

Laszlo Spiegler



This is a picture of me, taken in Ujpest in the 1930s. I was born in 1910. I had three sisters, Anna, Marta and Manci. I have worked since I was ten years old. I had no time to go and play on the plot. I came home from school, studied for a while, and then if I had any free time, I went to the shop. There were the three girls; they went to the swimming pool, while I was in the shop. I had to keep things in order. I bought dishes by the thousands, and sold things in the shop. When I was ten years old I was already selling jars. The cucumber and paprika wasn't pickled as it is nowadays, but they bought the jar and pickled them themselves. We sold them [the jars]. They weren't brought into the shop because there were too many, and I slept outside in a lean-to with my sister. When I was already fourteen years old we had been buying dishes by the thousands. I used to go shopping by myself. They put me into the shop as soon as they could because my mother was sickly, and when she was ill I had to stand in for her. My sisters had their circle of friends, and I didn't really like to bother with girls, I would rather work; I got so used to work. I loved working so much. I never went anywhere for the summer holidays as a child. I was 18 years old when I saw Lake Balaton for

the first time. There were cheap trains to Siofok; that was when I first saw Balaton. My sisters used to go to Puho; they spent their summer holidays at relatives. I finished four years of middle school, then I went to commercial school. I finished three years, but didn't want to work in a bank. Then I went to help my father anyway, and I became an ironmonger. Well, I was a boy and wanted to do what my father did. I became an apprentice ironmonger, and I had to carry 100-kilo bundles. I could carry them, but I told myself I wouldn't do it. Then I just simply didn't go to work any more. They said that I had to learn something, 'Don't be a merchant, please, learn some sort of technical trade'. And then it was announced here in Ujpest at the Nasszer brothers, that they wanted apprentices. They had a watchmaker's shop, a house of their own. I learned the watch-making trade there. I spent five years there. Sometimes they gave me jobs like taking out jewels, and once I took out to consignment a pearl necklace such that one could have bought a house with it. They trusted me! Before the war there was cultural life for the youth in Ujpest, they gathered every Tuesday. There was a cultural center that was full every Tuesday. The oldest of us must have been about 25. There were only young people. There was culture there, Hungarian, Hebrew? They sang and recited poetry. There was no food. It happened, back when the Jewish school still existed, that we popped in there to get a slice of bread and butter. This was before the war in 1936, 1937, and 1938. There was always good company. They went in for sports there. In the old times [before WWII], for example, the cultural center used to have a choral union, a Jewish choral union. They won prizes too. They used to sing Hungarian songs as well.