

New Years In Garay Street



New Year's Eve party in the Garay Street apartment in December of 1943. In the first row, fourth from the left is my older sister, Klari, I'm the fifth, the sixth is Klari's fiancée, Sandor B. In the background of the picture, you can see that there's a blackout.

When my sister started to be a grown-up girl, there were these Jewish youth balls, to which she regularly went. At the time, my mother still escorted her. She met two very cute boys there, who went to the Madach [high school], and were just about to graduate. A circle of friends formed with them and their friends which I dropped into at the age of fourteen. Four of the boys had a row boat together, and rented a place for it cheap in one of the boathouses. We didn't have a rowboat, but from the age of fourteen - my sister was seventeen - we went rowing with this group of friends.

First from the left is Istvan Halasz. Born in 1922, graduated from Madach Imre High School. He wasn't allowed to go to university, so he studied to be a glazier. In 1945, he got to University and became a chemist. He was very successful in his field, and sometime in the early 1960s, he never came back from an official trip. He stayed in Germany. He succeeded in getting his wife and daughter out years later.

The Garay Street apartment was on the first floor, with two huge rooms facing the street. One was 6x5 meters, that was the bedroom, there the four of us slept. The other was 8x5 meters and that one had an alcove. There was a bathroom, a W.C., a huge kitchen, and a giant foyer. It could have been called a hall, if it didn't open on the entrance door. There was wood paneling and built-in cabinets. We ate there. the bigger room was a salon, we were very proud of it.

Grandma slept in the alcove. She lived for almost a year more after we moved in. There was a maid's room which had a door that opened on the stairwell, the other to the kitchen. A renter lived in the maid's room. This renter had a big role later, when she saved my father, she hid him. The whole apartment was high-standard, with beautiful stuccos on the ceiling. The owner of the house lived next door. They incidentally, were likewise a Jewish couple, and somehow he built it so the

whole first floor streetside was altogether. It was directly on Rottenbiller Street, so it wasn't part of 'Chicago'. On the other side of Rottenbiller was the Filleres Department Store.

The building itself had four stories, without an elevator, characteristic of VII. District buildings, with a street façade, two apartments per floor, three on the highest floor. On the back side there were three apartments per floor, with those kind of common toilets next to the stairs on the highest floor. The majority of residents weren't Jewish, that's why it didn't become a star house. Relations with the other residents were friendly. One of courteous greetings. There weren't any special get-togethers, nor mixing. There was only one family who we knew were Arrow Cross. This doesn't mean Arrow Cross armbands, just their sympathies. But for example, they didn't report us, didn't make things uncomfortable during the Arrow Cross period. It's characteristic of the residents that after 1945 they came over to us to complain how hard life is, how little there is of everything. I can still hear when they said 'what a beautiful idea the Arrow Cross was, too bad it couldn't be realized'. There was a lonely woman named Olga Fuhrer, who manufactured cosmetic articles, and really loved us very, very much. Later we found out that she hid many people during the Arrow Cross period. But after 1945, she immediately started to pity the persecuted Arrow Cross. She didn't have political reasons, just humanitarian ones.