

Laszlo Galla's 50th High School Reunion



I really love this picture. This was taken at my 50th high school reunion. Well, that's how many of us were left in 1984. Naturally, we travelled to Szentes for the reunion, but none of us were still living down there.

After elementary school came eight years of public high school. I studied Latin for eight years, German for seven and French for four. I took private English classes later. There were compulsory religious studies. There was a separate classroom, a Greek culture classroom, and that inscription was still there from the days when one had to learn Greek, and the Jewish religion class was held there. There was a separate Catholic classroom, and the Calvinists studied in their classroom. Catholics were in the majority, but Szentes was quite a Calvinist town. The Calvinists were better off, the middle class. There were Lutherans too, a few, they had to go to their minister for religious instruction. I think it's ridiculous that we learned Hebrew prayers without having to learn Hebrew. No one wanted us to understand, neither the teacher nor anyone else, the meaning of 'ha-layla-haze.' Yet, we had to read and, indeed, learn texts by heart. It was the most incomprehensible thing, but we had to do it.

In the early days, there was an A and B class in high school. There were three of us Jews in our class, I believe there were two in the B class, and in the combined class in the 6th grade, there were three of us Jews who took finals. I didn't experience any anti-Semitism, not once. There were conflicts between the Calvinists and the Catholics, many more scuffles than between Jews and non-Jews. The three Jews included Pista Schiffer who was from Kunszentmarton, so I only met him at school, never outside it. Imre Polgar was a good friend of mine from the 1st grade. We always sat together in elementary school, then he was put in the class B, but we kept up our friendship. He then became a doctor. And the poor guy was sent from work service to a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp. Then he died here, in the middle of Hungary, in Baja, of some epidemic. He wasn't my best friend, but we were on very good terms. I mainly made friends with non-Jews, because there was only a few of them. Imre Polgar was just as good a friend as the half-Jewish boy, the son of our doctor, and the other non-Jewish boys. It wasn't an issue who was Jewish and who wasn't.