Laszlo Galla

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My family background

Mor Kohn was my mother's father. He was a textile merchant, he had his own textile shop. My grandmother, Netti Heitler was always ill. When I met her she was already bedridden, I don't know anything about her illness. She died when I was seven, in 1923. My grandfather must have lived seven years longer, so he died around 1930. He was pretty old, at least 80, so he must have been born sometime around 1850. I don't know where they were born. They lived in Hodmezovasarhely, but since they needed care, my father had them move to Szentes sometime in the 1920s and they both died there. I have never been at my grandparents' original residence, and I don't know how they lived. They were Neolog 1. They observed the high holidays now and then, perhaps they even ate kosher.

They had three daughters, one was my mother, and then there was Aunt Olga and Aunt Mariska. My mother, Erzsebet Kohn, was born in 1887, in her birth certificate she appears as Orzsike and her Jewish name was Eszter. Her sisters were older than her, I don't know exactly, perhaps four-five years older, and they were both housewives. I know that my mother, after completing four years of civil school 2 went to school in Temesvar [today: Timisoara, Romania] there were higher girls' schools 3 at that time, where they learned housekeeping and community skills. I think it was for two or three years, and my mother graduated from it. I don't know about the schooling of her two sisters.

Aunt Olga lived in Hodmezovasarhely among very bad family circumstances. They were poor, she was quite deaf as well, and her husband died, so she was not capable of looking after my grandparents. Aunt Olga's husband, Herman Mayer, was an agent. When they were mentioned in the family, it always came up how poor they were. They had two children, Rozsi and Lili. Lili studied acting but wasn't really successful, and was in some films, but always in smaller roles. And as far as I know, she later committed suicide in Berlin [today Germany]. This all happened in my

childhood, so I only found out about it second-hand. Rozsi lived in Bacska [Backa Palanka, Serbia] in Yugoslavia, she married a fairly rich Topolya [Topola, Serbia] merchant called Havas. He was a widower, and had a son. Rozsi was much younger than him, she was entrusted with bringing up the child. But they lived well in Yugoslavia.

Aunt Mariska lived in Szabadka [Subotica, Serbia], which belonged to Yugoslavia in the years after the war. She had a husband by the name of [Andras] Farago, who was Jewish and whom she divorced – a big thing in those days. I don't know his profession but they had two boys, Pista Farago and Bandi Farago, and a daughter, Ella Farago, who were still very small when their mother married a lawyer named Izso [from Izsak = Isaac] Tordai. So they were brought up by Uncle Izso Tordai. Ella was a journalist in Yugoslavia, and wrote for papers in Szabadka, Zombor [today Sombor, Serbia], and I think in Uj Videk [Novi Sad, Serbia]. For years she ran a psychological type section under the name Ella Havas – Emil Havas was her husband – and ran around in writing circles all her life.

My paternal great-grandfather was a shoemaker by profession. He was called Izrael Gunst. He was born in Albertirsa, and he worked there. [Editor's note: In the time of the great-grandfather the place was called Irsa, it was joined with Alberti only in 1950, and Albertirsa was formed at that time.] He had eleven children. The first few were born in Irsa, then my great-grandfather moved for who knows what reason to Szentes. From then on he had his workshop and business there. Not only did he make shoes to measure, but also for the warehouse, and he sold them. All the while, he raised eleven children. There were huge age differences between the children, so some had already grown up and left home when the last child was born. The interesting thing is that there were ten boys and one girl. My grandfather only kept in touch with a few of his siblings, perhaps not that closely with them either, so I don't know anything about most of them.

The youngest child, Berti [from Bertalan] became famous, relatively famous. When Lajos Kossuth [(1802-1894): Hungarian lawyer and politician, one of the leaders of the Hungarian freedom fight against the Austrians in 1848/49] was exiled after the freedom fight was defeated, he lived the last part of his life in Italy, near Turin and was preparing to write his memoirs. He needed a secretary who could translate and who could get hold of the raw materials. Kossuth asked his contacts in Pest to find him this kind of young man. Uncle Berci, who had legal training, and worked then as a freelancer for some Pest paper, was given the job. He went abroad, and was Kossuth's secretary for three years, [Bertalan Gunst was Kossuth's secretary from 1879-1883] and his memoirs were written in that time. He is even mentioned in the Szentes High School yearbook – since he attended this school, as did my father, and then me – as a famous old pupil, Bertalan Gunst, Lajos Kossuth's secretary. Then as a young man living in London, Uncle Berci married a girl from Budapest, yet their wedding was in Szentes – he so clung to his Szentes identity, and those in Szentes considered him that, too. Generally, our family is very close to their roots.

Another of my grandfather's brothers was Uncle Henrik. Uncle Henrik's story is very interesting. Joachim Gunst, then Henrik, or as he later called himself: Henri Horn, became an artist and lived abroad. He spent a little time in Italy, and most of his life he spent in France as an artist. He became a kind of a bohemian man, who had three wives. He had a child from both his first two marriages, and four children from his third wife, whom he married at the age of 50. This latter woman was in her twenties, so there was a huge age difference between them. Four children were born from this marriage. The first three between 1900 and 1904, and the last one in 1915, so when

Henri was 66 years old. The boy is called Pierre, they became completely French of course, and Pierre is of my age. Once we discovered him in a Paris directory. I knew that Uncle Henrik took on the name Horn, and he was known under this name as an artist. I was looking for something in the directory at the post office, and I noticed the name: Gunst-Horn. It had to be him, both the Gunst and the Horn was right. Later I got in touch with him, and then it turned out that this Pierre also had several children, and one of them, Olivier, who was born in 1947 in Middle-France, became a Roman Catholic bishop somewhere. This much about the fate of a Hungarian Jewish family. I think this is a very good story.

My paternal grandfather was called Lipot Gunst. I have seen the birth certificate, and his name is down there as Leopold, but on the sign in the shop it was Lipot. My grandmother was Emilia Paszternak, who was closely related to Joe Paszternak, the famous Hollywood filmmaker. [Pasternak, Joseph (1901-1991): Born in Hungary, he immigrated to the US in 1921, beginning his Hollywood career as a waiter in the restaurant at Universal Studios. By 1928, he had moved up from assistant director to associate producer and then was appointed manager of Universal Studios operations in Berlin. He fled Germany in 1933, and though he returned to save Universal from bankruptcy with his Deanna Durban hit musical, 'Three Smart Girls' (1936), he lost family members in the concentration camps. The onset of Parkinson's disease ended his career in 1968.] We never saw him, they didn't correspond either, but the family connection was quite well-known. My grandmother was born in 1849, and my grandfather was born in Irsa, in 1844.

In Szentes there lived about 500-600 Jews, and they were all middle-of-the-road religious. Mako was 80 kilometers away, where a much more intense Jewish life went on than in Szentes. There was an Orthodox 4 synagogue and a Neolog one, and a few thousand Jews lived there. Szentes was nothing compared to that. The town was about as big as Mako and the region was also the same, but the Jewry in Szentes was fairly assimilated. There was a synagogue, it was very beautiful, today it is the town library. There was a Jewish community, my father was its vice-president, then its chairman. There was a Chevra Kaddisha too, of course, which dealt with burials – the cemetery was very beautiful. There was a Malbish Arumim Society which dealt with charitable works for the poor, and there was a Jewish Women's Association, my mother was its chairwoman for a while. Even though everyone got along in the Jewish community, there was a fairly big battle when it came to community elections, since that's when they decided who should be the chairman, and his people then made up the tax committee, who took less tax from its own people, its supporters. The community tax at that time was collected like ordinary taxes, you had to pay them. So there was a battle mainly because of this, and the community was divided in two over it.

I know that before World War I, there was always a rabbi in Szentes. Between the two world wars sometimes there was, sometimes there wasn't. The rabbi, who was in Szentes when I was born, left Szentes and for a long time there was no rabbi. So when I had my bar mitzvah when I was 13, that is, in 1929, there hadn't been a rabbi in Szentes for years, and at my parents' request this rabbi came to Szentes from Pest, where he was employed, to conduct my bar mitzvah. And there wasn't one for years after either. For years after that, the Szentes community sponsored and looked after a rabbinical student, called Zoltan Kohn, who left them in the lurch. When he became a rabbi, he simply vanished and we never saw him again. And then once again, they were looking for a rabbi for years, and then came Jozsef Burdiger, who later magyarized his name to Berend. He was the rabbi in Szentes at the time of the ghettoization. There was always a teacher, and he was secretary

of the community too. There was a shammash too. There was no kosher butchery. Uncle Ungar, the shammash went from house to house, he was the shochet and the shammash. It also happened that they took [animals] to him.

There were six siblings altogether in my dad's family. The eldest was Erno, then Aunt Helen, then Aunt Maca – her name was Matild – then Regina. Then there was my father, and then Laszlo, who died young at 16, in 1899 – I was named Laszlo after him. My father was born in 1880 in Szentes. He attended high school there. At the time, this high school was connected with the Debrecen Calvinist High School. Since it only had six grades, anyone who wanted to go to seventh and eighth had to finish in Debrecen. My father didn't go there, so he only completed six grades of secondary school. I used to know why, but now I can't remember why he quit.

His sisters were all educated girls, but I don't know what schools they were in, or what they studied. Aunt Helen married in Kolozsvar [Cluj Napoca, Romania]. I think her husband died and she married again. Her second husband was Jozsef Weisz, he was a tailor in Kolozsvar. Aunt Maca was married in Hodmezovasarhely, her husband was Schenk, but I don't know his first name. She divorced, and then found a husband there called Droth through Aunt Helen, who was married and living in Kolozsvar. It was a very successful marriage. He adopted Aunt Maca's three children, Istvan, Margit and Gyorgy. Regina married in Szentes and had her children there. Then she died giving birth to her last child, Gyuri. He [her husband] was left a widower with three or four children, and my grandparents took on the little child to take the pressure off the widowed man. Uncle Erno became a mining engineer, went to Rozsaszentmarton and worked at the coal mine there as a mining engineer and eventually became the director of the entire mine. He died of illness there, before the war. Since my father's younger brother, Laszlo, had died, only my father remained in Szentes, and he took over the business from my grandfather.

First, Grandfather ran a grocery store in Szentes, which went better and better for him, and by the end, he became an ironmonger. So the spices and ox tongue and such that he sold at first gradually fell off and were replaced with hardware, more spare parts, like car parts, tools for blacksmiths, carpentry tools. Later when bicycles got big, they became a popular item. And of course, there were enamel pots, grinders, knives, scissors and such. The shop was opposite the Post Office, in the fourth house from the Main Square. He didn't open his first shop there, but somewhere in Kiser, which was an outer suburb of Szentes. [Editor's note: As it will turn out later, they celebrated the 75th anniversary of the ironmongery in 1943, so the grandfather opened the shop in 1868, at the age of 24.] Then, I suppose, he must have steadily got involved there, where I was born and the shop was. What I can remember, the shops were already 80-100 square meters large and there were numerous warehouses on the ground floor and in the cellar, which must have been about 250 square meters [2690 sq.ft.] altogether.

My father took over when grandfather started to get old, so I really only remember that period. There must have been four employees at the time. My father was a very diligent man. We closed the shop every evening at 7. At that time, you had to open from 7 to 12, then from 12 to 2 there was a noon break and from 2 to 7 it was open again, so my father was very busy. It was open on Saturdays – and for a time on Sundays, too – at first until noon and then from 7am to 10am. There was no stock delivery in the area. Even while my grandfather was in charge, it was my father who traveled for goods. One of our suppliers was the Weiss Manfred factory 5, but we were supplied by a number of other companies, the biggest merchants in Budapest at the time. There was a

competitor of about the same size in Szentes, the Horvaths, and there were smaller merchants in the suburbs, they were more like general stores, but most of them had been assistants from my grandfather's business who then set up for themselves. None of them were Jewish, these competitors, the Horvaths weren't either. Ours was the only Jewish one of its kind, there wasn't any other in Szentes.

There was a big ledger in which the sales on credit were written. There were some customers – Szentes was an agricultural area, most people were homestead or local village producers – who only had money in the fall. So there were many who only paid once a year, after the summer harvest, when they got money for wheat and other produce. Szentes was a county seat, there were many offices and schools, so there were also customers, clerks for example, who were paid monthly, and they paid us monthly. But you could say that at least 50 percent of the customers bought on credit, and most of them paid, too, at the set time. It was very rare that we had to take them to court or demand payment. Our customers were trustworthy people. There was no signing for things, it was just written down what a person had taken. And when the farmer came to pay in the fall, he trusted that we hadn't written anything extra, and we trusted that he would pay. So it was such a patriarchal period, even between the two world wars.

Growing up

My father got together with my mother in the following way: Aunt Maca was married in Hodmezovasarhely [at that time], and my father, as a young man, used to visit her, and met my mother there. It might have been arranged, but of course, I don't know that. I had an older sister who died before I was born, at the age of two and a half, of yellow fever. She was born in 1912, her name was Eva. [Editor's note: Yellow fever: a disease transmitted by mosquitoes in tropical, Mediterranean regions, causing high-fever and yellow skin. Its fatality rate at this period was 75 percent. Our sources say this was not usual for Hungary, but was possible.]

When World War I broke out, my father was already 34, but he was still immediately called up. I remember that he went into the Lugos [Lugoj, Romania] regiment – Lugos is now part of Romania – then they were sent to Serbia. He spent the entire war there, in Dalmatia and its environs, right up until the final retreat. He was constantly away for four years, though he got leave time by time. I wasn't made [sic – conceived] at home, but in Belgrade [today Serbia]. My father was given leave, but a very short one, and they knew in advance when it would be, so my mother traveled down to Belgrade. They met there in the officers' wing of the barracks – my father had joined up as an ensign officer and was a captain when discharged – and they spent a few days there, and I was made [conceived] there in February 1916.

My grandmother, Emilia Paszternak, had two sisters who were also married in Szentes. Aunt Betti and Aunt Lina. When I was born, my cousin Gyuri was sent down to get the family together. I was born at home, by candlelight, as the electricity service went off at 9 o'clock in the evening and I was born at a quarter to one in the morning. There was a midwife and Dr. Lowy was called, who was an old doctor, since the young doctors were in the war. And they asked Gyuri to wake Aunt Betti to come over. Aunt Betti had false teeth, and in her rush, she left them behind and came to celebrate my birth. This story was told in our family for twenty years.

When I was circumcised, my father wasn't at home yet. [Editor's note: Under normal circumstances, circumcision would happen eight days after birth, and the boy is given his name at that time.] So they sent him a telegram and he came home quickly. The commissioned personnel, which he belonged to, were somewhere in Dalmatia and were living in some royal or aristocratic palace. When they found out that I had been born, they filched a beautiful album containing members of that aristocratic family, and the fellow officers sent that as a present for me.

We lived with my grandparents. The house was in the same building as the shop, a corner building. The shop and the warehouses were in the corner part of it, and the five-bedroom apartment was on the Petofi Street side. My grandparents brought up one of my cousins, my Aunt Regina's youngest child, and one of the five rooms was his, my parents had three rooms and my grandparents had a huge room right beside the shop. We lived like the bourgeois, I would say. We had nice furniture and paintings on the wall. The paintings and the furniture all disappeared in 1944. I remember that we had paintings by Jozsef Koszta. [Editor's note: Jozsef Koszta (1861-1949) was a significant artist, he lived in Nagybanya (today Baia Mare, Romania), Szolnok, then on his farm near Szentes.] I got my own room when Gyuri left home at the age of 19-20. He eventually became a doctor, and because of the numerus clausus 6 he was only able to finish his training in Italy. Until that time I didn't have my own room, I slept in one room with my parents.

There were lots of books at home. There was a big bookcase with lots of books in it, books fashionable at that time, the Hungarian classics of the time: Jokai 7, Mikszath [Editor's note: Kalman Mikszath (1847-1910) was a great Hungarian novelist and politician. Many of his novels contained social commentary and satire, and towards the end of his life they became increasingly critical of the aristocracy and the burden that he believed it placed on Hungarian society] and Gardonyi [Editor's note: Geza Gardonyi, born Geza Ziegler (1863 –1922) was a Hungarian writer and journalist. Although he wrote a wide range of works, he had his greatest success as a historical novelist, particularly with Egri csillagok (Stars of Eger) and A lathatatlan ember (Invisible Man).] I only remember Hungarian, French and German books, there weren't any Hebrew books among them. We subscribed to the 'Ujsag' ['News': a liberally-minded political daily that started in 1903, was banned during the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, then continued that fall only to be banned again by the interior minister in 1925.] which you could call a liberal paper then. Then we subscribed to 'Mult es Jovo' [' Past and Future,' a Jewish literary and artistic journal], and when I was fairly little to 'Remeny' ['Hope': Jewish literary monthly]. And we had 'Szinhazi Elet' ['Theatrical Life': A popular weekly which appeared between 1912 and 1938, printing many colorful stories about the early theater and film world, including the text of new plays. Founded by Sandor Incze and edited with Zsolt Harsanyi.], which my mother read, and 'Uj Idok' ['New Times: A literary journal. Produced for and popular with the educated middle class, it came out in many more editions than other literary journals.]. My father got 'Magyar Vaskereskedo' ['Hungarian Iron Merchant'] and the National Hungarian Trade Association paper, which was a professional journal.

In the early days, when the family was still large and the six of us lived together, with my cousin, my grandparents, we had a cook and a maid. Later this was reduced to one. The cook, under my grandmother's direction I believe, cooked the kosher meals. My mother did the housework, and when there were no chores to do, then she helped in the shop. She sat at the register. As my grandmother got older my mother gradually had to take over the household. But this takeover surely did not happen smoothly, something they generally tried to hide from me, but well, the

tensions were running high during that time. My mother went to the market. It was near us, on the main square, just a few blocks away. She went with a ‘garaboly’ [hamper] on her arm, sometimes two. This is a Szentes word, it’s a round basket you can carry on your arm. I haven’t really heard this word in other regions. Sometimes the maid went with her, when she saw that it would be too much for her alone to carry. When there was a lot to slaughter then the shochet came to us, when there was only one chicken, we went to him.

My parents lived a fairly busy social life, they had quite a few close and less close friends. My father was the chairman of the Jewish community, my mother was the chair-woman of the women’s association, so they were in the middle of society things. Two or three times a week, after supper, so around 8 or 8.30 in the evening, the guests came, or they went somewhere. Their friends were 100 percent Jewish, even our doctor, who was also the district doctor, was a converted Jew.

Since my father was a community functionary, he went to synagogue every Friday night and every Saturday, too. At these times, my mother was in the shop, and when I was bigger, I was. My father said that he knew how to pray. He had a tallit, but I never saw him in a teffilin. I also had to take part in the morning prayers, as a student. Ten people were hard to gather together [for a minyan], so those of us who were high school students, so over thirteen, we were always divided up to take part in morning prayers. And for weekly prayers too, and then we had to put on the teffilin. I believe that my father would have stayed even more religious, but my mother was the spiritual dean, in that we tended increasingly towards irreligiousness.

On the high holidays, at Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, the shop was closed. Perhaps it was closed at Pesach or Shavuot, I can’t remember exactly. But on the three big holidays, we were certainly closed, and we went to synagogue. At Yom Kippur, I started with half day fasts, so I had to fast for the first time from early evening until lunch the next day. I must have been about eight then. This half-day fast lasted two to three years and from then on I had to do a whole day [Editor’s note: Children have to fast for an entire day, like the adults, only after their bar or bat mitzvah. Until then they only fast half a day.]. This was so even when we’d already given up keeping kosher. Once, when on the second day of Yom Kippur we were going home from the synagogue, the entire family made my grandfather hurry, because everyone was hungry. And right after that, I think he became ill, so they said he died because of this.

We always ate together. At the Friday night supper the two candles were burning. There was always chulent, but we never ate gefilte fish, because my mother didn’t like it, so we didn’t have it, even when we lived with the grandparents. I also remember that Gyuri, my cousin, had an older sister, they had a glass shop in Szentes. And her husband had come from somewhere in the Nyirseg [region in north-eastern Hungary] to Szentes, so he was more religious by about 20-30 percent than the rest, and so it was more important for them to observe the rules related to Jewish life. For example, there they always had a more festive Friday night supper. They always invited to this the Szentes Jewish teacher, who was from Hajdudorog, where Jewish life was also very strong. I had supper there every Friday when I was older.

We didn’t have a sukkah at Sukkot, but at various places in Szentes, sukkot were put up. We had a paved yard because of the hardware shop, into which the big transport carts came in through the great gate, they were able to turn around there, and unload the goods that came by railroad. So it was not suitable for putting up a sukkah. If they had been religious enough, my ancestors could

have surely found a solution, so that the carts wouldn't have come in, but unload the goods on the street, but this wasn't the case.

We always lit the chanukkiyah in those days, in my childhood. I remember the small sweets and some sort of present giving at Chanukkah. I've mentioned our doctor, who was a converted Jew. He had come from Transylvania 8, he had a half-Jewish wife, and they had two children; a boy and a girl. The boy was of my age, and when we went to high school we were together a lot, although he was not one of my best friends. They held a big Christmas, and later, when I was a teenager, my parents and I went to their house after the Christmas dinner, and spent the evening there. And then my father bought me a present too, since the two children there got presents, and he didn't want me to feel left out. I also remember a Christmas, when my mother and I were already preparing for the supper, and then my father came in with a little bell and brought in the gifts like little Jesus [Editor's note: In Hungary and other parts of Europe, on Christmas Eve parents ring a bell and tell the children that the baby Jesus has brought the presents]. We cheered up and laughed, so we didn't take Christmas seriously, it wasn't a holiday for us. I liked trains very much, and I usually got presents connected to them; a small train, rails, a big train, an engine you could sit in. And then those building blocks, Matador – it was a wooden building toy like Lego. And later there was Märklin, which was a metal erector set. [Editor's note: Märklin –a metal construction toy known all around the world, manufactured in Göppingen since the end of the 19th century.] I also got books.

There was no purimshpil, but there was a Purim ball, which was always organized by the Jewish Women's Association, and these were big events. And there were shelakhmones, cakes and brioche or such, we sent them to our six to eight best friends, and they sent them to us too. There was seder too, but that essentially stopped when my grandparents died. But at that Jeno Grunstein's, who was from Nyirseg, there were seder evenings there too [Editor's note: Jeno Grunstein's wife was the daughter of Laszlo Galla's paternal aunt.] I always went there without my parents, but I went with pleasure.

I remember in my childhood there was a huge square dining table in my grandparents' room. At seder all the family members gathered – my grandparents, my parents, Gyuri and I, and perhaps some sibling or relative who was there: there were eleven siblings in grandfather's family, so there was always a guest, so they were great seder evenings. As far as I can remember there were a minimum of eight of us at the table. My grandfather recited the Haggadah. It says what you have to do in the Haggadah, and I remember we did it all. While my grandparents lived, there were spring house cleanings at Pesach, and a separate dining service.

While we lived with my paternal grandparents, we had a kosher household, and the moment my paternal grandmother died, she died later [than he], under my mother we gave up keeping kosher. This doesn't mean that we started to cook with lard but we didn't observe the milk-meat separation rules totally. So the whole family, as far as I know, easily bent the Jewish rules. There was religion in the attitude, in honesty, in respect for others, love, charity and empathy. These are wonderful moral characteristics which I noticed everywhere in my family. These indicated religiousness, I believe, not murmuring unknown prayers or observing all kinds of regulations.

We never spoke anything other than Hungarian, with any producer or shop, or with those who lived in Szabadka [today Subotica, Serbia] or Kolozsvar. Despite the fact that these were annexed

territories 9, everyone was Hungarian there, too. My father spoke fluent German, my mother also spoke German, and she spoke French and Italian too. My mother loved languages. She learned Italian, for example, when she was well in her 50s, as there was an Italian class in Szentes. At that time we were very 'in' with Mussolini 10, so Italian was something very cultivated.

I didn't go to nursery school, I was raised at home. There was a Jewish elementary school in Szentes, I went there for four years. The elementary school was four grades, and all four grades were taught in one room, there were so few children, there were about 30 students all together. The curriculum was the same as in the other schools. I know this because we could take part in city study competitions, and the good pupils of the Jewish school always did well.

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 [Editor's note: In 1920 47,6% of the inhabitants were Calvinists, 47,4% were Roman Catholics, and only 5% belonged to other denominations.]. 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.' [Editor's note: It means "this night." As part of the seder ritual, the youngest child asks the person who leads the ceremony the following question four times: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" Through answering this question, the leader of the ceremony explains the special meaning of seder.] 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 [forced labor] to a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp [Editor's note: According to the estimations about 20,000-30,000 Jewish forced laborers fell into Soviet captivity.] 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 [Jews]. 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.

Besides school, I studied shorthand and took fencing lessons. I always liked sports: I played football, tennis and table tennis. I even won a table tennis competition when I was a 7th or 8th-grader. I also played chess. We didn't go on hikes – there wasn't anything to see in Szentes. But we did go to the beach, to the pool. There was a small fifteen meter pool in Szentes surrounded by changing rooms, a side feature of the steam baths – I didn't go the steam baths, the elderly did –

and I learned to swim there. And in 1932, when I was 16, a beautiful big pool was built, with a big park around it, and from then on, 'pool-life' was big, and I was a participant there every day. Our social life went on there every summer.

Zionism 11 was certainly not an issue in Szentes during my childhood. There was a dental technician who brought a religious assistant with him from the countryside or I don't know where, and I think I heard the word Zionist for the first time from him. But I heard about what the point of it was, and what they were doing from an exceptionally religious young Jewish man, who was an engineer for the railway. He wasn't from Szentes, he'd come there when he was 25-30. So he had brought his religion with him. Religion and the Zionist ideology was usually brought in from the outside to Szentes.

I had been going to Pest since I was a small boy. We had some distant relatives there but we didn't go because of them only, but my father used to go to get goods. Sometimes my mother and father traveled together, but only if there was a way to leave the shop. I was usually only with my mother in Pest. We stayed at the Astoria Hotel, and I loved the elevator there, and I annoyed the elevator boys, because I was always going up and down in it. Opposite the Astoria was an open air cinema, the Markus Park Cinema, and one could see everything brilliantly from the upper floors of the hotel, if we managed to get a room on the fifth floor on that side. I also liked watching the trams. I loved Budapest in general by then, and I always wondered at the great traffic, and even today I don't understand – in Szentes few people came and went on the street, everybody did their business wherever they were, and only went to the Post Office or shopping, if they really had to. There was no bustle, and I wondered why did so many people have to be on the street and go here and there, why didn't they sit at home and do their job.

I was a very thin child, so my mother took me here and there to find out what was wrong with me. There was nothing, it just seems I didn't need so much food. Once my mother took me to Tatrathaza, which belonged to Czechoslovakia at that time, in order to fatten me up. I can't remember any other summer holidays, and my parents didn't really go either. They couldn't get away because of the shop, it couldn't be closed, especially in the summer when the agricultural life was booming, and every day something was needed – here a watering can had busted at the Kovacs', or the wagon wheel had come off at the Szabos'.

Even though my parents didn't go on holiday, we went to Szabadka, and Kolozsvar; they could somehow take a couple days off, they found someone to substitute them. In Szabadka, my lawyer uncle had a villa in Palics – a pretty summer vacation place near Szabadka. I was there too. My grandparents died when I was in my teens; until then even though my grandfather was already old, they could leave him there for two-three-four days or at Christmas time. We often spent Christmas and New Year's Eve in Kolozsvar. I have very nice New Year's Eve experiences from Kolozsvar. My uncle, Aunt Helen's husband, was a tailor. Their apartment and workshop was on the main square in a tenement. The workshop alone had three or four rooms, there were assistants, apprentices. Their apartment was right next to the workshop. By the way, he was the tailor for the Hungarian Theater in Kolozsvar, and was on very good terms with the actors. After the New Year's performance, the actors came over, already a little tipsy, and gave another performance to the guests there, to my uncle's circle. I was allowed to stay up until midnight, occasionally until after midnight, and could watch this performance. They gave a great cabaret there on New Year's. I will never forget.

I graduated from high school in 1934. After that, it didn't even occur to me to go to university. Partly because I didn't know what I wanted to be. I knew one thing, that I didn't want to be what my father was, a country ironmonger. For a while I was forced to, anyway. I believe my father took it with mild resignation. He would have liked the business to go on forever and grow. My father, who was one of the most known people in his profession in the country, had been asked by the Weiss Manfred factory for 15 years to come to Pest and be the factory's iron merchandise director. And my mother kept going on about it, and at the end reproached him when the trouble came, that if we had lived in Pest, then what happened to my father wouldn't have happened. Well, my father didn't want to leave the shop for anything, he liked working there, and he would have liked me to take over the shop.

After graduation, I went to a cousin of mine in Kolozsvar, who had a pretty successful transport enterprise, as a trainee, and I was there for a short time. Then I was sent to Pest to a post-diploma course. The course was eight months, and there they taught sales management – in today's terms. About two years after graduation, I came home to Szentes, and from then on, from 1936 until 1947, I worked in the shop.

In 1936 I was 20, the best age for a boy. I had a quite busy social life, but somehow then I moved more in Jewish circles. Earlier when I was at high school, and we lived together with Christian boys, naturally I spent more time with them. My best friend at that time was a Christian boy, with whom I had been at school for eight years. Then he went to the Ludovika 12, the military academy, and became an officer, so from then on I only saw him when he got leave, but then always. We maintained the friendship, despite the fact that we never wrote a single letter, but when we were together, then we were just as good friends as ever. Then the war came, and the poor guy died somewhere near Gyor. [Editor's note: In November 1989 the Szentes City Council erected a monument in the memory of those citizens from Szentes who had lost their lives in World War II. On this monument it can be read that Janos Imre Csalah died in 1944.]

My other good friend, who was my friend until he died, was the Jewish teacher, who was always there on Friday nights and seder at my aunt's, and who I have mentioned earlier. The brother of the teacher, Miklos Klein, later Fabian, was a rabbi. He became my best friend when I came back to Szentes in 1936. He was seven years older than I. When he had come to Szentes at the age of 20, I was thirteen and misbehaving at synagogue, and he came over to tell me off, tell me a few more things, and drive me away. But then the age gap closed, and from then on he was my best, perhaps my only real friend, and we always shared our troubles. We were together in forced labor. He got married in Szentes. They have two children, both pedagogues. Gyuri and Judit are married, everyone in the family is a pedagogue. Miklos Fabian worked at the education department of the county council as an assistant director. When the chief town of the county became Hodmezovasarhely instead of Szentes, they moved there, and later, when the chief town of the county was changed again [1961], they moved to Szeged. He worked at the education department of the county council, and he died there in Szeged, in 1995.

During the war

When Hitler came to power in 1933, we didn't feel the effect of it in our daily life yet. Naturally, we heard about it in the newspapers and on the radio, but somehow we didn't think it was that serious. In 1938, the first anti-Jewish law 13 was passed. This affected our lives. But we didn't

believe what ensued. Up to 1939, life went on in the normal routine, but then war broke out, and things changed in a lot of ways, whether you were Jewish or not. In 1940, I was a forced laborer once for three months and once for two. The 1940 work service 14 lasted for three months in Tecso [today Tyachev, Ukraine], in recently re-annexed Subcarpathia 15. Interestingly enough, there were lots of Christians designated politically untrustworthy with us. [Editor's note: Not only Jews were drafted into forced labor, but also communists, social democrats, or people who were considered politically untrustworthy because of other reasons.] This was in Tecso in the spring, around April, May, then in October and November, I was in County Bekes near the Romanian border, in Okany, for two months, and then I was discharged.

I was at home in 1941 and the ironmonger's was operating. It also went on later too, it celebrated 75 years of existence in 1943, and my father had a gold-colored emblem made which they stuck on letters and on the corner of invoices. It said, 'Sandor Gunszt, wholesale. 75 yrs.' There was a garland around it. Even then it never occurred to us, that it would have to be abandoned.

Then, from the beginning of 1942, I was continually a forced laborer. We had an exceptionally unpleasant company commander but his subordinates behaved more sympathetically towards us. Nobody in the company died, we covered all Transylvania, the Alfold, Transdanubia [eastern Hungary]. When Szalasi 16 came to power on 15th October 1944 17, we were in Baja.

I was in forced labor until 1944 when we were handed over to the Germans at Hegyeshalom [on the current border with Austria], but not as laborers but as deportees. Then we were brought down to Harka with a little trip through Austria and then to Mauthausen 18 where we were for about two weeks. In Harka, we dug tank traps for the Russian tanks. We spent nearly five months there.

On 28th March 1945 they took us from Harka. I was liberated in Gunskirchen [Austria] in May 1945. Then we wound up in Wels [Austria] in a reception camp, and the International Red Cross transmitted the names of who was there on various radio stations. Some people in Szentes heard it on the radio and went to my mother, and out of breath, told her that I was alive. In Wels the news was always going round that now we were going home. There was a gentleman there called Hiller who was agitating for us not to go home, but to Israel [at that time Palestine] or some other western country. I wanted to know what was going on at home, how my mother was, what happened to my father, so I never even gave it a thought. On 1st August we got under Soviet rule instead of American rule because of a territory exchange, and my chance came in the middle of August: I went straight home, a good way on foot. As it turned out, the place where my mother was deported and Harka, where I was, were only about 40 kilometers apart, but we had no idea about each other.

My father was deported shortly after the Germans entered, on 19th March 1944 19. He was the chairman of the Jewish community at that time, and he and other notables were rounded up at the Szentes police station. He managed to submit an appeal against his internment, naturally he thought he was innocent, and he knew that they only rounded him up because it was easy to find him through the Jewish community. Well, you can imagine what happened to that appeal, and the following week they deported him to Auschwitz, to be more precise, he was taken from Szentes first to Pest [Budapest], from there to Sarvar and then to Auschwitz and there he was exterminated. [Editor's note: Randolph L. Braham mentions Sandor Gunst by name: he says that he was first taken to Topolya, with other prominent members of the Szentes Jewish Community and

was deported to Auschwitz among the first. See Randolp L. Braham: A magyar Holocaust, Budapest, Gondolat, e.n. (1988). According to the interview, in the meantime he was also in Budapest and Sarvar.] It is very hard to distinguish what I heard at first. But at the time, I think we didn't really know about Auschwitz. My father wrote postcards from Pest and Sarvar, which my mother didn't only keep and take to the ghetto and into deportation, but also managed to keep and bring back home.

There was a ghetto in Szentes and the polemics were flying about where to demarcate it – there wasn't much time to decide, of course. The Turul Association 20, a right wing student association, got involved. One of its members was the son of one of the Szentes Calvinist pastors, who was a university student, and along with his associates, suggested that the ghetto should be near the railway station, since the English or Americans would probably bomb it, and then at least the Jews would be killed. It was put there, not so close but quite close to the railway station. In Szentes, there must have been 400-500 Jews who were not in forced labor, but the Jews from Szegvar, who were very few, less than 100, were also put in the Szentes ghetto. For sure there were six or eight to a room. Single-story family houses were appropriated from the residents. My mother went there in May 1944. Our forced laborer unit, which had been in various places over the years, was in Szentes when ghettoization took place, indeed the authorities took twenty men from our company to build the fence around the ghetto. I know that the company commander made sure when he picked the twenty, that Szentes men or men from around there should not be involved as they would surely help, or make contact with the Jews there.

I was not able to meet my mother then, who was later taken to Szeged, because the Jewry from the region were rounded up in the ghetto there and were deported from there. And by chance our unit was in Szeged when my mother was put on the train, and by chance, I was working at Rokus station under German military command when my mother was put in the wagon. The two German NCOs in charge were very decent: Corporal Maschke and Lance Corporal Till who were exceptionally nice men, especially Maschke, who was a post office clerk in Germany, he hated the whole war and Hitlerism and because of this was on very good terms with us. When I saw that they were leading Jews off and went closer – we couldn't go over there – I saw that my mother was in line and was put into the wagon and I told this Maschke that they were taking my mother and asked if I could somehow speak to her. And Maschke went to the constable captain 21, who was directing this whole thing, and spoke to him, asking if my mother was in the wagon and if the door was already closed, then could I go over there, accompanied by a constable, to speak to her for twenty minutes. And so it was. My poor mother wanted to give me something to eat from what she had, yet I could say that compared to her, I was in clover.

They took my mother to Austria, she worked in the Treff Koffer- und Lederwarenfabrik with a bunch of people from Szentes. This factory was in Tribuswinkel [about 20 kilometers south of Vienna, Austria]. I think they divided them up at Strasshof 22 and took them to various factories. [Editor's note: They deported the Jews from Szeged in three transports, two of these, according to other sources only one, went to Strasshof.] 'I want 20, 50' – it was a slave market – and my mother and her friends, in good company, came to this factory where the boss was extraordinarily nice, and treated them well. By the way, all the members of a provincial theater company broken up by the Germans were also taken there to work, they of course were extremely bohemian, those who didn't bother much with the whole Hitler thing. They had better conditions, of course. They didn't sleep

eight to a bunk, but only two or three to a room, but they did the same work, and got along well with them. The factory was close to the Hungarian border. Then, a few days after 4th April 1945 [the liberation of Hungary from German occupation] it was liberated, and they immediately set off for home in adventurous circumstances. My mother came home on the roof of some truck filled with metal.

After the war

When I got home to Szentes in August 1945, our big shop was completely empty. There were 10-15 sacks on one of the shelves, my mother sat next to the sacks and 'sold' them. My mother got empty bags on consignment from some contacts who were Jewish corn traders. And I started as an iron merchant without any capital, which usually doesn't work. The stock was completely bare and poor, even though I involved two acquaintances of mine from Szeged, and the three of us scraped together enough money, so that it at least looked as if there was some enamel pots in the store. If someone came in for five things, they got one, and who will shop in a place where they can't get what they want. That terrible inflation lasted until 1st August 1946. Everything which that morning cost, I don't know, 100 million pengo [old Hungarian currency] was 300 million by the afternoon. So we couldn't buy more goods with the money that came in – that is to say total bankruptcy. Clerks came over from the town hall, who had bought from my father before, and one threw the pay that he had received at two in the afternoon on the counter for anything that I wanted to give him. I counted the money with great difficulty, and got a pan down for him, and he went away happy. It turned out the next day, when I ordered pans that one couldn't get one of even half that size for that money. But perhaps more importantly I didn't like doing it. So at the end of 1947, I gave up the whole thing.

At the end of the war, many people fled. It wasn't only Jewish apartments left without owners, instead there was the Government Lost Property Commission, which packed its own warehouses with what they could find and had not been stolen by the local inhabitants. So my mother got a mattress and a cupboard from somewhere. When I came home we got another mattress and a table. The five-room apartment was completely empty, totally ransacked.

Our house was our own and when I knew that I was coming to Pest, I wanted to sell it. There were not many idiots who bought houses in 1947, when the winds of nationalization 23 were blowing through the country, yet I found two who divided it up and bought it. Naturally, for a ridiculously low price since I needed the money to get furniture in Pest. After selling the house we moved to Pest. My father had a cousin here, a widow who had a big apartment, which was also empty, so we rented two rooms from her and furnished it with our own furniture. I lived there with my mother until I got married, and my mother stayed on there.

Despite her 61 years, my mother was like a 40-year-old in many ways, she didn't like being idle. On top of that, my father's cousin, from whom we rented the two rooms was quite a difficult woman to bear, my mother also wanted to get away from her, so she got a job through an acquaintance as a cashier in a state enterprise called 'Clothing Store.' And my mother had very good times there, she worked for at least ten years until she retired. Somewhere there are certificates praising her work, what a good worker she was.

I had a cousin, the daughter of Aunt Mariska, Ella, who was deported from Szabadka in the summer of 1944 – it belonged to Hungary then, and they deported the Jews there. At the station, when they were marched to the boxcars, she saw a small guardhouse by the outer platforms of the station, and in an unguarded moment, she stepped out of the line and went into this house which was empty, and got down. The whole lot went, she stayed down and came out when they had gone. She went to the railway cashier, where they knew her, in fact, she was a well-known journalist there, and she got a ticket on credit for the fast train to Pest. She had no money, but the ticket lady gave her one on credit. She traveled up to Pest with the next fast train – she had acquaintances here in Pest through whom she found a place. Bela Balazs was a close acquaintance of hers, he also helped. She went into hiding with fake papers, and in the end she got through everything. She had an old Christian friend, called Ferenc Kende, who had a book and newspaper distribution office, he also helped her.

My mother – with whom I was living – told Ella in a letter about the difficulties we had in Szentes, and then I got to Pest through Ferenc Kende, who gave me an agency position to distribute various papers in certain places in Budapest and Fejer County, where I had to distribute the children's magazine Huvelyk Matyi ['Tom Thumb,' children's monthly magazine published from 1947 until 1949], and the official journals of the Material and Price Office. I didn't get a salary, but worked on commission. I went around the countryside by train, on foot, by cart, it was hard work. I lived from this for months, looking for a way to break free from it as soon as possible.

I managed to when the iron wholesale industry was nationalized. I had an acquaintance, the son of the owner of a Szentes mill owner. He had graduated as an engineer from Brunn University, because he wasn't accepted in Hungary [at university] because of the numerus clausus at the time. And due to his left wing leanings, when the state takeovers came, he was immediately given a high position, the directorship of VASERT [company selling iron goods], a wholesale metal enterprise. I went to the personnel department of this company and told them that this was my field, I had many years experience, I'd like to work there. I was firmly kicked out. After that, I went to this gentleman who took steps immediately, and I was employed in 1947. As much as I disliked retail, I liked national iron trading. I became a company leader, I had the task of obtaining stock. In the spring of 1948 I got a position as one of the directors of a nationalized iron trade company, until it was merged into the VASERT.

I magyarized my name in 1948. At the time I'd just moved from Szentes to Budapest, and I already had a job at VASERT, and no one understood my name on the telephone. I was thought to be Kuncz, and many similar names, but not a Gunst. That's when I decided to change it, so that everyone could easily say my name. The rule was to submit three names, which the Interior Ministry could choose from. I only submitted 'Galla.' I mused on this one and that one a bit, then decided that the only good name for me was one that was easy to pronounce everywhere. And a clerk called me in to the Interior Ministry and argued that Galla was the name of a place and at the same time it was Slavic. But I said that it had a Hungarian sound even if it was Slavic, and I wanted it. And then he went for it, and accepted it.

In 1952, I ran into the director of the head department of the National Planning Office, which was then being formed, whose wife was from Szentes and whose parents had been friendly with mine. I knew her well too, I was their wedding witness before the war. When we met we told each other what had happened to us. I had already done two years of economics evening school – while I was

working – and was in the third year, which also sounded good to him, so at the beginning of 1953 I started working at the head office of investments of the National Planning Office and I worked there for 15 years. I started as a lecturer, and in the end I was an assistant manager, an advisor.

In 1968 I transferred to the Ministry of Heavy Industry, because the head of the department at that time was asked to go to work there, and since he considered me his right hand, his condition was that I also go with him. I did not go further up the ladder – this is probably because I hadn't been a party member since 1956, and generally, among those qualified, they chose party members as high functionaries. But I didn't mind, because I didn't need to do any managerial tasks that would have taken me away from my field. For example, I didn't have to employ or dismiss people, so I was very happy with this situation. In 1955 I graduated from university and from then on, besides my work, I dealt with education and I had many publications. I worked at the ministry until 1979 and I retired at the age of 62. After this I worked for 16 years as a teacher, an expert. In the meantime I spent two years in Tanzania, from 1971 to 1972. I was posted there for two years in a ministerial type trust which directed industry there, similar to the National Planning Office here. When I went to Tanzania I took my wife and my children along.

When I returned to Szentes in 1945, I had become fairly left-wing given past events, so that I immediately joined the Hungarian Communist Party 24 there in Szentes. I never took part in investigations or anything like that, no kind of bad party work. No one even asked me to or hinted at it. I did my thing to the best of my abilities in iron trading. I was a party member until 1956, when because of my experiences to that point, and because of those I had just undergone, I didn't join again. I have not been a party member since.

In 1956 25, I did not take part in the revolution, I was 'standing in line for bread.' On 24th October, it might have been the 25th, I wanted to go to work but there were no trams, and then the Kossuth Bridge was still open, just south of Parliament, and I lived in Buda [Budapest is bisected by the Danube into Buda and Pest] and we went to work with great difficulty, with gunfire on the side streets, and of course, there was nothing to do as we didn't know what would happen next. On the morning of the 25th, when there was the shooting on Kossuth Square, the president closed the office's gates from news of it and from the sound of the shots themselves, so there was no going in or out. I don't like being shut in, so the first thing I did was when somebody was let in, I hung around by the gate and slipped out. But my real job during these events was to secure food and a normal life for us. Just like in 1945 when I never thought about not going home, in 1956 I didn't think of defecting. I am from here, I belong here. If I look out of the tram window and spot a certain house, I know I am at the corner of Terez Ringroad. I know the natives' language, their habits. Here I know how to think and do my thing. That's how I feel. My father felt he had to be a merchant in Szentes, he didn't move to Budapest, they deported him – he might have survived in Budapest. He belonged in Szentes as an iron merchant; I belong here, in Pest.

I first got married in 1948. We only had a civil wedding in the II District council offices. My first wife was Eva Erdos. She was four years younger than me, I believe. She was Jewish, born in Veszprem, and had studied hairdressing, but at the time we met, she was working in book distributing at Kossuth Publishers. She had a stand at the party committee office in the IV District, which was still downtown, where Kossuth Publishers, which dealt with political type books, sold books for cash or in installments. And that's where we met each other. I was renting an apartment, she owned a studio apartment, so I moved in there. My mother stayed where she was. Right up until we moved

back together again six years later.

My son G. was born in 1950, and I just started to go to university then. And I struggled a lot with how marriage and a child would work out. It didn't really, because we divorced in 1953. Eva hasn't married since. We made an agreement to have the child for three years each. In the first three, when I moved away from Eva and into a rented apartment, I couldn't have taken him with me, but I counted on things changing. But three years later, it didn't happen, and I believe G. was six or seven when it finally did. After that he never went back to his mum. From the time I moved, come rain or shine, I went for G. in nursery school twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday, and studied with him. We always went on vacation together. When he came to stay with me, Eva didn't meet him twice a week anymore, but they saw each other regularly.

G. was a mediocre student until he was 13 or 14, when he decided to be a hotelier and from then on, he went up, and found his place very well, everywhere. After finishing the eight classes of middle school, he went to the Catering Technical School; that was four years and he graduated from there. Then he spent a year in the Beke Hotel kitchens, where he got a chef's training, and then he went to the Commerce and Catering Academy, which was for three years. He graduated from that one, and afterwards he did two years of supplemental courses at the Economics University, got his doctoral degree and became an economist. I spent two years in Tanzania and G. was there for more than a year – he was given a sabbatical by the college, and worked there in an English-Tanzanian hotel chain with great results.

G. knew he was Jewish but he wasn't circumcised. This subject was always, how shall I say, in the air, especially in the first years, when we were not far removed from it – you know, he was born in 1950 and the Holocaust lasted until 1945, but I never thought of, how shall I say, 'holding a course' on it. They had Christmas in their childhood. I didn't go to synagogue, and didn't live a religious life. Perhaps we spoke of Chanukkah, but no Chanukkah candles were lit at home, that's for sure. So he didn't grow up in the religious spirit. But he thinks of himself as Jewish. Perhaps more so than I do. He married a Jewish woman.

In 1956, I met my second wife, Agnes Kovacs, on vacation. The Planning Office had a vacation resort at Revfulop, and her first husband had also worked at the Planning Office. I didn't really know him as he was in another field. Our wedding was in 1958. My second wife was born in Budapest in 1928, from Jewish parents on both sides, but was not raised Jewish at all. I always got the ones who were not Jewish at all. Thirst for knowledge, reading, respect for writing, love, respect and honor – I feel these are the virtues by which I am Jewish, and not because I read the mah nishtanah or my children do. And usually, I came together with these types too. During the war she went into hiding, her mother hid her in some convent. She didn't graduate from university, but became a very talented journalist. She worked for various papers and for the press service of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce, for the press service of Hungaropress. Her English and German were perfect. The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce was an organ of the Foreign Commerce Ministry, and so she was often sent as Hungarian press attaché to the Hungarian section of trade fairs abroad.

My wife thought that Kovacs was too plain a name [Kovacs = Smith], after all, there are a lot of them, so she took the official name of Galla-Kovacs, hyphenated. That's how it was written in her papers. At the time, I opposed it and said that if we had children it would be a problem, if the

mother's name was Galla-Kovacs and they would be simply Galla. At the time, it wasn't usual not to have an official father and to call someone after their mother. Because at the time, it was obligatory to give the child the mother's name, if there was no legal father. That's exactly what happened. M., who was born in 1959, said his mother was Agnes Kovacs in all the official places, as he didn't feel it was socially acceptable to be called M. Galla and have a mother who was Agnes Galla-Kovacs, as they would think he had no father.

When I got married again, I got a two-room apartment in Wesselenyi Street from the Planning Office. At the time, offices and big companies had the means and it was customary to award apartments to recognized workers. My younger son was born there. And my mother and I had had enough of her living in a rented apartment, so she moved in with us. So my wife, my mother and my little boy and I lived together until 1962 when, with the help of my mother-in-law, we exchanged the two-bedroom apartment for a three-bedroom one on Damjanich Street, and we lived there until my next divorce.

M., my younger son, always blundered. First he went to the ex-Jewish High School, the Radnoti, from where he was pushed out – because we lived in the VII District and that was the XIV District – he was told that he didn't belong in that district. If he had been a good student, or had fit in, then he could have stayed. Beneschofszky [Rabbi Imre Beneschofszky, famous rabbi of the Buda Jewish community] had been Agnes' religious instructor and from that time, they had had superficial, but good relations. When Agnes divorced her first husband, and we married a few years later, we became close to the Beneschofszkys, and spent every seder and every New Year's Eve [Rosh Hashanah] with them. Through him M. had got into the Jewish High School for a year, from where he was kicked out by the principal, and his homeroom teacher for other reasons – that he should be locked up in a mad house. He was examined, and the doctors said he was a bit strange but didn't need to be locked up. He became a professional comedian, where he could use these certain 'strange traits' of his very well.

I had to divorce again in 1974. My mother died then, too. My third wife was a Christian lady, named T.I., and I wasn't aware enough to notice that she was an alcoholic. And that's why that marriage fell apart quickly. It lasted from 1976 until 1979. She was born in 1934. She was a librarian, that was her field, she had a university degree in it. I have no idea, what ever happened to her. I had stayed at the same summer holiday home with Zsuzsi [Zsuzsanna] Acs, my fourth wife, in 1952 – we got to know each other on the way there. Then, in 1981, when the age difference – 18 years – was of less importance we became closer. We married on paper in 1988, but we have been together unofficially since 1982. We are very happy together and have a big family around us. Zsuzsa also has a daughter and two grandchildren. We go to the swimming pool three times a week, and if we can, we travel for winter and summer vacations to spas in Hungary. At home, we read a lot and meet our friends.

I support the formation of Israel, its survival and development with all my heart; I have done so and will continue to do so. I think it's extraordinarily important from a global viewpoint – so not just from a global Jewish viewpoint – from a total world view, that it exists and flourishes. And I read and hear everything from this viewpoint. I have had good friends in Israel; their children and grandchildren still live there. A close work service buddy, with whom I went through thick and thin over the years, immigrated to Israel and started a family there, and we were very good friends. We corresponded, they came to Hungary several times and we met them. But I've never gone there.

They invited us, perhaps others did too, and we could have gone uninvited, but we didn't. Nowadays we don't go anywhere, but when we could, we traveled a lot. We were in Transylvania, and visited relations in the 'Delvidek' [now North of Serbia, mostly populated by Hungarians.] many times. Then we were in England, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, France and Spain, all of Europe, in Canada, and in the USA too.

The change in regime 26 didn't really affect me. I was quite old already at that time, and the way I see things, my lack of religious feeling didn't change. Naturally, I look at manifestations of anti-Semitism, which lay dormant and has come to the surface since 1989, and tries to take up more and more space, and it affects me, but I am optimistic.

Glossary

1 Neolog Jewry
Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the sop-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

2 Civil school
(Sometimes called middle school) this type of school was created in 1868. Originally it was intended to be a secondary school, but in its finally established form, it did not provide a secondary level education with graduation (maturity examination). Pupils attended it for four years after finishing elementary school. As opposed to classical secondary school, the emphasis in the civil school was on modern and practical subjects (e.g. modern languages, accounting, economics). While the secondary school prepared children to enter university, the civil school provided its graduates with the type of knowledge which helped them find a job in offices, banks, as clerks, accountants, secretaries, or to manage their own business or shop.

3 Female Education ('Girls Schools')
The 1868 Law of Public Education established the higher-level elementary schools for girls as the continuation of elementary schools. In meeting social demands, women's colleges were also set up by the state (the first one in Pest in 1875). Teachers' training schools were open to women and in 1895 arts, medicine and pharmacy university faculties were also opened, while the curriculum of girls' secondary education was changed accordingly. In the next century girls' secondary schools were founded and those who finished here could attend a university. Girls finishing other institutions of secondary education had to take a supplementary exam in Latin (occasionally ancient Greek) in order to continue with their studies.

4 Orthodox Communities

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869.They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,. In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

5 Weiss, Manfred (1857-1922)

Industrialist, businessman. His grandfather, Baruch Weiss, a pipe-maker, moved to Budapest in the early 19th century. His son, Adolf, was a founding member of the First Steam Mill of Budapest Co. After finishing the Academy of Commerce, Manfred, Adolf’s son, worked in Hamburg. Upon his return home he opened a canning factory with his brother. In 1884 he married, and through his father-in-law he swiftly became the main provisions supplier of the K.u.K. Army. They broadened the scope of manufacture with the production of ammunition and cartridge-cases. Owing to an accident in 1890, the factory had to be moved to Csepel (an island in Budapest). He was the largest purveyor of the K.u.K. Army during WWI and was promoted in title to baron in 1896 for his services rendered.

6 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.

7 Jokai, Mor (1825-1904)

Romantic novelist, playwright and journalist, the founder of the national romantic movement in Hungarian literature. After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848, he became a fugitive of the Austrians. He was a very prolific writer, his complete works fill 100 volumes. Among his well-known works are Weekdays (1845), A Hungarian Nabob (1894) and Black Diamonds (1870). His work has been translated into over 25 languages.

8 Transylvania

Geographical and historical region belonging to Hungary until 1918-19, then ceded to Romania. Its

area covers 103,000 sq.km between the Carpathian Mountains and the present-day Hungarian and Serbian borders. It became a Roman province in the 2nd century (AD) terminating the Dacian Kingdom. After the Roman withdrawal it was overrun, between the 3rd and 10th centuries, by the Goths, the Huns, the Gepidae, the Avars and the Slavs. Hungarian tribes first entered the region in the 5th century, but they did not fully control it until 1003, when King Stephen I placed it under jurisdiction of the Hungarian Crown. Later, in the 12th and 13th centuries, Germans, called Saxons (then and now), also arrived while Romanians, called Vlachs or Walachians, were there by that time too, although the exact date of their appearance is disputed. As a result of the Turkish conquest, Hungary was divided into 3 sections: West Hungary, under Habsburg rule, central Hungary, under Turkish rule, and semi-independent Transylvania (as a Principality), where Austrian and Turkish influences competed for supremacy for nearly two centuries. With the defeat of the Turkish Transylvania gradually came under Habsburg rule, and due to the Compromise of 1867 it became an integral part of Hungary again. In line with other huge territorial losses fixed in the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Transylvania was formally ceded to Romania by Hungary. For a short period during WWII it was returned to Hungary but was ceded to Romania once again after the war. Many of the Saxons of Transylvania fled to Germany before the arrival of the Soviet army, and more followed after the fall of the Communist government in 1989. In 1920, the population of Erdély was 5,200,000, of which 3 million were Romanian, 1,400,000 Hungarian (26%), 510,000 German and 180,000 Jewish. In 2002, however, the percentage of Hungarians was only 19.6% and the German and Jewish population decreased to several thousand. Despite the decrease of the Hungarian, German and Jewish element, Transylvania still preserves some of its multiethnic and multi-confessional tradition.

9 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.

10 Mussolini, Benito (1883-1945)

Italian political and state activist, leader (duce) of the Italian fascist party and of the Italian government from October 1922 until June 1943. After 1943 he was the head of a puppet government in the part of Italy that was occupied by the Germans. He was captured and executed by Italian partisans.

11 Zionism

A movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel - the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfuss, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

12 Ludovika Academy

The decision to create the first Hungarian military academy was made by the Diet (national assembly) of 1808, but was actually adopted by the Royal Hungarian Army only in 1872. Those who graduated from the academy were usually enlisted by the Hungarian Army, but volunteers were also accepted by the K.u.K. Army, if they met the service requirements. In 1922 the term time became 4 years, and successful graduates became lieutenants.

13 Anti-Jewish Laws in Hungary

Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

14 Forced Labor in Hungary

Under the 1939 II. Law 230, those deemed unfit for military service were required to complete "public interest work service". After the implementation of the second anti-Jewish Law within the military, the military arranged "special work battalions" for those Jews, who were not called up for armed service. With the entry into northern Transylvania (August 1940), those of Jewish origin who had begun, and were now finishing, their military service were directed to the work battalions. A decree in 1941 unified the arrangement, saying that the Jews were to fulfill military obligations in the support units of the National Guard. In the summer of 1942, thousands of Jews were recruited to labor battalions with the Hungarian troops going to the Soviet front. Some 50,000 in labor battalions went with the Second Hungarian Army to the Eastern Front - of these, only 6-7,000 returned.

15 Hungarian Occupation of Subcarpathia

In the middle of March 1939 the Hungarian Army invaded the territory of Subcarpathia (part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until WWI), inhabited chiefly by Ruthenians and belonging to Czechoslovakia, while the German Army overran Czech and Moravian territories in the West. Czechoslovakia, as such, ceased to exist. A German puppet state was created of the territories not occupied by either German or Hungarian troops, under the name Slovak Republic. The area annexed by Hungary was 12,000 sq.km. 5-10 % of its population of 700,000 was Hungarian.

16 Szalasi, Ferenc (1897-1946)

Ferenc Szalasi was the leader of the Arrow-Cross Party, prime minister. He came from a middle class family, his father was a clerk. He studied at the Becsujhely Military Academy, and in 1915 he became a lieutenant. After WWI he was nominated captain and became a member of the general staff. In 1930 he became a member of the secret race protecting association called Magyar Elet [Hungarian Life], and in 1935 he established his own association, called Nemzeti Akarat Partja [Party of the National Will]. At the 1936 interim elections his party lost, and the governing party tried to prevent them from gaining more ground. At the 1939 elections Szalasi and his party won 31 electoral mandates. At German pressure Horthy appointed him as prime minister, and shortly after he got hold of the presidential office too. He introduced a total terror with the Arrow-Cross men and continued the eradication of the Jewry, and the hauling of the values of the country to Germany. He was arrested by American troops in Germany, where he had fled from Soviet occupation on 29th March 1945. He was executed as war criminal on 12th March 1946.

17 Horthy declaration

On 15th October 1944, the governor of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, announced on the radio that he would ask for truce with the Allied Powers. The leader of the Arrow Cross party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, which had already invaded Hungary in March 1944, took over power.

18 Mauthausen

Concentration camp located in Upper Austria. Mauthausen was opened in August 1938. The first prisoners to arrive were forced to build the camp and work in the quarry. On 5th May, 1945 American troops arrived and liberated the camp. Altogether, 199,404 prisoners passed through Mauthausen. Approximately 119,000 of them, including 38,120 Jews, were killed or died from the harsh conditions, exhaustion, malnourishment, and overwork. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 314 - 315)

19 German Invasion of Hungary [19th March 1944]

Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary. In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-

American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On 18th March, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's. On 19th March, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojay, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veesenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

20 Turul Comrade Society

The Turul Comrade Society formed in fall of 1919. One of the most popular and most powerful university comrade associations, its members were law, medicine and humanities students. In reprisal for the abolition of the numerus clausus in 1927, which had banned Jews from university studies, they organized beatings of Jews on campuses (then effected the introduction of the ‘numerus nullus’ in 1941).

21 Constable

A member of the Hungarian Royal Constabulary, responsible for keeping order in rural areas, this was a militarily organized national police, subordinated to both, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The body was created in 1881 to replace the previously eliminated county and estate gendarmerie (pandours), with the legal authority to insure the security of cities. Constabularies were deployed at every county seat and mining area. The municipal cities generally had their own law enforcement bodies - the police. The constables had the right to cross into police jurisdiction during the course of special investigations. Preservatory governing structure didn't conform (the outmoded principles working in the strict hierarchy) to the social and economic changes happening in the country. Conflicts with working-class and agrarian movements, and national organizations turned more and more into outright bloody transgressions. Residents only saw the constabulary as an apparatus for consolidation of conservative power. After putting down the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Christian establishment in the formidable and anti-Semitically biased forces came across a coercive force able to check the growing social movements caused by the unresolved land question. Aside from this, at the time of elections - since villages had public voting - they actively took steps against the opposition candidates and supporters. In 1944, the Constabulary directed the collection of rural Jews into ghettos and their deportation. After the suspension of deportations (June 6, 1944), the Arrow Cross sympathetic interior apparatus Constabulary forces were called to Budapest to attempt a coup. The body was disbanded in 1945, and the new democratic police took over.

22 Strasshof

The Strasshof concentration camp was located near Vienna and its 21,000 prisoners worked in Eastern Austrian industrial and agricultural plants. The prisoners were mainly deported there from the southern part of Hungary and Debrecen, at the end of June 1944. The 15,000 Hungarian Jews (60% of them women) got to the camp based on the agreement between the Budapest Rescue Committee (Budapesti Mentõbizottság) and Eichmann ('human life in exchange for goods'). According to the agreement they 'set the prisoners aside' for prisoner exchange. Eichmann offered

the Austrian deportation of 30,000 Hungarian Jews, in exchange he asked for the immediate payment of 5 million Swiss franks. They used the prisoners in Strasshof to relieve the lack of manpower in the surrounding of Vienna. They employed some of them at private companies, in factories, others cleared ruins away, dug trenches, and the women did agricultural work. The Gestapo elected some from among the prisoners, these formed the "Judenpolizei." Their task was to ensure that the deportees would remain in the camp and that they wouldn't make contact with the local inhabitants. Only the workers got medical care, the treatments were carried out by Jewish doctors. The living conditions in the camp were much better than at other forced labor and concentration camps, but during the transportation there many died. About 6,000 remained in the camp until the end of the war, the others were deported to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944 or to Bergen-Belsen in the spring of 1945. Three fourth of them survived the deportation, about 1,000 died of illness. (Christian Gerlach - Götz Aly: Az utolsó fejezet. A magyar zsidok legyilkolasa, Budapest, Noran, 2005; Israel Gutman (szerk.): Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, I-IV, Macmillan, é. n.)

23 Nationalization in Hungary

In the endeavors of transforming the society and economy after 1945, the liquidation of private property and the formation of centralized state property played an important role. The nationalization started with the1945 land reform, which brought about nationalization of forests, model farms, reed works. On 25th May 1946 they legalized the nationalization of mines and other establishments connected with them. At the end of 1946 they nationalized the five biggest industrial works of the country. The next step of the nationalization started in the fall of 1947 in a different political situation. The MKP (Hungarian Socialist Party) became very strong, and gradually it became the only party which made plans and took decisions, excluding the other parties from the process. At the end of 1947 they nationalized the trade of goods belonging to the state monopoly (salt, matches, yeast, tobacco etc). They nationalized factories with more than 100 employees in 1948. They also liquidated companies in foreign ownership in Hungary by show trials. In December 1949 they nationalized by order private companies, which employed 10 or more persons, and shortly after that they made impossible the functioning of workshops with more than 1-3 employees. (Ivan Peto - Sandor Szakacs: A hazai gazdasag negy evtizedenek tortenete 1945-1985, Budapest, 1985, KJK, pg. 95-104; Tibor Valuch: Magyarorszag tarsadalomtortenete, Budapest, 2001.)

24 KMP (Hungarian communist party - HCP)

A group of Hungarian prisoners of war (Bela Kun, Tibor Szamuely, Ernoe Por and others) formed the Hungarian branch of the Bolshevik Party in Moscow on 4th November 1918, dispatching members to Hungary to recruit new members, propagate the party's ideas and radicalize Karolyi's government. Upon their return to Hungary they soon organized the KMP (lit. Communists' Party of Hungary) which swiftly became the leading political power of the Hungarian Soviet Republic announced in March 1919 that lasted a mere 122 days. Afterwards, the party was reorganized with some of its leaders working in Hungary, and others abroad. The HCP operated underground in the interwar period, and established a socialist workers' party as a legal cover. Some operating in Hungary (Sandor Fuerst, Imre Sallai, Zoltan Schoenherz and Ferenc Rozsa) became victims of the terror practiced by the Hungarian authorities, while others (Bela Kun, Ernoe Por, Jenoe Hamburger and Jozsef Madzsar) were executed during Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union. From the end of

1944 it swiftly became the most influential political organization under various names in Hungary until the political changes in 1989.

25 1956

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

26 1989 Political changes

A description, rather than name for the surprising events following the summer of 1989, when Hungarian border guards began allowing East German families vacationing in Hungary to cross into Austria, and escape to the West. After the symbolic reburial of Imre Nagy, the Hungarian parliament quietly announced its rejection of communism and transformation to a social democracy. The confused internal struggle among Soviet satellite nations which ensued, eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the reorganization of Eastern Europe. The Soviets peacefully withdrew their military in 1990.