

The Simko Family



This is our family: my mother Irena Simkova, nee Braunova, my father Artur and my brother Ivan Simko and me. The photo was taken in Nitra in the 1930s. I spent practically my entire childhood in Nitra. Very often we'd go to Zobor [Zobor: a hill by the city of Nitra (height above sea level 588 m), in the Tribec mountain range - Editor's note], both with friends and with my family. I know every corner of it there. I spent all my free time there. In the summer we'd go biking there, in the winter skiing. I always liked sports. I spent a lot of my free time doing sporting activities. At home we had a ping-pong table in the courtyard. My brother and I would often play table tennis. In those days there were two places to swim in Nitra, so we used to go swimming. When I was 13 I had a bar mitzvah [Bar mitzvah: 'son of the commandments', a Jewish boy that has reached the age of 13. A ceremony in which a boy is proclaimed to be bar mitzvah; from this time onwards he must obey all commandments prescribed by the Torah - Editor's note]. I know that I had to study with a cantor. I wasn't very good at singing, that was very bad, but I suffered through it and then some children that my parents had invited to our place came for the party. I don't think that I got a gift as such. I had only the party. My brother also had a bar mitzvah. Both of us had it in the Neolog synagogue in Nitra with Rabbi Schweiger. My father was a judge. We didn't go hungry, but neither were we rich. I know that my father's monthly salary was 1200 crowns [in 1929, it was decreed by law that one Czechoslovak crown (Kc) was equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold - Editor's note]. That was a lot, but not again that huge an amount. The only one in the family back then to have a car was Serena Szilagyi. We also had one permanent household helper, besides the one that took care of us children. She took care of the household, cooked and did the shopping. She lived with us. I also know that she used to get 20 crowns a month. I've talked about my parents and grandparents, and we didn't get to my brother yet. Well, I wasn't a good student. My brother Ivan was always getting top marks. A much better student than I. He was very talented, and wanted to be a doctor, he was a great kid. He was born in 1927 and in 1944 he died. He was only 17 at the time. He was still this child that was growing up. This is what happened to him. You see, he was always very bold. We didn't look like Jews. He was hiding out in Nitra on Zobor and someone gave him away. Then he was in the Sered work camp [14](#) and before the deportations he hid in a pile of sawdust. But they

found him, and then, when they were transporting them in a train to one of the concentration camps, he was apparently sawing his way out of one of the wagons. He wanted to jump out of the wagon while they were still transporting them. He tried to save his own life right up to the last moment. Unfortunately he didn't manage to. After that I didn't hear anything more about my brother.