, they vaccinated and examined us because they took us to work in the officers' casino. The casino was in a family house downtown Regen, in a big storied house, a beautiful apartment, and there they accommodated the mess hall for the German and Hungarian officers. It was exactly opposite to our apartment they removed us from, and I could see into the apartment, the furniture was still there. They assigned me in a little room where we washed glasses. A soldier came in the morning for us and they took us back in the evening. We went to the ghetto on foot, but with escort. There was a big store in the casino's building, the relatives of Eva Deutsch's husband owned it. Once I looked down while in a break, and I saw they brought things which belonged to Jews and I recognized my aunt's fur-coat, as well as the paintings. You wouldn't believe how I cried. The soldier with whom I worked together called me and told me the following: 'Don't cry, don't make them laugh at you even more. Don't show your pain! Leave it at that, all of this will end. My family perished in Dresden during the bombardments. Don't cry.' So he had this humane attitude. They didn't give us food in the kitchen, but if there were any leftovers in the pot, we were allowed to eat that. But where Hungarian soldiers were, there was

pork, and of course I didn't eat it. When we went back to the ghetto I told that to Mom, but she answered 'Forget about it, eat what they give you, who knows what will happen.' We ate in the ghetto from a common cauldron. This only lasted for a short period.

Then they deported us. As far as I know, they completely emptied the ghetto from Regen with one train [Editor's note: 3,149 people were deported from the ghetto of Szaszregen on 4th June 1944]. By chance, it happened that we were together with my parents in the wagon, mom and my stepfather and another family, the Steuers and some other acquaintances. We were many. They told everybody that they would take us near Kassa, to 'Kenyer mezo' [Bread field] for work, this was the story. The journey was terrible. They gave us buckets to use them as toilet, but I couldn't piss in front of strangers, not even when my abdomen was this big [she showed it]. Somewhere in Czechoslovakia, when we already passed Kassa, the train stopped and a Jewish doctor came to see whether there were any sick people. Mom told him I couldn't piss. It wasn't about the stool, I couldn't even piss. He advised us to put hot water on my abdomen. But where to take hot water from? We were on the open track, they let us get off. I hid behind a bush, I thought nobody could see me. Surely they could, but it didn't matter. They put us on the train on Thursday, we came out from the house on Thursday morning, and we arrived in Auschwitz on Monday, and I couldn't piss until around Saturday.

The German soldiers came and took over the train and a German soldier told us they would take us to work and there also would be an orchestra. Dad thought how good it would be, because he could play the violin. But my mother was extremely strong. Dad was a pessimist soul, so was I, but mom said: 'We either all kill ourselves or I don't want to hear a word!' And we sat in the wagon and it was terrible, because there was a very old lady, I didn't know her, and she was blind too, and she fumbled and wailed all night long. It was terrible, the train was carrying us through the night and she fumbled and shouted: 'Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!...' - it was awful.

When we arrived, I was together with mom then, and they separated us immediately from the men. We got off the train, and we went arm in arm with mom in front of the selecting committee. How should we know where would they send us? We arrived in the front of the selecting committee, and the selector - I don't know who he was because I wasn't attentive - signaled mom to go to the left and me to go to the right. But then I said in German 'Aber meine Mutter!' (But my mother!) and my mom said 'Aber meine Tochter!' (But my daughter!) and the selector pushed mom to the right side where I was and he said: 'Oh, you can still run.' We didn't understand what it meant, and I remained with mom...

When they undressed us in Auschwitz they took away even my shoes. I had a beautiful pair of ski boots and when they took us to the shower room they caught hold of them immediately - probably the Jewish girls, because they undressed us there - and when I came back I didn't even have my boots. And then they gave me a green one and a black one, but one of them was high heeled and the other one low-heeled.

We spent just three nights in Auschwitz and then they took us to Cracow-Plaszow. We were together with mom and aunt Agnes there. They told us in Cracow not to mention that we were mother and daughter, but to say we had a profession. We both said that we were sewing women. They selected mom for construction works and me to a warehouse, so I had no problems there, there were acceptable circumstances, but mom had to carry bricks. She got vitamin deficiency and

blisters appeared on her legs. The great thing was that from the first moment we had no menstruation, otherwise it would have been awful – I don't know what they gave us. Everybody had his place in the barracks. I was on good terms with the Polish Jews, they loved me, so they helped me. There were no acquaintances from Vasarhely there, because I went together with the Jews from Regen. The Cracow-Plaszow camp was the former ghetto of Cracow. The camp was built on the territory of the Jewish cemetery, the Polish Jews remained there from the ghetto. This is the location of the movie Schindler's List [by Steven Spielberg].

We worked in several commandos in June, July and August. When they put me to work for the first time, in a warehouse, there was an older man, he was at least 35, I chatted a lot with him. He procured a pair of normal sole boots for me. This man was a hardware dealer, and very interestingly, he had a very serious knowledge of Yiddish literature. He asked me about what we used to read. I knew just one Yiddish writer, Sholem Asch, we knew rather the Hungarian literature [Editor's note: Sholem Asch (1880-1957) of Polish origins, Yiddish novel and drama writer]. They put me in a warehouse, where they spilt the nails which they took away from the stores of Cracow, and we had to separate them in order of height. This was piece of cake, we finished quickly and we asked what else we should do? They mixed together the nails that we separated before and we had to start over. In a word it wasn't work. The main point was that when I got to another commando, I worked again in acceptable circumstances. In the meantime my mom's leg had blisters and they took her to the infirmary. Mom was 46, she looked older compared to the others, but she was a modest [silent] person, she didn't complain, they kept her in the infirmary as long as it was possible to prevent her to be put to work. And we met every evening.

Finally, they put me in a tailor workshop, it was a very important tailor workshop. They brought us the uniforms of the fallen and wounded German soldiers, after disinfection, to mend, button and patch them. They assigned me there. The clothes were disgusting, there were lice and other things. There was a foreman – he looked old, but he wasn't even 40, he just looked very bad – he picked me out and ordered a warmer coat for me and mom to prevent us from catching a cold in the dawn, when we had to stay at the roll-call. This foreman told me he made an exception for me because I reminded him of his child, who was together with him for a while, but then she was moved to an easier work somewhere else. At least he knew so. That's why he was so nice to me. The Germans killed her wife in front of him.

An interesting thing happened in Cracow. One of my colleagues came to me one day with the following: 'Come with me, there is somebody who is maybe your relative, speak with her!' Since we were together with mom then, we went together. There was a lady in the other barrack, she seemed old to me, she was at least 30. She couldn't say precise things about our relation, but she knew she had a Goldman in her family – it was interesting, because my grandmother's maiden name was Goldman. She told us she had a little boy she helped to flee to Italy. She hoped that his son is alive, she was the wife of a judge from Cracow otherwise. But it was interesting that she told me, even if she didn't find out that we were namesake, or we are some kind of relatives, but when she saw me in the street she knew we are relatives because my eyes were the same with her son's. I couldn't find out more about her, because they emptied the camp and they took us back to Auschwitz. This was in August 1944. My mom had white hair already, because she grew gray hair very early. I lost mom then, they separated us, and they took her to the gas-chamber.

We already heard about the gas-chambers, and we could smell the terrible smell of burnt flesh, but we didn't want to believe it was happening. Practically we didn't want to believe these things, somehow one tends not to believe bad things, we tried to keep away ourselves from this [thought]. We spent a month in Auschwitz and they took us to a working camp. They took us from one camp to another, in several working camps. Naturally it was terrible, but there was no more torture, there was no more murder. There was bad treatment, hunger and work. There were no more executions, the front was already approaching. Considering that towards the end I ended up in the Sudet region and the Russian troops were closing in, they were afraid to mistreat us. Oberalstadt was the name of the town where the factories were, and we worked there. [Editor's note: Oberalstadt was the commando of the Gross-Rosen camp in Poland.] Many Czech people worked in this town. They took us, the people from Regen, approx. 10 Hungarian Jews, to work there. The other workers were Polish girls. They weren't in Auschwitz, they were there since one and half year, and they had their own clothes, even their hair grew longer because they were not trimmed like us. We were together with them.

After the war

The Russians liberated us there on 9th May 1945 [Gross-Rosen was liberated on 5th May 1945]. The woman doctor of the camp was from Szaszregen, she was originally from Bessarabia, she spoke Russian and she could deal with the Russian commanders. She arranged that we, the 10 people from Regen to start off together towards home. We weren't an organized group, we just kept on going... We didn't try to get any help, we just were in a hurry to get home. Why? We hoped. We got from one train to another. It didn't matter where we slept, we slept in the open air on the ground so well we can't sleep that easy with all the pillows today. It was essential to get to [Buda]Pest. Hungary was liberated before, and the Jews already organized the assistance in Pest. There was a school, I don't know in which part of the town, where the Jews arrived, we could obtain information there, and there were lists on the walls about who have arrived, who were asking about whom, it was truly an inquiry office. We spent a night there, we washed up, ate, even got some money and we set off for home.

I didn't go to Vasarhely, I went to Arad knowing that my aunt Aliz lived there, and this was a sure thing. I thought that I would also find there uncle Sandor, my father's younger brother who fled to Arad during the rule of the Iron Guard. The relatives from Arad were frightened that they would be deported, so they prepared for this, they fled my cousins, aunt Aliz's little children, to a reliable Romanian family, to a village. Fortunately it didn't happen, they took my uncle's store but they all survived. [Editor's note: Southern Transylvania remained under Romanian authority after 1940, so the Romanian anti-Jewish laws applied to them, not the Hungarians]. Interestingly my aunt wasn't at home in Arad because she went to Vasarhely to search for the family. So I waited for her in Arad. She found out in Vasarhely that I was alive, and I got home healthy and I was at her house. So I arrived to my aunt's place, they gave me something to eat, they made me fat. I was like a garbage can, I ate all the leftovers. I spent a few weeks there, my uncle Sandor from Petrozseny came after me, and we went together to Vasarhely. We thought I would move in with him, and I would settle there. But first I came back to Vasarhely to see whether I could find somebody at home. I was convinced that I would find there my mother's youngest brother, Gabor, who was in forced labor. Unfortunately I couldn't find even him.

So I came to Vasarhely, but I saw there was very little hope here. Our small family house was in a terrible condition when I got there. Although if it was a newly built house, in 1938, the Russian and German soldiers ravaged it, and it was raining into the house, it was all moldy. It was all ruins, in an awful condition. Considering that my stepfather was a very respected man in Vasarhely – in terms of humanity, culture and honesty – they knew him because he was a bank clerk, so I went to the Albina bank, there was a manager called Boros, and he helped me very ingeniously to solve the problem. He gave me a long-term credit which I used to repair the house. I went to my grandfather's second wife, who was Christian and she wasn't deported. We were on very good terms and I directed and managed the things from there. In the meantime I got acquainted with my husband...

I had a passing acquaintance with my husband, Imre Diamantstein, before the war, and when we met in Vasarhely, everybody was glad to see anybody who was alive. He was a very good friend of my cousin, Pal Laszlo, Boske's son, who was grandpa Mittelmann's adopted child. And we met there because Pal Laszlo got home much earlier and he was already working, he created a genuine public kitchen, and those who had no place to eat, could eat there. We met several times with my future husband there, that's how our friendship started. I was still thinking about moving to Petrozseny to my uncle Sandor, but in the meantime I fell for my future husband, and I didn't want anymore to leave Vasarhely and I also got a job. There was a perfumery in the Rozsak [today Lalelelor] square, the main square, the Fekete perfumery, I think it's called Velur today, the owner's name was Fekete, he was an old inhabitant of Vasarhely, I got to work there at the cash desk. This was in 1945.

In the meantime I went to Szaszregen, to see what I could find there. I found nothing. Our dining room furniture, the kitchen furniture and the furniture from my room remained there because a police officer moved in, and when he moved out he left all the things there. But I couldn't find the furniture of the room, which was a very nice drawing room suit, not even a piece remained from that. I couldn't find the books and any valuables. On the other hand, in the kitchen, from where they took away everything, I found a mass of papers, photos and documents, but it looked like a garbage heap. [All this time] I stayed at the sanitarium in Szaszregen. This was someone's villa, and they organized such a sanitarium in each town to accommodate people who got home from the deportation, because they didn't have anywhere to go. In Marosvasarhely they organized the sanitarium in the building where the maternity hospital is today. There they fed people who got home. Of course it was a Jewish organization, they organized all these places. I spent a few days in the sanitarium of Regen, hoping and waiting for some news, and one day I got some false news telling me to wait for my stepfather because he would come home. It was impossible, because I found out he perished quite early, not in Auschwitz, but in Austria in a terrible place, he was one of the first who died. Therefore I don't know even today why that person told me to wait for my stepfather.

So that was it. I came back to Vasarhely and, to my uncle's great disappointment, I told him I would not move to Petrozseny. They talked me out of moving there because they told me I was young, and I would bury myself between old people if I went there. The truth was I felt good only between people of my age, who went through this hell. When I was in Arad and I met people who hadn't gone through what I did, it was beyond them what we went through there. I felt wrong and I had no [mental] contact with them anymore. The least we cared for then were the clothes, we were glad if

we had anything to eat, clothes to wear, we were happy if we could sit down. I always used to say I wouldn't stand anymore, I would lay down or sit in an armchair, I am sick of standing because we stood quite enough. The daily inspections checking whether we were still there, these so-called appels (roll-calls), which were a headcount, were awful. Twice a day, regardless of rain, snow or searing sun, we had to stand and stand and stand and stand... I also said I will erase the number five from my vocabulary because we always marched in rows of five, and they always counted five, five, five... Fortunately, however, one forgets these things.

I got married one year later, in 1946. I was 24, while my husband 31. Our wedding turned out to be very comic. We went to Petrozsény together, so my aunt could meet my husband, and suddenly my uncle decided he wants a religious marriage, because my father surely would have liked it. How could this occurred to him, who wasn't even religious? Although he observed the Jewish holidays. So what happened? The little synagogue in Petrozsény was close – it was more like a prayer house, because we couldn't call it a synagogue, really. He called in ten old Jewish men, one of them was very religious, they brought the chuppah with them, and we had a religious marriage at my uncle's house, in the presence of another married couple. My husband didn't even have a hat because it was summer, so we had to rent one – this really amused us – it was a joyful marriage, so to speak. And later, in October, we had our civil marriage in Vasarhely.

My husband's cousin, Eva Diamantstein, came home as well. Their house on Vorosmarty street survived the war, and in the backyard there was a little two room apartment, and we moved there after we got married. As a matter of fact, when I took the credit to repair my house, mom's cousins, who fled to Temesvár, wanted to come back, and they offered me to pay my debts in exchange for a rent, so I could have moved in with them. And it happened so, and we had an agreement that if I needed the house, they would have handed over the house to me, of course. I stayed there for a very short period because I got married and I didn't need the house, we moved to the two room apartment. When my elder son Peter was born in 1948, and he was already older, I told them I needed the house because the family was growing. And one of their relatives who lived in the house and who sustained the old couple, didn't want to move out and hand over the house to us. In the meantime a rumor spread that a new nationalization would take place and we were afraid that they would take this house, as well, so we sold it for nothing. We could buy a bicycle and a winter coat from that money. So this is what happened to the house and we remained all three in the small two room apartment.

My husband was originally from Deva, and his father, Jakab Diamantstein, was a merchant, but I didn't know my father-in-law personally. They were three brothers, the elder brother, Miklos, the younger brother Istvan (Pista) and my husband, Imre. At first my father-in-law and his family lived in Deva, they had a store there and I believe they went bankrupt already in 1935, so they came home to Vasarhely to reunite the family, because there were several brothers of my father-in-law living here. As far as I know, my husband's elder brother worked in Arad for a while, in the so-called Neumann factory, it was a famous, big factory in Arad. Later he ended up in Vasarhely and he had some interest in the Diamantstein ironware store. It was a family matter, as far as I know, and he did the book-keeping, the old man didn't work, he was too old for that. My husband's mother – I don't remember her name – fell ill and died in 1939, so the old man, my husband and his elder brother lived together. Pista got married soon and he moved to Bucharest. So the three of them were at home. Miklos was a very cultured, serious man, he was single, he never got married

because he wasn't entirely healthy, he had problems with his thyroid gland. My father-in-law and his elder son were deported, they perished there. His younger brother Pista was also a clerk in Bucharest. His wife Anna Szucs was a commercial artist and had a very nice studio there. They didn't get to be deported because they lived in Bucharest and so they survived the Holocaust. They weren't religious at all, they had a daughter who was born after ten years of marriage, and then they emigrated to Israel, and then to Canada together with the youngsters. My brother-in-law died two years ago [in 2002], at the age of 91, while my sister-in-law Anna still lives there.

In the meantime my husband graduated law school in Kolozsvár and worked here in Vasarhely at a law office as articled clerk, in Dr. Gusztav Hirsch's law office, until he was taken to forced labor. My husband's family was very religious, moreover, my husband used to pray even at home each morning, following the prescriptions. They weren't Orthodox Jews, but they were observant and used to go to the Orthodox and not the Neolog synagogue. They had no payes and such, but all the Diamantsteins, because there were many Diamantsteins in Vasarhely, were all religious.

My husband was in a terrible place for forced labor, they took them to the swamps of Pripet, which, as far as I know, is in today's Ukraine [Editor's note: It is the largest swamp in Europe, covering Southern Belorussia and Northern Ukraine. On 12th August 1941 6,526 Jews accused of looting were shot there. They wanted to sink the women and children into the swamp, but it turned out it wasn't swampy enough. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Pripet.] He was there with Naci Rosenblatt, and they marched over a thousand kilometer, and, almost miraculously, he came back safe and sound. It was in November 1994, at the age of 29, when he got home in rags from forced labor. He had a near touch, even though he was a slim figure, but it looks like he was very resistant in the extreme misery. Unfortunately all those who came back from that hell stopped being religious, because the holidays were family holidays and they had no families anymore, none of them had.

My husband went first to Bucharest, to his older brother, and he came to Vasarhely from there. And he got a job. At first, as a lawyer, he got a job at the court as judge, but the wage he got there wasn't enough to help him subsist. When I married him he had an office with a lawyer called Bela Harap, opposite to the today's maternity, in a corner building. But this only lasted for a short period, because it was closed down during the nationalization [12](#). Then he got a job in the timber business in Vasarhely and retired from there. This company he was working at had several names, because it was reorganized many times and they had authority over the entire Csik [region] for a period, then didn't have – this was the period of the regional reorganization, when the regions were transformed into counties in the 1960s. [Editor's note: Zsuzsa Diamantstein refers to the regional reorganizations in 1952 [13](#) and in 1968 [14](#)]. In the last period he worked at the IFET [a timber trading company] in Regen, because a manager called Florea, the manager of the local furniture factory, advised him to do so because he was approaching retirement and if he transferred to IFET, he would have had a larger pension. So he transferred there, and even after he retired he still went to work there voluntarily. He was a very active man, he hated idleness. When he finally stopped working, he typed state exam works for students. He always found something to do.

Music was his passion, classic music. My husband learnt to play the piano in Deva, but there was no chance for a career in music in a middle-class family – that was not a career, rather a bohemian thing, they should choose a serious profession [this was the general view then]. So he became a lawyer and since he was a very thorough man and always learned and did everything perfectly,

that is very thoroughly, he was very good at it and became a very respected lawyer in Marosvasarhely. We had a piano for a while, but one day we sold it because we needed the money to support our children, who were university students. But we were amongst the first who had a record player, a trashy old Soviet record player, and we also bought many records. It's true I learned to play the piano and I grew up with music, but I really learned the music [to qualify it] beside my husband, so I could tell the difference between a very good and a very bad piece. While we were still a young couple and our children were still small, we used to go all the time to symphonic concerts, theatres, cinemas, and there was no performance we didn't see. We had a nice circle of friends, but we never played cards when we were together.

None of us ever discussed politics. Back then it was all the same for a young girl what was going on throughout the world or in politics. My parents never took part in any political organization, and my stepfather, although he was somewhat leftist, never took part in anything. When we came back [from the deportation], it was natural for the youth to consider that socialism was the future. It's unfair to accuse Jews for introducing the communism, because it was natural, they really believed discrimination, both racial and religious, will end, and this idea dominated amongst the youth. In 1945 my husband joined the party and he took seriously his duty. As intellectual he held seminars, taught Marxism in the party school, this was his task. He had no particular task, he was only assigned to do this, and so did many others. In the beginning the youth joined the party because they believed in its goals. I didn't join it because I was quite backward, and I had an inferiority complex that I wasn't smart enough for that. The fact is, that as time passed by my husband became utterly disappointed by the turn of events, and he even became ill when he saw what that beautiful idea turned into, but that's a different story. Unfortunately he didn't live to see the collapse of that terrible regime [cause by the Romanian Revolution in 1989] [15](#) that crushed people, personality or thought. He died in 1986, but he suffered terribly when he saw what this world has become.

We never thought about emigrating, none of them was that brave, we didn't have enough courage. We preferred safety, our small home. We have never been wealthy, but we had a very nice life. My husband had a small salary because lawyers weren't appreciated then, with all the law school he had, and he was a legal adviser, a 'consilier juridic', as they called it at the company, and when the counsels were created he never thought about joining them. He didn't really like his job because he was more like an artist, a very good musician, an outstanding piano player.

My son was two years old in 1950 when I went to work. I got a job at the ear, nose and throat clinic as clerk. I worked there for nine years. In 1955 my second son Gyuri was born, and then I was transferred to another company called 'Inspectoratul de calitate' [Quality control], and I retired from there in 1977.

Immediately after the war many boys have been born, but none of them was circumcised. Our children, neither, and we would have wanted it not because of the religion, but rather due to reasons of health, but by that time there was no rabbi anymore in Vasarhely. Our children had no problems in school, the others never made them feel they were Jews.

We kept in touch with the Jewish community, the membership ran under my name, and I paid the membership fee, I was indicated as member. Later it didn't matter, when my husband retired he used to go quite often to the community and helped uncle Grunstein, so it wasn't a problem. We

used to observe the holidays at home, I used to cook the prescribed meals, on Pesach we had that coffee with matzah.

Before my older son graduated high school I always had a paid assistant in the household. There was no one I could leave the children with. In the summer we used to go to Petrozsény to my uncle Sandor, he was the 'grandpa' and we used to spend our summer holidays there. Petrozsény has always been the last stop, we rested there, and then we used to go to the [Black Sea] coast. Usually we made a tour of the country by train. Everything was very cheap, so we managed to go everywhere. We used to go to the Black-Sea coast more often, and used to stay at [private] houses, in villages, but later, when the children grew older, we used to stay in hotels. We traveled abroad for the first time in 1973, to Hungary. In 1980 we had a very nice trip, because we could get currencies of the socialist countries, so we didn't depend on anybody, and thus we were able to visit every socialist country, except Russia. Unfortunately we didn't manage to get there, and I'm disappointed I never got to see Leningrad [today Saint Petersburg]. We traveled to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, East-Germany and from there we managed to visit West-Berlin because one of my husband's cousin, Tibor Diamantstein, lived there. We had a pass, of course, and went there without our children. In West-Germany we traveled to Berlin, passed through Munich, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, and on our way back we visited Salzburg, Vienna, Hungary and we came home from there. We used to travel by train from one place to another. We always arranged for lodging, always had some food with us, we had no problems. We managed to obtain the visa to West-Germany without any difficulties, so they considered us reliable.

I never had problems with my children. I'm not a biased mother, but I had very good children, and I never had any problems with them. They were good pupils. Peter, who became an electronics engineer, was a really outstanding person, was accepted to the university first go, but this department only existed in Bucharest, and after he graduated he remained there as research engineer. His wife is a Romanian girl, Angela, a mature woman now, whom he met in Bucharest. She was working in the city library, but in the meantime she finished law school, and that's how they met. They got married in 1981. His Jewish origins never caused him any problems. He was a hard-working boy, almost stupidly honest. In the meantime they had a girl, Andrea, after five years of marriage. So Peter remained in Bucharest and worked at a research institute, he was very respected, he worked very well. After the revolution [after 1989], my daughter-in-law wanted to emigrate at all costs. They were getting these news about how in Israel everything is made of gold, and she had a feeling that she may have problems with this name, Diamantstein here. She told me this although she is a 'get-beget' Romanian (to the backbone), and she insisted, so in 1992 they emigrated to Israel. Now they live in Petah Tiqwa, my son has a job in his profession, while my daughter-in-law finished again law school, but in Ivrit, and even the locals can't believe that someone could learn a language so well, especially in a profession where speech is a must. My granddaughter was six years old, so he learned it quickly. My son Peter knows the least Ivrit in the family, but, as I have heard, he can manage. Peter's daughter Andrea will graduate high school this year [in 2004]. She is 18 and wants badly to become a doctor.

Now here's a very interesting story. While I was in the concentration camp, there was a girl from Regen with me, some six years younger than me. Her name was Lia Struminger, but after her stepfather she was Lia Weisz. At one of the selections for work in Auschwitz her mother was taken away and she was left by herself. But she was a very smart girl. And we ended up together and

became very good friends, because she is much more resourceful than me. So we stayed together until the end, she was my intimate friend. After we came home I never heard of her, the only thing we knew was that her father came home too, and took her with him. This was the only news I heard about her, no one knew anything else. One day, my son was already working in that lab in Israel, there was a lady there who asked him whether he was new there. She said 'I see you can't really speak the language. How would you talk: in Romanian, Hungarian, because I know these?' 'It's all the same to me' 'What's your name again?' He said 'Diamantstein'. Then the lady said: 'I knew a Diamantstein in Szaszregen.' My son said: 'That's not me, he's just a namesake, I knew him.' Then this lady looked at him and asked him: 'Aren't you Zsuzsa Riemer's son?' – People knew me by that name. 'Your have her eyes.' It turned out that she was this lager mate of mine, with whom we spent all these years together. She emigrated to Israel long before, and I met her, but unfortunately she died. Of course we began to exchange letters. My son told me they both cried when the truth came out, and what life can bring.

My younger son Gyuri has done a lot of thinking about what to do and made quite a choice: he became a history teacher. He graduated in Iasi with outstanding results. He worked a long time in Bucharest. In fact he wanted to become an archeologist, but there were no openings in any museum nearby, so he remained in Bucharest thinking that Bucharest is a good place for a transfer. But it wasn't easy at all, he wasn't able to change places with anyone. He got married in 1982, he married a local Hungarian girl, Zsuzsa Derzsi, who graduated the Economics university in Kolozsvar. After my husband died his former general manager, a incredibly decent man – unfortunately he died too, his name was engineer Argint –, created an inspector position in Szaszregen, because the company had a school, and asked Gyuri to fill it so he could return home, because he was a man with a family by then and used to commute to Regen. After the revolution he ended up again in the public education system, and since he didn't find any other openings, he still works in Gernyeszeg in two schools. [Gernyeszeg is 18 km from Marosvasarhely.] He is content with his job. His wife Zsuzsa worked in that period at the National Statistics Institute, and later got a transfer to the Asirom as economist. Five year after they got married they too had their elder daughter, in 1987. Her name is Kati. Their second daughter was born in 1990 and is called Judit.

My son Gyuri knew we were Jews, there was no problem about it, but his Jewish identity woke up in him during the Six Days War. One day he came home saying 'These aggressor Jews...' Then my father took him to task for saying that, telling him how could the Jews be the aggressors when they only had that small country, surrounded by all those enemies, so how could this small country be the aggressor? From that moment this Jewish feeling woke up in Gyuri, in 1967, when he was still a little boy, and he has this sentiment. This is not that strong in Peter. I don't know how strongly he considers himself Jewish, but he lives there and thank God he's fine.

Me and my husband were to Israel in 1975, but I also went there in 1993 and 2000, as well. I liked it very much there, especially when I was there for the first time, because I was traveling all over the place, I wasn't afraid then, there weren't any of the current problems. So, even though I don't know the language, I wasn't afraid to get on the bus and go to another city. We have seen many things with my husband, in that three week period we were there we visited the whole country, because our friends showed us everything. Last time when I visited Peter it was different, I couldn't just go wherever I wanted to. He didn't really have the time for trips, worked very much and still does. Not quite anymore, because they don't allow them to work overtime, and they don't pay

them for it.

My husband's elder brother Pista emigrated to Israel because his daughter fell ill. She is about Peter's age, a half year separates them, and she contacted a very serious diabetes at 7 and they recommended them to move to Israel. He already had a job. They were living in Bucharest, my sister-in-law was a commercial artist, but become deaf when she was a child, and couldn't hear anything, could only read from lips, so she couldn't find herself a job. But she was extremely skilled and she managed to do well in Bucharest, but later they had hardly anything to sustain themselves, especially after their child was born. They decided to emigrate to Israel thinking that maybe diabetes is easier to treat abroad. Well they didn't manage to heal her, not to this very moment, but eating was easier with all those fruits and stuff, so my niece lives in Canada, has a husband and a daughter. We kept in touch with them, unlike any other relatives we have abroad.

In 1989, at the time of the revolution, my greatest joy was that we didn't have to take the typewriter we had at home to the police anymore. I was so bored of taking it there each year in order to check it and make sure there would be no secret document written with this typewriter – the whole thing was a formal inspection. So the revolution came and this whole thing stopped. This was my greatest satisfaction, at least we didn't have to carry that typewriter and type those letters. Otherwise we were happy because it was awful that they looked even in people's beds, controlled everything, they would not let you sleep if they didn't know everything. I didn't have any particular problems, except that my husband's cousin was living in Pest – she moved from here, married an actor –, and when she came to Vasarhely she used to stay at our place, of course, and we always had to go to the police and request a permission for her to stay there, even though she attended and graduated school here, but we always had to do these things.

I never liked big differences, that is the difference between the very rich and very poor people. You could say I'm a leftist, but I was never a communist or member of the party, but even though I still can't understand and accept these differences, that is one being in need and the other rolling in wealth. I'm not saying I liked the earlier era better, because it was terrible to stay in those lines and to have those nightly surprises. It's true it didn't affect me personally, but one could hear, read, knew about what was going on, and it was awful – everything took place in the night, just like in the camp, always unawares. We had nothing to fear of, we had no reason at all, but of the picture of having to stay in line from dawn for hours if you wanted to eat some meat or drink some milk. These were horrible things. But there weren't these big differences between people, it was more sympathy because everyone had to cope with the same difficulties.

After 1989 there were no major changes in terms of religiousness. The only change you could feel was that the Jewish community could function more freely, and there were more events organized. Solidarity was stronger, the central Jewish organization probably helped more the community here, but I don't exactly know because I wasn't involved in the activities. Lately, as far as I know, there are more gatherings, maybe Jews have a stronger solidarity. I get some food supplies from the community, and that's a very big deal.

My husband died on 21st February 1986. Three weeks later my granddaughter Andrea was born in Bucharest, and they needed my help because my daughter-in-law had no relatives. This was partly good for me, I had something to do. While they were still in Romania, until 1992, I could say I was half a year with my granddaughter, because I used to go there twice a year, and not just for a

week, but for two-three months, and the child always spent their summer here. So I had a preoccupation. When they emigrated to Israel, my help was needed here because Judit, the younger granddaughter, was born in the meantime, while the elder one, Kati, was looked after by the parents of Zsuzsi, my daughter-in-law. So there was more of us helping them, so they can only bless us because we helped them so much, and we still do.

I don't have any other traveling plans. I went to America in 1998, and I stayed there some three months at the widow of my cousin Pal Laszlo, Vera, because we practically did everything at the same time. We got married at the same time, Peter and her son were born three days apart, and our husbands died several weeks apart. It was very nice at my cousin's, the trip was beautiful. Then I went to Belgium with the Gyuri's family, because the school where he works in Gernyeszeg made friends with a Belgian group who are supporting not only the school in Gernyeszeg, but the town of Gernyeszeg, as well. My son made very good friends especially with one of the families who used to come quite frequently to Vasarhely and usually stayed at my place because there is no room in Gyuri's apartment. When in 2000 one of their children got married, they insisted on me going there because I was the 'granny from Romania', so I was together with Gyuri and his family in Belgium. It was very nice and we also visited Holland because Zsuzsi's best friend lives there. So this was a beautiful journey and in the same year I also visited Peter's family in Israel. In the meantime I went to Pest quite often, but now I've decided to stay at home, I don't want to go anywhere. I will not go to Israel, there's no point, and I'm not telling you why, it's a long story. But they will come to me. I'm not feeling that I couldn't be able, but at 82 is not really recommended to jump around.

Glossary

1 . Hungarian Soviet Republic

The first, short-lived, proletarian dictatorship in Hungary. On 21st March 1919 the Workers' Council of Budapest took over power from the bourgeois democratic government and declared the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The temporary constitution declared that the Republic was the state of the workers and peasants and it aimed at putting an end to their exploitation and establishing a socialist economic and social system. 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. This violence and the regime's moves against the clergy also shocked many Hungarians. The Republic was defeated by the entry of Romanian troops, who broke through Hungarian lines on 30th July, occupied and looted Budapest, and ousted Kun's Soviet Republic on 1st August 1919.

2 . Arrow Cross Party

The most extreme of the Hungarian fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The party consisted of several groups, though the name is now commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc Szalasi and Kalman Hubay in 1938. Following the Nazi pattern, the party promised not only the establishment of a fascist-type system including social reforms, but also the 'solution of the Jewish question'. The party's uniform was consisted of a green shirt and a badge with a set of crossed

arrows, a Hungarian version of the swastika, on it. On 15th October 1944, when Governor Horthy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the war, the Arrow Cross seized power with military help from the Germans. The Arrow Cross government ordered general mobilization and enforced a regime of terror which, though directed chiefly against the Jews, also inflicted heavy suffering upon the Hungarians. It was responsible for the deportation and death of tens of thousands of Jews. After the Soviet army liberated the whole of Hungary by early April 1945, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross ministers were brought to trial and executed.

3 . 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.

4 . Exemption from Deportation in North Transylvania

In March of 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary and North Transylvania. After the occupation, the openly Nazi-friendly and anti-Semitic Dome Sztojay formed a government, and a series of anti-Jewish laws were introduced. The law for ghettoization of Hungarian Jewry made exception in certain cases. The sphere of exemptions were defined in a decree on May 10, 1945. The widows and children of those Jews who received a high commendation for bravery in World War I, or those widows and children of Jews who disappeared or died a hero's death in World War II as a soldier (not during 'work service' in the Labor Battalions) were exempted. Foreign Jewish citizens living in Hungary were also given exception under this rule. There were other modes of escaping deportation. Rezso Kasztner, Zionist leader from Kolozsvár, exemplified this when he secured the release of 1300 Hungarian Jews (250 of which were Kolozsvár families) as a result of negotiations with Adolf Eichmann. The North-Transylvanian Jews' other means of escape was to flee to Romania, and hide there through Christian help. Three doctors played a major role in hiding Kolozsvár Jews: Imre Haynal, Dezso Klimko and Dezso Miskolczy, offering help through their exaggerated diagnoses and extra-extended treatments. In Spring of 1944, the clinic of Imre Haynal hid and sheltered a number of Jews, the greater part of his 'intensive care' ward were Jews fleeing deportation, since the expulsion of the seriously ill was often overlooked by the authorities.

5 . Second Vienna Dictate

The Romanian and Hungarian governments carried on negotiations about the territorial partition of Transylvania in August 1940. Due to their conflict of interests, the negotiations turned out to be fruitless. In order to avoid violent conflict a German-Italian court of arbitration was set up, following

Hitler's directives, which was also accepted by the parties. The verdict was pronounced on 30th August 1940 in Vienna: Hungary got back a territory of 43,000 km² with 2,5 million inhabitants. This territory (Northern Transylvania, Seklerland) was populated mainly by Hungarians (52% according to the Hungarian census and 38% according to the Romanian one) but at the same time more than 1 million Romanians got under the authority of Hungary. Although Romania had 19 days for capitulation, the Hungarian troops entered Transylvania on 5th September. The verdict was disapproved by several Western European countries and the US; the UK considered it a forced dictate and refused to recognize its validity.

6 . Anschluss

The annexation of Austria to Germany. The 1919 peace treaty of St. Germain prohibited the Anschluss, to prevent a resurgence of a strong Germany. On 12th March 1938 Hitler occupied Austria, and, to popular approval, annexed it as the province of Ostmark. In April 1945 Austria regained independence legalizing it with the Austrian State Treaty in 1955.

7 . Iron Guard

Extreme right wing political organization in Romania between 1930 and 1941, led by C. Z. Codreanu. The Iron Guard propagated nationalist, Christian-mystical and anti-Semitic views. It was banned for its terrorist activities (e.g. the murder of Romanian Prime Minister I. Gh. Duca) in 1933. In 1935 it was re-established as a party named Totul pentru Tara, 'Everything for the Fatherland', but it was banned again in 1938. It was part of the government in the first period of the Antonescu regime, but it was then banned and dissolved as a result of the unsuccessful coup d'état of January 1941. Its leaders escaped abroad to the Third Reich.

8 . Hungarian era (1940-1944)

The expression Hungarian era refers to the period between 30 August 1940 - 15 October 1944 in Transylvania. As a result of the Trianon peace treaties in 1920 the eastern part of Hungary (Maramures, Crisana, Banat, Transylvania) was annexed to Romania. Two million inhabitants of Hungarian nationality came under Romanian rule. In the summer of 1940, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, the Romanian government agreed to return Northern Transylvania, where the majority of the Hungarians lived, to Hungary. The anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1938 and 1939 in Hungary were also applied in Northern Transylvania. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19th March 1944, Jews from Northern Transylvania were deported to and killed in concentration camps along with Jews from all over Hungary except for Budapest. Northern Transylvania belonged to Hungary until the fall of 1944, when the Soviet troops entered and introduced a regime of military administration that sustained local autonomy. The military administration ended on 9th March 1945 when the Romanian administration was reintroduced in all the Western territories lost in 1940.

9 . Numerus clausus in Hungary

The general meaning of the term is restriction of admission to secondary school or university for economic and/or political reasons. The Numerus Clausus Act passed in Hungary in 1920 was the first anti-Jewish law in Europe. It regulated the admission of students to higher educational

institutions by stating that aside from the applicants' national loyalty and moral reliability, their origin had to be taken into account as well. The number of students of the various ethnic and national minorities had to correspond to their proportion in the population of Hungary. After the introduction of this act the number of students of Jewish origin at Hungarian universities declined dramatically.

10 . Strohmann system (new)

sometimes called the Aladar system; Jewish business owners were forced to take on Christian partners in their companies, giving them a stake in the business. Sometimes Christians would take on this role out of friendship and not for profits. This system came into being because of the anti-Jewish laws, which strongly restricted the economic options of Jewish entrepreneurs. In accordance with this law, a number of Jewish business licenses were revoked and no new licenses were issued. The Strohmann system insured a degree of survival for some Jewish businesses for varying lengths of time.

11 . 19th March 1944

Hungary was occupied by the German forces on this day. Nazi Germany decided to take this step because it considered the reluctance of the Hungarian government to carry out the 'final solution of the Jewish question' and deport the Jewish population of Hungary to concentration camps as evidence of Hungary's determination to join forces with the Western Allies. By the time of the German occupation, close to 63,000 Jews (8% of the Jewish population) had already fallen victim to the persecution. On the German side special responsibility for Jewish affairs was assigned to Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly appointed minister and Reich plenipotentiary, and to Otto Winkelmann, higher S.S. and police leader and Himmler's representative in Hungary.

12 . Nationalization in Romania

The nationalization of industry and natural resources in Romania was laid down by the law of 11th June 1948. It was correlated with the forced collectivization of agriculture and the introduction of planned economy.

13 Territorial reorganization in 1952

The new constitution adopted in 1952 declared Romania a country, which started to build up communism. The old administrative system was abolished, and the new one followed the Soviet pattern: the administrative partition of the country consisted of 18 regions ('regiune'), each of them subdivided into so called 'raions'. In the same year the so-called Hungarian Autonomous Region was founded, a third of which was made up by the Hungarian inhabitants living in Romania. The administrative center of this region was Targu Mures/Marosvasarhely, and it was subdivided into ten 'raions': Csik, Erdoszentgyorgy, Gyergyoszentmiklos, Kezdivasarhely, Marosheviz, Marosvasarhely, Regen, Sepsiszentgyorgy, Szekelyudvarhely.

14 . Territorial reorganization in 1968

In 1968 a new territorial reorganization took place in Romania. As a result of the new

administrative reform adopted on 16th February 1968, the 18 regions founded in 1952 were replaced with 39 counties plus a separate administrative unit consisting of Bucharest, the capital of the country. In Transylvania the reform led to the administrative division of the Hungarian community.

15 . Romanian Revolution of 1989

In December 1989, a revolt in Romania deposed the communist dictator Ceausescu. Anti-government violence started in Timisoara and spread to other cities. When army units joined the uprising, Ceausescu fled, but he was captured and executed on 25th December along with his wife. A provisional government was established, with Ion Iliescu, a former Communist Party official, as president. In the elections of May 1990 Iliescu won the presidency and his party, the Democratic National Salvation Front, obtained an overwhelming majority in the legislature.