# Piroska Hamos

Piroska Hamos
Matyasfold, Budapest,
Hungary
Interviewer: Eszter Andor
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I visited Piroska Hamos not only in her own flat, but at her younger granddaughter's place, where she spends half of the week. She plays with her great-grandchildren a lot; she always manages to be on the same wavelength, even with the younger one, although there are almost ninety years between them. Although Piroska has difficulties getting around and is quite sick, she is mentally very fresh. She reads a great deal; as she says, she can't even fall asleep without reading, and she reads everything: whatever her grandchildren give her to read, even books which she dislikes as too modern for her tastes. She watches the news regularly and, by and large, follows politics even today. She likes nature programs and general knowledge quiz shows. During the interview, she enjoyed telling stories, and told them in great detail, and she has an incredibly good memory; she can remember every name, place and date, some of which are after a period of 80 years.



## Family background

Unfortunately, my Mother committed suicide, and she was not the only one in the family. Both my grandfather, grandfather and my uncle on mother's side committed suicide as well. Others from the And from the OblatOblath family, others committed suicide as well, but they were not such close relatives.

My grandfather was Gerson Oblath [1850-1910s]; he also committed suicide sometime around the second half of the 1910s. He was born in 1850, but I don't know where. I don't know whether he was from Ovar, or if he arrived there from somewhere else. He worked in a pub in Ovar. I suppose, he had his own pub, but I am not sure. He was a bearded old man. His beard was not that long, if I remember correctly. I only remember meeting him on one occasion. I must have been about five or six years old, it was in Balassagyarmat, and he had probably come to visit us. He had come from Ovar, and was on the way to Dregelypalank. His oldest son was on holiday in Dregelypalank, and

he went there to visit, but he never came back. He was pulled out of the Danube in Szod. I have no idea if he is buried in a Jewish cemetery.

My grandmother's name was Antonia Kohn [1856-1950s]. I learned from documents, that she was born in Nagypeszek in 1856. As a child, I met her many times, because, after we moved to Budapest in 1920, we spent our Christmas, Easter and Summer Holidays in Balassagyarmat. Grandma used to live with my mother's twin sister. She lived with them until the end, first in Balassagyarmat, and later, when they moved to Budapest, then there, too. She was in Budapest during the war, but I don't know where. She must have been in the ghetto. She was old when she died- she was over 80, I know that. She had breathing problems, I remember; by that great age, she was lying down almost all the time. She is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Budapest.
My mother had many siblings. Ignac was the oldest one. We called Ignac Uncle Naci. After him came Ferenc. Then, there was my mom, Jozefin Oblath- within the family, she was known as Pepka- and her twin sister, Aunty Netka. It is interesting, that neither I, nor Aunty Netka's only remaining daughter, ever knew that they were twins. We only found it out completely by accident, based on the birth certificate from the Jewish community. They did look very similar, though. I don't know why they never talked about it. Sometimes I think to myself that it's not certain that they were twins, maybe they were only registered at the Jewish community at the same time, but they were a year apart. This is only an assumption, though. And then there were Jozsef and Miksa, whom we called Uncle Miska, and Aunty Linka. I have no idea when they were born. I don't even know whether they were born in Ovar, but yes, they probably were.
Uncle Naci lived in Budapest; he worked as a chief accountant for Nepszava, or something like that. He was a socialist. One of my mother-in-law's sisters, Aunty Lina became his wife. He had three sons. Uncle Naci became ill long before the war; he had heart problems. Aunty Lina must have been in the ghetto. But I don't know, because, at the time of the ghetto, I wasn't at home.
His eldest son, Andor [1901-1945] was born in 1901. He was a clerk, but I don't even know where, but he was already married. He must have gotten married around 1933 or 1934; their son, Peter, was born in 1935, and lives in Australia too. They used to live in Budapest, I think in Tuzolto Street, but by the time the house was built, they had moved to Matyasfold as well. There was an attic room there, the youngsters and the small boys lived up there. Andor died in 1945 of typhus, supposedly due to the typhus injection. When I arrived home, he was already dead.
His middle son, Jeno [1903-1930s] was born in 1903, and at the age of 33, he got blood poisoning, and there were no penicillin yet at that time, so it killed him. He finished high school; he was a clerk, but he was unemployed for a long time. And in 1930 or 1931, when they were building the house in Matyasfold he managed the construction work. He was unmarried and lived at home.
His youngest son, Pali still lives in Australia. Pali got married here, and his wife had some sort of a dressmaker's shop, and also a clothes shop. Pali worked at BESZKART. And then, something happened; she didn't pay the insurance, and she was supposed to pay some penalty, and I don't know how, but, she escaped from Hungary and left for Israel. Later, Pali went after her somehow, I think he could already go officially. He was a driver in Israel. This happened before the war. Later, they left Israel for Australia. I don't know exactly when it happened, but it was already after 1957, because my sister went there, and at that time Pali and his wife were still in Israel. In Australia, Pali didn't work anymore. He'll be 95 in 2003. His wife died a long time ago.
Ferenc had a grocery shop in Bela Bartok Road, but it was called Miklos Horthy 1 Road back then. Later he didn't work, and Miska took over the shop. Ferenc only had a wife, they didn't have children. When I came back from the deportation, they were already dead. I don't know what

happened to them.
About Aunty Netka I know the most, because we spent every summer at their place. Her husband, Sandor Weinberger was a merchant. They lived in Balassagyarmat for a long time, and they owned a textile shop there: a draperers and haberdashery. Sometimes Aunty Netka was in the shop, if she had to help something, or because Uncle Sandor had to go somewhere, but mostly, her husband was there. It was not a big shop, they didn't have any employees.
In Balassagyarmat, they had their own house, but before that they lived in a rented flat. There were three rooms in the house: grandmother lived in one room, the parents in another one, and in the third one, the five children. When we went there in my childhood, this was how it was. They had a beautiful dining room, very nicely furnished; it had a really dark color, maybe even black, with a glass show-case. They didn't have a garden, just a little courtyard.
Aunty Netka had help, Mari. She was a many-skirted peasant woman. She cleaned the house, and did the laundry. But Aunty Netka cooked. I don't remember, where she lived in their old flat, but when they moved to their house, then in the back, there was a room, or maybe it was a room with a kitchen, and Mari lived there. She was with them for decades. Even, when they already lived in Budapest, she used to visit them frequently.
They were well-off, for a while. I think, they moved to Budapest because the shop went bankrupt. In Budapest they made men's shirts at home, Aunty Netka, and the two girls. Her husband dealt with the transportation and administration. When Aunty Netka and her family were already living in Budapest, I was already married, and had children, I got out of this close family circle, so I don't know so much about these things.
As far as I remember the husband of this aunty was a son of a rabbi. They kept a fully kosher household. I don't remember exactly when, but there were milky days, when there were only meals without any meat, I remember that much. For what occasion, I don't recall. And Esther's fasting, they kept everything. They were religious. They were not orthodox, although they are buried in the orthodox cemetery, so they didn't have payes.[Editor's note: thus they were orthodox, but not Hasid]. My mother's sister wore a wig. When they moved to Budapest in the 1930s, she didn't wear it anymore, because of her children. After the war, Aunty Netka didn't wear a wig anymore. She let her hair grow long, she had beautiful snow-white hair. When she went out, she wore a hat. Even with a wig she used to wear a hat.
Aunty Netka had five children: three girls and two boys. Her eldest daughter, Magda, was ten months younger than me, the youngest one, Agi, is 75 now, I think. We loved each other very much. Magda was a friend to both my sister and me. All five stayed alive after the war. Aunty Netka was in the ghetto, I believe. Her husband probably was too. When I came home, he had already died. Aunty Netka lived with her children. She died in 1965. She is buried in the orthodox cemetery, just the two of them, she and her husband, all the other relatives are already buried in the Israelite cemetery in Budapest, because her children were not at all religious, but let's say, even the children observed the high holidays.
Magda lived in America after the war, somewhere near Los Angeles. Her husband had relatives in America. In 1941, there was a world expo in America. Her husband was a jeweler, and he went to this world exhibition, and never came back. Their daughter was a year old when he left, and next time he saw the child was in 1946, because in 1943 or 1944, when they were supposed to leave Hungary with the last airplane, my cousin, Magda got scarlet-fever, and the airplane left without her. Their belongings were going to be shipped there and were already on the way to Lisbon, because they could go with a normal emigrant visa. She was in hiding here, in Budapest with her

daughter. The eldest son of Aunty Netka, Gyuri, was a Zionist, if I remember correctly, he later became a communist. But he died at a very young age. The next one was Ella. After the war, she married a policeman. He was also a communist, I think, and a Zionist before the war. Lacika was the fourth child. He worked as a goldsmith, and later he was an international purchaser at Artex (gold and antiques.) He used to go abroad, and he also dealt with the national mint. I know it for sure, that he had some connection with the mint. Agi, the youngest one, used to be a teacher. She lives here in Budapest. Now she's retired.

Jozsef, or Joska, was a doctor. He graduated from university. Before the war, he was the local doctor for Szentendre and its neighborhood. He married a Goldberger girl. She was a very rich, but really ugly woman. He had two sons. They were younger than me. Uncle Joska didn't marry very young. His wife was also much older than me. They lived in Szentendre, in their own house. They had lots of nice pieces of furniture, pictures, they had everything. They were not show-off people. Let's just say his wife wasn't a very nice lady, and Uncle Joska was very busy -he had a big practice. They visited us once in Matyasfold; they had a very good time there, and we also visited them once. They were all deported; nobody from that family came back. After his wife, there were some houses we could have requested, but in the meantime they had been nationalized and renovated and we would have had to pay so much in exchange for the renovation, that nobody in the family could afford it. After the war, we were happy to be alive at all. One of the houses was turned into a maternity home after the war.

A hardly know anything about Uncle Miska. I don't even know, what sort of school he finished, I only know, that he took over Uncle Feri's shop. This was a small grocery shop, its name was Zsigmond Kertesz and co. grocery and spice shop, Zsigmond Kertesz was Aunty Linka's husband, who died at an early age. I don't think they had any employees. They sold cheese, cold cuts, and some spices. If I remember rightly, when you entered the shop, the counter was on the left hand side. But what sort of cash register they had – I don't remember at all. The shop had a back area; my uncle kept the cheese there. In 1929, they still had this shop, I used to go to the Trade High School in Miklos Horthy Road, not far from it. But I went to school in the morning, and when school was over, I went home. I only went to the shop a few times, maybe just once or twice. I think, they must have had it until about the middle of 1930s. Uncle Miska married very late, around 1940, and I think he must have married a well-off woman, because when he was already married, he wasn't in the shop anymore, but in their candy shop on Erzsebet Avenue, next to the Hirado cinema. And very late in life, he had a little boy. He committed suicide before the war, sometime around 1943 or ‘44. And then his wife stayed in the shop. She was from Kisvarda, she had many siblings, and her son, Jancsika stayed in Kisvarda, I think. He was deported from there, with his grandparents and his aunties. He was a little boy, He wasn't even at school yet, I think. And after the war Uncle Miska's wife left for Australia, and died there.

Aunty Linka lived in Budapest. They were also involved in the grocery shop. I don't know, if she had a share as well, but she was in the shop quite a lot. She married Zsigmond Kertesz, one of the brothers of my mother-in-law. I only saw her husband once, he died very early of tuberculosis. They had a daughter. Her husband's sister, Jeta, also became a widow very early, and she lived with them in Buda. She didn't work. She took care of Aunty Linka's daughter, and spoiled her, she didn't raise her very well. Aunty Linka was still alive at the outset of the war. During the war; she was in the ghetto with her daughter. She remarried, but by the time I came back from the deportation, both she and her husband were dead. She died during the war. Exactly how and when, I don't know. But she died in Budapest.

Their daughter is still alive, she is around 80 now. It was a mixed family, because their daughter married a Pole I think, and in 1943 or 1944 he was expelled from Hungary and sent to Russia, I don't know where. They were still here, when her husband died. But she came back after the war, with a child. We meet very rarely, at funerals, and occasions like that. We met quite recently, at the funeral of my sister-in-law, who died at the age of 101.
My grandfather on my father's side was Gabor Schultz [1841-1928]. He was born in 1841 in Szemered. He was a watchmaker and umbrella-repairer. He worked at home. He was a very tall bearded old man. He had a very long beard. I can't say anymore, whether he had payes, or it grew together with his beard. He wore a hat, but I don't know what he wore at home. He usually wore a suit. So, he dressed in an urban style.
I really can't tell you my grandmother's name. I can't even remember her first name. [Editor's note: Based on a document found among family papers, her name was Pepi Kohn, 1850-1928] Grandmother was a housewife. She was as short and shriveled as my grandfather was tall. I don't know how religious they were. I don't know if they went to synagogue. Grandmother didn't wear a wig, at least I can't remember her wearing one. They lived in poor conditions. I know that my dad used to send money to them. We didn't spend too much time with my grandparents. I don't know why, but we rarely visited them. We only went there, when we were there, in Balassagyarmat for holidays, but never other than that.
Grandfather was around ninety, when he died. I wasn't even 16, when grandfather died. Grandmother was a couple of years younger than he was, and there people told us that my grandfather fell over, and his lungs got inflamed when because of lying down, and he died, and a month later grandmother died. She couldn't even attend the funeral, she was sick.
Uncle Samu was the eldest one. He lived in Besztercebanya. I don't remember ever meeting him. I have no idea what his profession was. As far as I know, he had lots of children, but how many, I don't know. I knew one of them, his daughter, Malvin, who came to Budapest, and lived at my father's place, and even worked in the tailor's workshop for a while. After the war she emigrated to Israel. Uncle Samu was, I think, deported together with his family, when the Slovaks were deported.
His eldest sister was Aunty Milka, she is the one I know about, but he may have had more siblings. She lived in Budapest. Her husband was called Adolf Spitzer. He was a tradesman of some sort, I think. She had three daughters and a son, Miklos. We lived at their place, too, when we moved to Budapest in 1920. They lived in Adam Vay Street, on the fourth floor. It was a two-room-and-kitchen flat; it didn't have the modern conveniences. I don't know more, although we even lived there for a while. I met them later too, but not very often. During the war they were probably also in the ghetto. Aunty Milka died after the war. I don't even know, what happened to her. Miklos died in forced labor. One of her daughters, Janka, emigrated to Israel.
Dad's other elder sister was Aunty Giza; we lived at her place, too. Back then, it was called Szerecsen Street, now Ede Paulay Street, where they lived. They also had a two-room-and-kitchen, flat without modern conveniences, but I think they had a toilet inside. I remember, once I slept on my father's tailor's desk, I don't know, why it was there. Aunty Giza's husband, Gyula Spitzer was the brother of Uncle Adolf. Uncle Gyula was a hat maker. She had two daughters, Tera and Manci, and a son, Tibor. The two daughters of Aunty Giza left for Australia after the war. Her elder daughter died five years ago, at 91 years of age. Her younger daughter still lives there, she is about 90 now. The son died in forced labor. I know nothing about the others. Somehow, due to my early marriage, I kind of lost touch with my family, apart from my parents and their brothers and sisters.

Then, the next one was dad, and there was his younger brother, Ignac, who emigrated to America. He was a tailor too. When we lived in Balassagyarmat, they had a tailor's workshop together, which was a shop as well. He was married, and had a son. He had a Christian wife, Aunty Bozske. I heard something about him having to escape after the Commune [Hungarian Soviet Republic] 2, and this is why he left for America. I remember, it must have been just before my mom died, when they came there to say good-bye. It must have been around the End of 1919. We never wrote letters, I don't know why. I know, when we came back from the deportation, Etel [1913-2003] found out their address in America from someone in the family, and wrote to Ignac, and he sent a single package. They sent material for clothes, very nice material, a couple of meters, so, it was enough for the children, for my sister, and for me, for coats and dresses, and everything. But no letter was attached. And my sister wrote and thanked them for it, but there was no further reply. We heard from someone, that his son became a doctor, and they were very well off.
Dad, Armin Schultz [1888-1944] was born in 1888, in Balassagyarmat. Dad, I think, graduated from elementary school. He learnt his trade from some tailor in Balassagyarmat. He was a gentleman's tailor.

## Growing up

My mom was called Jozefin Oblath [1887-1920]. She was born in 1887 in Ovar. I don't know what sort of school she finished. She was a housewife. I heard, that she was very good at sewing, and she used to sew bodices and shirts for peasant women, but she didn't work. I have no idea how she meet my dad. I don't even know where they got married either. I suppose, they must have married in 1910 or 1911, since I was born in 1912. My maiden name is Piroska Schultz. My sister, Etel, who is only 15 months younger than me, was born in 1913, and we had little brother, Pistike [1920-1920], who was eight years younger.
I was born in Balassagyarmat, Etel in Ovar, which now belongs to Slovakia, because, my dad, - I just heard this, because I was very little at that time - I don't know how it came about, but he worked in Berlin for a while. But I don't know how long for. And when my sister was born in October, the rumblings of war had already started. And then, dad came home. But mom came home to her parent's house in Ovar, to give birth. I know it for sure, that when dad came home, we came back to Balassagyarmat, because I know, that we lived in Balassagyarmat, in Ipoly Street during the war.
My mom was pretty, very pretty, and her twin sister was also very pretty. And very kind, too. She had a bun. She had nice, brown hair, and she wasn't too tall. At home, she never had her hair tied up. Only, when she worked on something like cleaning, or something like that, but not for religious reasons. She wore a long skirt, I know that, and she wore apron on top of it. I don't remember her face so much anymore. It was such a long time ago.
Mom kept a kosher household. When I was a child, there were separate milky and meaty dishes at our place in Balassagyarmat. We didn't go to the synagogue every Friday, only on holidays. At Pesach, I know for sure that we didn't have any bread. I don't remember, whether we cleared away any breadcrumbs beforehand at home. I only remember, that at her sister, Aunty Netka's place, it was observed carefully. There were separate Pesach dishes, and there were separate milky and meaty dishes, anyway. And I also know, that Etel and I spent the seder at Aunty Netka's. Only we children went there. Mom and dad didn't come. I remember that Mom used to make kneydl for Chanukkah, but there was no celebration. I don't remember if we lit candles, I don't really remember all these things, but one thing is sure, that she didn't attend mikveh, and she didn't wear a wig.

I only have very vague memories of the time in Balassagyarmat, only one or two things are very vivid in my memory: for example once, Etel was sick; on Friday evening the candles were lit and Dad lit a cigarette, which is forbidden, among other things, for Jews at holidays. And mom got angry with him. And Dad suddenly threw the candle holder onto the floor in his anger. My other memory is that when my dad was a soldier, and he came home for a holiday, he took me and Etel, holding our hands to my mom's sister , because he said that Ipoly Street, where we lived, led straight towards the Ipoly river, and the Czechs were shooting from the other bank whereas Zichy Street was zig-zagged. And I remember that in our courtyard there was the Jewish community's matzah bakery, and there was some sort of black, steam engine-like machine, and this steam engine-like thing was bombed and made an awful lot of noise.

Once, when I was already eight, there was a big commotion, and lots of whispering, but we could still hear that Mom had died. Our brother was a five-month old breast-fed baby at the time, and people said all kinds of things, of course, not to us children, but we heard that they could see my dad carrying my Mom on his back and throwing her into the Ipoly. The police questioned him too. Of course, there wasn't a word of truth in it, because Mom committed suicide. I don't remember my poor mother's funeral, but I seem to recall a long wooden box standing on something and there were a lot of people.

I know that she didn't get along with my father. She was unsatisfied with her life, and with my Dad not being religious. She died in 1920. I was only eight at the time, and then we never asked about it. Later, when I had grown up, I was more curious, but then there was no longer anybody to ask what had happened.

The period after that has completely faded, I don't remember anything that happened. I only remember that we were in Budapest. I don't remember the packing, nor the traveling. I have a hazy recollection of sometimes living with one of my father's sister's in Vay Adam Street, and sometimes at my Dad's other sister's, in Szerecsen Street. So I lost a year from school, and so did my sister, because we were sometimes here and sometimes there. We started school here, but we couldn't take exams anywhere, so we had to retake the year. Dad wasn't with us, only our little brother, with a nanny. He died at a very early age, of diphtheria. He was buried somewhere here in Budapest. I saw our little dead brother, when he was buried. He was buried properly, in a Jewish cemetery, but where, I have no idea. It was in 1920.

After that I only remember living in Dob Street, and we had a new Mom and a little sister, who was exactly the same age as Pistike would have been, had he lived. From there on, we lived in normal circumstances. Dad married my step-mother in 1921. My step-mother, Margit Adam [1890s-1956], was also from Balassagyarmat; she was born sometime in the 1890's. I think they had known each other when they were young, but how they got together in Budapest, I don't know. I called her Mom too. We had a very good step-mother. She was trained as a seamstress, doing work to-order, and she had a one-room-plus-kitchen flat, without all the modern conveniences and we moved to her place, when they got married. They were married properly, but I don't remember the wedding at all. My step-mother was a widow when she married my Dad. She was young, around 30. To me, she was old of course, at an ‘aunty' age, because I was around eight or nine years old, at that time. She wore normal, modern dresses. She dressed fashionably. Her hair was heat-curled on both sides, and together in a bun. On the street, she wore a hat, not a scarf.

I don't really remember elementary school. I went to elementary school in such a scattered way: I started in Balassagyarmat, then I went to the school in Erdelyi Street, and Homoki Street, and only the third and fourth years, I attended at Kazinczy Street, when Dad had already remarried, and we

lived there in Dob Street. We went to middle school 3 in Dohany Street. In middle school, only the religion teacher was male, all the others were female. I always got ‘excellent' grades and studying was easy for me, Etel had great difficulties with studying, but she also had almost all ‘excellent' grades most of the time. She always tried very hard to keep up with me, but for her, it took a lot of effort, whereas for me it didn't. When I got into this middle school, I think there was only one subject, writing, in which I merely received a ‘good', rather than an ‘excellent' grade, and our class teacher was a bit suspicious that I was such a good student.
She was called Gezane Ban. She taught many classes: Hungarian, history, and needlework. I liked her classes very much. I learned all sorts of needlework from her, starting from tapestry, to sewing with a sewing machine. Then I became her favorite. I was so much of an example, that it even happened, that I was called into a 4th year Hungarian grammar class, to answer some questions, when I was only in the 1st year, to demonstrate that I knew the answer when the 4th year students didn't. Gezane Ban was a very well-educated, very good person. Originally I was going to be a doctor, but in order to do that, one had to take a supplementary exam in Latin after middle school, and my parents had no money to pay for a tutor, but Gezane Ban wrote a letter to the teacher at the secondary school in Prater Street, to ask whether she could perhaps take me. Mom was curious about what the teacher had written; she opened the letter and she stuck it back as it was, so no-one would notice. Gezane Ban recommended me very highly, to this teacher, but then it was added: 'it's a pity that she's a Jew.'
Then there was an old maid, our German teacher, Auguszta Bitto. Back then, German language was obligatory in Middle school, and I did quite well in it, but somehow we didn't like each other. Neither of these teachers were Jewish. I don't remember any of the other teachers, even in Middle school.
There were a couple of Jews in the class, but I don't even remember the names any more really. There were many Jewish girls in the Middle school, but I don't recall any ugly comments at all. Not a single one. Not even in the commercial college. There were not many Jews in the commercial college, where I attended for four years.
I was very friendly with the Salzer girls. They had some sort of a clothes shop in Kiraly Street; they were well-off. I was invited to their place for afternoon tea-parties.
I think they lived in Kiraly Street, they had a nice big flat. They learned to play the piano. There were three girls; the two younger ones were schoolmates of mine, the older one wasn't. Dorottya Kohan, was a poor Jewish girl, and very thin. Then there was Marta Komor, a pretty, red-haired Jewish girl. Girlfriends didn't visit our place very much because our flat was small, and the workshop was there too.
We were often taken to matinees and the theatre on Sundays. We also went to the theatre with Mom. We attended the national theatre a lot. One of my step-mother's sisters, used to live in Akacfa Street, close to the old National Theatre, so in the winter time, we used to leave our coats at her place, so we didn't have to pay the cloakroom fee- we were poor- and we ran all along Akacfa Street, with just scarves around our necks, all the way up to the gods, and we saw many wonderul plays. Dad never went to the theatre. He did go to the cinema though, and he also took us there. But I have no idea what we saw.
We used to swim; our step-mother laid great emphasis on us learning to swim, from the swimming coach in the Rudas Baths. We usually went to the pool with one of old Aunty Milka's daughters. We also learned to ice skate; back then there was no such thing as figure skating and all that, but at school, they often iced over the courtyard and we used to skate around in there.

My step-mother wasn't very religious. She kept high holidays, but there was no lighting of candles on Fridays. We didn't keep Chanukkah either. There was no seder and matzah. At Yom Kippur, she fasted, and when we got older we did too. I don't remember whether Dad fasted at all. At Yom Kippur, we went to the synagogue, but we didn't spend the whole day there, just for the Kol Nidre. I think she baked barkhes on Fridays, but there was no special food on Friday evening, but she didn't cook on Saturdays. We often ate cholent and we liked it. She made the cholent on Friday and heated it up on Saturday. I remember that in the summer, she always cooked something on Friday which didn't have to be heated up on Saturday if not absolutely necessary. My Mom didn't keep a very strict kosher household, but by and large, that's what it was. This meant that the milky and meaty dishes weren't mixed; they were also kept separately in the cupboard. We didn't eat meaty and milky foods together. We never had, for example meaty soups and then Pasta with cottage cheese. We never put meat and butter on the same table together. We had a separate milk jug, because in every normal place- I think, even the Christians do it this way- it's kept separately. The dishes weren't washed up separately though, and Pork was never prepared. She often cooked with chicken and goose-fat. Mom used to buy cuts of goose and chicken at the market. She bought them from a Jew, but whether they were kosher or not, I don't know. A woman used to come and do the laundry, Mom didn't wash clothes. She did cook and clean, though. She was at home. Etel was at home too.

I attended many seders, because in school we had Easter holidays then, and then we kids went to Balassagyarmat, to my natural Mom's twin sister, Aunty Netka, and we attended the full, religious seder there. The seder was led by Uncle Sandor. Gyuri or Laci asked the Mah Nishtanah, I don't remember which one of them. I don't remember either, who had to find the Afikoman. I remember it was meat soup, dumpling soup. What else there was, I don't know. We really liked being there; it was great.

We also spent the summer in Balassagyarmat and always the Easter holidays and Christmas holidays. In the beginning, we only stayed with my Natural Mom's twin sister, Etel and I. My step-sister was much younger than us and she stayed at my step-mother's sister's also in Balassagyarmat. Later, we also stayed at my step mother's sisters', there was more space there. But from morning to night, we were together with my aunty's children. We used to go to the park together. We used to go to the River Ipoly together to swim, so we really stuck together.

For quite a large period of my childhood, we were poor because Dad had no work. There were times when we only had bread and lard for lunch. In Furdo Street- now it's called Attila Jozsef Street- there was a famous gentleman's outfitters, and at the beginning, he used to do work for them. He got work from them and he did it at home. In the beginning, Dad only worked on made-to-measure clothes, and later he stated to do ready-to-wear clothes, he did orders for large companies. Dad worked a lot. He made off-the-peg items. He worked for many companies, but he got the material from them; suits, coats, trousers.

When we lived in Dob Street, Dad only did to-order work, his workshop was at home, and he even had a helper, called Mr Wittmann. My sister Magdi, when she could talk, called him ‘Uncle Boy.' It was a one-room-plus-kitchen flat, next to the back stairs of the first floor of a two-storey building. It was terrible to go to the toilet: it had no light. It was in front of the back staircase, and I was scared to go there. The room was a workshop too. There was bed in there; we slept there and there was a sewing machine and a table and things you needed for sewing. There was a wardrobe too. By the time Mr Wittmann arrived in the morning, the bed had to be done, and we had to be dressed up etc. We could only study in the kitchen, because of the workshop, and that wasn't very good

because the kitchen was always dark. It had no windows, and opened onto a closed corridor. Later we rented a room in a flat opposite, and we children slept there and studied there, and then the original one-room flat became the workshop. The kitchen stayed as a kitchen, and they slept in the kitchen, on a convertible iron bed. It was folded up in the morning and opened out in the evening. Then at sometime we moved to Karoly Avenue. Exactly when, I don't remember anymore, but when I got married, we already living there. There were three rooms there. We lived in one room and the workshop had two rooms. In 1929, Dad already had a big workshop in the flat. He had several sewing machines, and tailoring machines. He did the real tailoring work. Many people worked for him: relatives and strangers too. Not all of them were Jewish. I think they didn't work on Saturdays. I don't know why they didn't move to a bigger flat when things were going better; I wasn't at home any more by then.

We lived well by that time. In 1928 or 1929 Dad even bought a car, which wasn't an everyday thing back then, as it is now. Nobody in the family had a car. Dad didn't get a driving license, because it turned out that he was color-blind. For a while, the car was driven by the son of one of my father's sisters, Miklos. Later, it was driven by the husband of my step-mother's sister, Uncle Rudi, who was unemployed at the time. They used the car for leisure, not for work. They went to Balassagyarmat in it. Then they would call for this uncle. They were on really good terms.

There was a memorable trip once. The car was a big, open one but you could pull a canvas roof over it. Back then, there were no limitations on how many people could sit in the car, it was just as many as could fit in. In the spring of 1928, Dad and the others were leaving for Balassagyarmat, to visit relatives. Uncle Rudi was driving. His wife, Mom and Dad and Dad's two sisters, Aunty Milka and Aunty Giza, came along. They were all sitting in the car already, when Aunty Giza's husband said, ‘Of course, you never take the poor relatives!' Dad replied, ‘Come along, if you want to,' and so he sat in as the seventh passenger. Unfortunately, this was fateful. The car blew a tire, and it turned over and poor Uncle Gyula fell out in such a way, that he was just half out of the car and the side of the car came to rest on his chest. He was still alive, when he was taken to the hospital in Balassagyarmat. He died on the operating table. He was buried in Balassagyarmat.

Later, I don't know exactly when, because I wasn't at home any more- I was married- Dad entered a partnership with Arnold, the husband of Iren, Aunty Milka's daughter, who was also a tailor. They had a big workshop on the corner of Nepszinhaz Street and Kalman Tisza Square; they worked with many helpers, because they got work from wholesalers.

Mom and Dad had already moved away from Karoly Avenue by then. First, they moved to Kertesz Street. This was a two-room flat with basic conveniences, so there was a toilet. In the flat in Karoly Avenue, there hadn't been a bathroom either, just a toilet. We had to wash ourselves properly everyday though; wash our feet, in the kitchen, in a washbasin. We used to go to the baths every week, the Rudas baths. There was a swimming pool, showers, basins and I don't know what else. In the swimming pool, one could also swim, because the water there wasn't too warm. After that, they moved to Dohany Street. I don't know exactly why they moved, but I think it was a question of money; I think it was cheaper. But in this flat already, they had a bathroom. From here, they moved to Almassy Square.

That was a three-room flat; two rooms were quite large, and the third one was also big enough for a complete bedroom. There was a bathroom and separate toilet and a big hallway. There was an alcove, a servant's room. There was also a workshop too. I don't know what happened to the joint workshop. That partnership fell through. The biggest room was six meters by seven meters [18ft by 21 ft] and the workshop was there. There were many workers there.

My sister, Etel, did one year at a commercial college and it included a course on typing and shorthand; before that, she did four years of middle school. Before the war, she worked in an office, in a big joiner's workshop. She married Jozsef Schneller, not long after I got married, It must have been in 1934 or 1935. Her husband was a tailor and became Dad's partner. He was related to my step-mother somehow. In 1936, Agi [1936-] was born, they only had that one child.
My step-sister was called Magda Daimant [1920-1982], but she magyarised later. She became Maria Desi. She was a very interesting child. She was only obedient to her mother, and to nobody else. When Mom wasn't at home, she could be incredibly naughty and impertinent. Basically, we were on very good terms, though. Magda attended the same elementary and middle schools we did. She wasn't a good student and she didn't finish any other schooling after the four years of middle school, but she was a clever woman. She educated herself; she read a lot. I don't really know what she did before the war. They lived together, because my sister Etel used to live with my parents, and Magda lived there as well. They lived in several places in Budapest. The last flat was in Almassy Square. After the war, Magda worked as a clerk in the town hall, and later she also worked as a caretaker at resort by Lake Balaton. But in the end she worked in a cake shop, as a coffee-maid. I think she met her husband at one of those resorts. They married around the end of the 1950s. His name was Dr Imre Horvath, and he was five years her junior. He became a mental specialist, a psychiatrist. But basically Magda supported her husband and he had her to thank for the fact that he was able to finish medical school at all. He died in 1982 and Magda in 1984. They had no children.

## Married life

My husband, Imre Hamos [1899-1945] and I were related. We were second cousins; my husband's grandfather, and my grandmother on my mother's side Antonia Kohn, were brother and sister, and we met at an afternoon get-together, at my Aunty Linka's place. I wasn't even seventeen and he asked me to go to skating with him. My parents let me go alone, because he was a relative. Imre's younger sister lived at number 29, Wesselenyi Street, with Imre and his Mom, and I was invited there. He liked me. I had never had a boy courting me before. He was 30 and he wanted to get married. He couldn't find anyone suitable. And then he courted me. He asked for my hand in marriage and I had to decide. I had just finished the 2nd year of commercial college, when I was asked; he wanted to get married as soon as possible. He didn't want to wait. I was a really good student and I really loved going to school. Back then, there was no opportunity for a married woman to go to school. I didn't even graduate from this school, because I decided to get married. But it's not good to marry at such a young age. It was a good marriage, but I left many things out of my life. For example, I would have loved to dance, but my husband hated dancing, so this was completely missing from my life. I still think it was wrong, that my parents let a 17 year old girl decide alone.
My husband was Imre Hahn. Our name was changed to Hamos in 1934. My husband did this; it was around the time when we converted to Christianity, but maybe even earlier. I think Imre's grandparents came from Kiskunhalas. his father was Mor Hahn, I think he was born near to Szeged, in Szentivanpuszta, in 1873. His wife, Eva Kohn, was born in 1872 in Nagypeszek. Before she got married, she worked as a diamond polisher, but that's just what I heard; I don't know any more about her. Imre's father was a printer and a socialist. My husband was born in Budapest in 1899. He was much older than me. His father died in 1914. His mother never remarried. When I became his fiancée, his grandmother on his father's side was still alive. She was a small, wizened old lady; I don't even know her name. I was introduced to her and to one of his uncles. In 1929, when we got

married, I was 17 and he was 30.
The wedding took place in December 1929. it took place in the synagogue in Dohany Street. We used to live there in the seventh district. At that time we didn't live in Dob Street any more, but at Karoly Avenue number nine. First we went to the registrar's office in the morning and afterwards to the synagogue. I had nice wedding, a big one. I can't say how many people were there, but it was the closest relatives, many of them. From Imre's side, his mother came, all his Aunties, his sisters and their children; there were many people. My class teacher, from the middle school, Gezane Ban, really liked me and she was very unhappy that I got married. She took the whole middle school class along with her. I got many pieces of needlework as wedding presents. We had a big lunch up in our flat. There were at least 20 or 30 people in the flat after our wedding. There were two long tables in the living room, but what the food was, I don't recall.
I had a really beautiful dress. It was embroidered silk, mid-blue, long sleeved and the collar and the cuffs were sewed with pearls. The fashion at that time was that the dress was shorter at the front and longer at the back, not all the way down to the floor, but long. My step-mother's brother and his wife had a ladies' clothes salon, but it was an elegant outfitter's, not an off-the-peg store; so it was an elegant salon and they made it. But we did have to pay for it.
There wasn't a real honeymoon, as such. We spent the first night in The Royal Hotel. We left the wedding lunch, and the Royal Hotel had a so-called ‘palm garden' at that time, and we met three of my cousins there, who were also Imre's cousins and his best friends. We met there and chatted and spent the night there. Then we came out to Matyasfold, because we had bought the house before, and it was almost completely furnished.
We had a big suitcase and it was full of porcelain and glass and my bride's bouquet was in there too. I can't say any more what else it had in it. I went to the wedding in my father's car and we packed everything into this car a few days after the wedding. Karoly Avenue number nine, had a through-courtyard, leading from Karoly Avenue on one side to Rumbach Street on the other side, by the synagogue. The car was standing at the Rumbach Street gate, and the carpet, along with a lot of other things, was put on the roof. We left for Matyasfold. When we got there, the suitcase was gone. We had left it at the gate. Our Dob Street address was written inside the case. Because we, and also my parents, used to travel with this case when we went to Balassagyarmat, so the name and address was in it. But that's not all; the lucky thing was that Dad's younger sister, Aunty Giza had moved into our old flat in Dob Street, and the honest people who found the case, opened it and saw that these must be wedding presents because of the bride's bouquet, and they took it all there. That's how everything that we had thought lost, was recovered.
The house in Matyasfold was originally in the name of my husband and my mother-in-law, because they shared the deposit and they were going to pay it together. My mother-in-law had a coal cellar. She sold coal and wood, as a retailer. But then she became sick and she closed the cellar and then it wasn't just that she couldn't pay, we supported her completely. And then she wanted to have the house on her son's name. It was in 1939, and for a Jew they wouldn't write it over.
We found a house together before the wedding already. We wanted to go to the outskirts of Budapest, because we bought it together with my mother-in-law and she wanted to live in the countryside. She really liked me. She preferred to stay at my place, rather than her own daughter's. She went to her daughter's for a day or two every month, but then she would call my husband, after no time at all, ‘Come and pick me up, I'm coming home!' She was an old gossipmonger. Her sister, Aunty Lina, also lived there in Matyasfold, and they sat together and gossiped about the family. She was a kind woman. She loved the children dearly. She took them to

the cinema when she was still well enough. My mother-in-law wasn't at all religious; she didn't go to the synagogue. She fasted at Yom Kippur.
Originally the house had two rooms, with all the modern conveniences. It was a brand new house, built in 1928. The former-owner of Pesti Hirlap, [a well-known newspaper of the time,] Karoly Legradi bought this land from some wood merchant, and portioned it off, and he built these houses to sell. The builder was a rascal, because he skimped on materials for the house wherever possible. These houses looked really good; they had white french doors, and the rooms had parquet flooring, but he put the parquet on the bare ground, so six or seven years later it all had to be thrown out, because the wood was rotten and the parquet floor had to be re-laid in both rooms.
I didn't receive any money as a dowry, but the whole house was furnished by my parents. I received bedroom and dining room furniture, and kitchen furniture and an oven, two beds for the bedroom, two bedside cabinets, two big wardrobes one of them was for underwear and the other for hanging clothes, and a big mirror. The mirror had two little cabinets in it, made from a nice, light wood, in line with the style of the times, and there was a couch, this was the bedroom furniture. The dining room had a long, simple serving cabinet, with three doors. It wasn't an expensive piece of furniture, it had a sideboard which you could serve food from. There was a showcase and a big convertible oval table, which had two armchairs and six inlaid chairs that went with it. They bought ready made furniture and for wedding presents, I got cooking pots, tea sets, many sets of glasses, a carpet, and a chandelier, I got all sorts of things. So, it was all in this kind of lower middle-class way.
Now the house has three rooms because we built an additional room in 1939. Originally we built it because my the husband of my sister-in-law, Klari, was put on a B-list, and they moved to his other sister's place, and they brought their furniture to Matyasfold. My mother in law who used to live with us, had her bed in the dining room first, and later she lived in the third room. The children slept with us then. There was no children's room; it was a different world back then.
My husband had two sisters, Iren [1901-2002] and Klari [1903-1973]. Iren's married name was Markne Rosner, and Klari's was Lajosne Weiner. Iren was born in 1901 and Klari in 1903.They also married quite early. They must have gotten married at around the same time, in 1921 or 1922, because in 1923, Ibi [1923-1940s] and Tibi [1923-1940s] were born in the same year. Before they were married, both of my sisters-in-law used to work in the offices of the former OTI, The National Social Security Institute. I think they finished four years of middle school. My sisters-in-law were not religious whatsoever. They only kept the fasts, but there was no lighting of candles or anything like that.
Klari didn't work; at that time, if women got married, they didn't work really. Her husband, as far as I remember, worked for General Biztosito. Her husband was put on a B-list. He was made redundant. He got some severance pay. It was around 1938 or 1939, so it might have been because he was a Jew 4. He had no income because he couldn't find another job. They couldn't pay the rent, so they moved to my husband's other sister's place for a while, and they brought the furniture to Matyasfold. Klari's son, Tibi, we don't even know where he ended up. He was taken away for forced labor. Klari was in the ghetto. And my children were with her in the ghetto. And after the war, Klari's work was mending stockings. At the end, she worked as a cashier in a pharmacy until her retirement. She died in 1973.
The Rosners had a shoe accessory shop in Baross Street. They also sold leather. This was a crummy, poky den. It was almost opposite their house. They had a two room flat, but the house itself wasn't very elegant. Just my brother-in law and Iren worked in the shop. Iren had a daughter,

Ibi, and a son, Endre [1927-1940s]. Her son was born in 1927; I don't know what he did. Ibi worked in an office somewhere, but I don't know who for. She was deported from the KISOK field- she was buried in Germany. Somebody sent Iren a picture of her grave. Her grave was taken care of for a while. Her son escaped from forced labor somewhere, and the Russians caught him and took him to Russia. We know nothing about him – where and when he died. Iren was in hiding with her husband. After the war, she worked in a food store, later she worked in an office for a long time, until she was about 90. She was 101 years old, when she died in 2002. In the retirement home, there was a big celebration on her 100th birthday. Both of my sisters-in -law were buried in the Jewish cemetery in a common grave.

It was the custom before, to clean every day and every Friday, to do a big clean and wash the kitchen furniture. I didn't do too much cooking, because my mother-in-law lived with us at that time already and she cooked. When I got married, I couldn't cook at all. The first meal I made was inedible. I cooked tomato soup, and no matter what I put in it, it didn't taste good; I added some more sugar, some more roux, but I didn't put in any salt! I did shopping, I took the kids for walks, I did needlework, I sewed, so I wasn't the kind of person who rested a lot. I did read, especially in the evenings in bed. Even now, the book I am reading at the moment is right here. I'm not able to fall asleep without reading.

When I was a young woman, we played cards every Sunday. Many people came: my sisters-in-law, Klari and Iren, my step-mother's relatives, and my cousins, Uncle Naci's sons. Although when we got married, my husband said, ‘There are no close connections with the relatives,' it wasn't like that at all. We moved there in 1929 and in 1930, my natural mother's eldest brother, Uncle Naci, built a house in Matyasfold, and they lived there with their three sons. The two houses were close by, five minutes apart. My cousins were friends with my husband - relatives and friends as well. I liked them very much, they were intelligent, well-educated, well-read people. They graduated from secondary school. Back then, it was a big thing if someone graduated from secondary school.

We also went over to Uncle Naci's place a lot. They liked us – especially Uncle Naci.

Aunty Lina was a strange woman. She liked to put on airs, although she was uneducated. We'd go over after dinner, especially before we had children, and later our children and Andor's son were very close.

We were a very hospitable household. People like to be at our place very much. Many times people came already for lunch, many times they brought lunch with them, and many times we cooked together. The card games continued even after we had the children. The family of my sister-in-law, Klari, also came, although their children were a good few years older than mine. They really enjoyed being here. My sister-in-law's family even spent the summer holiday in Matyasfold. Not at our place, but they rented a flat and my mother-in-law cooked for them.

Klari and I met up almost every week. My children really like her children; it was a very strong relationship. When I was 24, I had an operation to remove kidney stones and while I was recovering, Klari took care of my two children. My husband lived at their place with the children, while I was in Hospital.

Before the war, we used to go to the theatre and the cinema, but not very often. I went to the opera house for the first time as a young married woman; I went to the opera with my husband. In Matyasfold, the IKARUSZ company had a gym and once a week they showed movies in there. We also went to Budapest many times; we went to large cinemas. In Lajos Kossuth Street, there is a cinema that used to be called The Forum; that's where I saw the first talking movie. Many times we took up a whole row, because Uncle Naci and his family, and my sister-in-law's family all came

along with us. I think we usually went to later shows. Of course all this was before I had children. But it happened that we asked Klari to come over and mind our young kids, but this didn't happen very often.
My cousins and my husband owned a boat together, and they rented a space for the boat at the first boathouse, next to the Ujpesti Osszekoto bridge. As soon as the weather started to be good they went to lacquer it and put it in order. When I joined their group, then I also went along to tidy up the boat and every weekend, we went rowing on the Danube, in two boats. It wasn't the done thing at the time, to sleep in the same tent with one's fiancée, so they went to Vac or to Horany on Saturday, and I went to join them on Sunday morning and then came home in the evening. That was the program every weekend, when the weather was good. How they settled on this sport, I don't know, but Jeno was a member of the Workers' Sports Association. My husband was also a member. He liked rowing and was very good at it. When we were rowing in a cox-less double scull, if he didn't want someone to overtake us, they couldn't. Later, we gave up rowing.
In the wintertime we went skiing. While my husband was still a bachelor, he even went abroad to Mariazell and to other Austrian resorts. At that time, there wasn't too much snow in the Buda hills, but there was some and the Workers' Sports Association had a cabin up in Nagyszenas and we used to go there. I didn't like skiing so much, because I found myself in a group of people who had been skiing for years and I wasn't very adventurous. I did like going there though, and learnt to ski very quickly.
My husband worked for MEFTER, the Hungarian Royal River and Sea Shipping Stock Company. He had free tickets for boat travel. We went to Vienna with the ship. My mother-in-law was with us too; we had to take this poor soul everywhere. My husband insisted on it. I didn't have anything against her, we got along quite well.
When I was a young married woman, my parents spent many summer holidays at the Danube's Romai-bank, but I never spent any holidays with them. Both of my sisters-in-law had summer holidays every year, with their three children at Lake Balaton, or Nagymaros, by the Danube. I also went there for a week or two, but it was at the time when I had Marika [1933-1999] already. And then the bad times came and these holidays stopped.
My husband only had a secondary school education. Back then a secondary school final exam was worth a university degree now. He had a commercial secondary school final exam I think, because he worked in business, he dealt with salaries and stock-taking, sometimes he had to go to the countryside, to do auditing. He worked for MEFTER, the Hungarian Royal River and Sea Shipping Stock Company; I don't know what position he had exactly, some sort of a clerk. He worked from 9am to 3pm. He came home at three o'clock and we always had lunch then. He didn't go back in the afternoon after that. Sometimes, there was some work related to payroll, which he took home, and I did it. I was at home, I didn't work.
We converted to Christianity because of my husband's office, because he worked for the Hungarian Royal River and Sea Shipping Stock Company. This was a state-owned company and he was picked on at work. A colleague of his, who wanted to the best for him, pushed him to convert to Christianity, so that we would have no problems. In 1934, the Jews were unwanted already. And he liked his workplace. To be honest, I don't know if he was promoted after this. Back then, I didn't really care about rankings and suchlike. He always got a bit more money.
We were christened in the Rozsak Square church in Budapest. My elder daughter, Marika was ten months old then. She was born in 1933. She was also christened. My daughter Judit [1935-2002], was born as a Christian in 1935. Only our godfather was there. We didn't even have a godmother.

This colleague of my husband was an older, very religious man. He was our godfather. I don't think we had to go to religious classes. I got some book and I read it; Catechisms or I don't know what. The conversion wasn't too much of an issue. We didn't get together with Christians, so when Judit was born, we didn't even know who the godparents should be. Back then, there were green-cross district nurses, who dealt with children and pregnant women. I asked ours to become the godmother and she accepted. I don't even remember the christening. There was no celebration.
I didn't even want it, my natural mother was not very, but quite religious. She didn't wear a wig, like her twin sister did, but she did keep the Friday evening candle-lighting. I was raised in this religion; I went to these kinds of religious classes. I knew it better than the Christian religion. And my husband wanted us all to be assimilated. I didn't want it and we argued about it for a very long time and then I said that I'd agree to the children being Christian, but I didn't want to myself. But my husband said we couldn't raise two types of children in the family – because at that time, it worked that the girl would have been Jewish and the boy Christian [Editor's note: according to the Hungarian regulations of the time, children born in a mixed marriage, were registered such that boys were registered according to their father's religion, and the girl's according to their mother's.] This colleague pressed my husband very hard. And in the end, I was taken in.
Of course I did everything I could, to provide the girls with the appropriate religious upbringing, especially when they went to school; I went to church with them and they were confirmed etc. But I don't know too much about the Christian religion, even now. During the war, I moaned about what sort of a pope it was who allowed that the Holy water that washes away all sins, didn't wash away our past Jewishness. The Jews, who converted to Christianity, were persecuted as much as those who didn't. I think, the conversion was also just a formality for my husband. He didn't even go to church. He never went to church. My husband's mother was not at all religious. For her, it was all the same. From the catholic religion, we just kept what all the other Jews do: Christmas and Easter, the Christmas tree and presents.
There were two married couples with whom we used to get together, but not very often. They were Jewish. Actually the wife of one of them was Christian. But we didn't even talk about the conversion.
My natural mother was already dead. I lost her when I was little. I had a stepmother, who raised me as if she was my natural mother. They weren't happy about it. It‘s very interesting, that actually the whole family wasn't religious, but they were Jewish, and we kept the Jewish high holidays. My father was the least religious one, but it was he who was most upset when he heard that we converted to Christianity.

## During the war

Then the real troubles began: special Jewish regulations, from which we were not exempt. My husband was very bitter, as was I. On the 26th May 1944, we moved to my parent's place in Almassy Square. We didn't have to, but we had the opportunity, because we would have had to go to the ghetto in Pestujhely. But out of those Jews from Matyasfold who went there, nobody came back. Actually, we were lucky, my daughters and I. In Matyasfold, a police officer lived just in front of us, who was the chief officer of the camp in Kistarcsa, which was a holding camp.
They had moved there not long before. They were a young married couple with a little baby. We weren't even on nodding terms. This police officer was completely stunned when he first saw us with the yellow star, because we'd converted to Christianity and my daughters were in school and church was obligatory for them, and I went with them. Until then, we had had no contact at all with him, and after that he approached me, and when it was announced that the Jews and those of

Jewish origin from Matyasfold had to go to the ghetto in Pestujhely, he offered to have a look and see what sort of a place it was. A couple of days later, though, he asked if we had any relatives in Budapest, because it would be easier to hide in a big city. He talked us out of going to the ghetto. He even gave us an official document which allowed us to move to my parents' place with all our belongings.
I don't know what happened to him after the war. I do know that they moved to Debrecen, because his wife was the daughter of some factory owner, and they left for Debrecen after the war. By the way, he was also denounced by somebody who he'd sent to Kistarcsa, because he'd had to. He was acquitted. I was there as a witness, but my testimony was not needed.
When Almassy Square number 15, became a yellow-star-house 5, there were 18 of us living in those three rooms. My father was there, my step-mother and step-sister, my sister, with her husband and little daughter. They had lived in this flat originally. There was my also husband and I with our two children. And then another five people arrived there, because my mother-in-law came, and my two sisters-in-law, Iren and Klari, their husbands and their three kids. All three were deported and they all died. My sister-in-laws daughter was deported from the KISOK field. My dad was taken away, we don't even know where he went, because we never received so much as a line from him. In 1944, men had to go to forced labor. He wasn't very old, but he was over 50 already, but he also had to go. After the war, my sister had them search for him, but no information could be found about him at all.
When we moved to Almassy Square in 1944, they weren't working any more. I think they worked before that, but I don't know that for sure. Sewing work could still be done for a long while. The workshop still existed in 1944, but my father didn't get any work any more orders. The workshop was standing empty. We sewed trousers. Etel arranged it, and she dealt with them. We sewed for a company, we didn't make individual trousers. I did the ironing. It wasn't easy because a tailor's iron is heavy and it had to be heated in a little oven. Etel worked by hand, and she arranged things. And there was a machine operator. He was despicable, because when the Germans were already here and we were still working, there was a raid; the Jews were being collected and he informed on us, telling them that we were at home. We had gone down to the cellar by then – at this time my sisters-in-law and my mother-in-law were already living there, because it was a yellow-star house- and we spent a night on top of a coal pile, in the coal cellar, my mother-in-law, the children and I. We heard the Arrow Cross 6 men shouting in front of the cellar window, but they couldn't find us. The next day we came up from the cellar; we couldn't stay there for ever. Then all along Wesselenyi Street, came a long, long line of people, escorted by Arrow Cross men. They were Jews, who had been dragged out of their houses, all sorts of people: the old, the sick, everyone. We also got into this chain of people- we had to come out of the house. They took us to Tattersall. In the daytime, we lay on the floor, on blankets or coats, whatever one had. Some people even died there. Mom took a bag of food, and that's what we had. Tattersall had some sort of a gate and towards the evening time, it was opened and we were driven into the racecourse. This is right next to the cemetery in Fiumei Road and when they opened the gates, we just saw all those crosses and we thought, ‘This is the end; they've brought us to the cemetery!' It was a terrible sight – the cemetery, all those crosses, but then they let us go up to the grandstand, in case it rained or something. We were there with three children, without anything to eat or drink, because the stuff Mom had thrown into the bag was already gone. We were in our coats. It must have been around October, when the Arrow Cross was in power. Then we sat there and waited for whatever was to happen next. And sometime - late in the evening or in the night, I think it was policemen in army

uniforms that appeared, and they announced through the loudspeakers - at least that's how I remember, because we were sitting high up on the grandstand, and we could still hear it - that we could go home. Then the line of people, in their yellow stars, started off again, through the streets at night. It wasn't pleasant to walk, we were also very scared, and that's how we went home.
My husband was taken into forced labor many times; he was in Budapest for a while, but he died in Balf. What they did in Balf, I don't know. He didn't write from there, and I wasn't at home either, anyway. He wrote one time, from somewhere on the way there, and I heard that he was sick from a fellow laborer who came to visit me. They were next to each other, on plank-beds or on the floor, I don't know. He probably found out from my husband, that we lived in Almassy Square, because when we moved away from Matyasfold, we moved away from my parents. He told me that my husband had become sick, and the sick ones, those who couldn't go on, had been shot dead. So my husband was also shot, into a big hole. This, according to his fellow laborer, was on the 31st March 1945, a day before the Russians' arrival. I heard this in 1945 or 1946. Beforehand, I had made enquiries through the newspapers. I think it appeared in Nepszava or Nepszabadsag. [which was called Szabad Nep, at that time,] because my step-mother's relative had some connection, through which I could make an announcement there.
We never received any official message that he had died. I had his death registered. This was because of the house in Matyasfold. It was in two names: that of my husband and his mother. It had to be cleared up because of my daughters. That's when I had his death registered. My mother-in-law had two daughters who could also have inherited it, but they declined, so it was put in the names of my two daughters, but I was the legal beneficiary.
There is a memorial in the Jewish cemetery here in Kozma Street, and who those are buried here, were identified. There is a big long grave, but everybody has their own little plaque. There are nine of them in one grave, and my husband is named there. I didn't know about this exhumation in Balf, I only heard about it when the coffins were already being buried here.
We don't know where my mother-in-law is buried either. She was in a ghetto, with her daughter Klari, during the war. She was liberated there. Right afterwards, in 1945, she died of typhus. When I got back home, she was dead already. Many died of typhus. My sister-in-law told me that her husband dragged her into the cemetery in a trunk, I wasn't at home yet. There was probably no name or anything written on it. When I came home, we tried to find out about her, but no luck. Probably she was buried in a common grave.
Etel's husband was also taken to do forced labor. He died in Fertorakos.
When the Germans came in 7, I was deported. By the time there was a ghetto in Budapest, I wasn't there anymore. It was on posters, that every women under the age of 35, should appear on the KISOK field, complete with food for three days and I don't know what else. So I went to the KISOK field with my sister, but in the evening of the first day, those whose husbands were in forced labor, were allowed to go home, but next day they had to come back and then we didn't go home anymore. It happened some time around the end of November 1944. Both of us went on foot as far as Zundorf- which is somewhere close to Hegyeshalom, on the Austrian border. There, we were driven into railway cattle cars, men and women together, and the doors were closed on us. It was terrible. I can't even describe this trip. We weren't given any food or drink, we couldn't go to the toilet; one of the corners was the toilet. I don't remember anymore how long this journey, this nightmare, lasted.
We traveled as far as Hamburg, there they kicked out all the men, and this freight train pushed on with the women, actually going back. Of course we didn't know anything, because we couldn't see

out, so only when the train stopped again, we saw the name of the station: Furstenberg. Actually, it was through this nice, friendly-looking little place, that we arrived to a concentration camp, surrounded by barbed wire, where we were received by dogs and SS soldiers. This was Ravensbruck.
We only stayed here for two weeks. It was horrible. There were four or five of us on a narrow plank-bed. That's where I saw women with shaved heads for the first time, and here Etel cut my beautiful, almost waist-length hair, which was worn plaited around my head, with her nails scissors, which she still had at that time. This was because I was scared of lice, and of being shaved bald.
After two weeks, we were put into train carriages again, and we were taken to a different camp. This was Leipzig, as we heard later. Luckily, my sister and I were taken to the same place, but they never knew that we were sisters, because she was called Schneller, and I was called Hamos.
Compared to the circumstances in Ravensbruck, it was much better here. In Ravensbruck, two people lay on one plank-bed, and five people shared one spoon to eat the inedible food. Then I had still been quite particular and I preferred not to eat that slop with a well-licked spoon.
The camp in Leipzig, was actually a labor camp, from which we were taken to work in the factory in shifts, one week at night, one week during the day. The name of the factory wasn't written there, but on the so-called ‘money' we received, the name HASAG was printed. [Editor's note: HASAG was a privately-owned German company, which was the third largest employer of slave labor. From the summer of 1944, labor camps were established next to each HASAG plant in Germany, all of which, were satellite camps of Buchenwald. Mostly women were employed in HASAG plants.]
When we went to the factory, we crossed tramlines, but I don't remember the number of the tram. I think it was a cannon round and bullet factory, because we were sorting little metal cartridge-cases into boxes. We had to check them very carefully. No scratches could be on them.
In the lager, many things happened, which seemed important back then. For example, in the barrack's corridor, was a big tank of sand and a big barrel of water, so that in case of fire, there would be something to put it out with. Once, somebody spilt some water into the sand and the Aufseherin [female overseer] said that she must've urinated there, and she demanded a Strafappell [punishment-line-up.] Every morning at five o'clock, there was an Appell [line-up,] which meant that we had to stand in lines of five people, in the corridor, until they had counted that we were all present. When the Strafappell was ordered, it was freezing cold and snowing outside. Etel and I were washing our hair, and we also washed our stockings, shirts and underwear, and we had to put them all on while they were still wet, and to stand in the snow, with our wet hair, for an hour.
There was a large stone building in the camp – Poles lived in there and there were a great many wooden barracks. Etel and I got into a wooden barracks block for 20 people. There were bunk beds and on them, mattresses stuffed with straw, and a blanket. There was an iron heater in the room, on top of which we could toast the bread we received. Many such rooms opened onto one corridor.
In the barracks, the toilet was a long room and along one wall, similar to village latrines, there was a wooden board with five holes in it, so one could do one's business in company, if it so happened.
One could wash in the main building, because there was always nice, hot water in there, a shower and there were hot pipes where one could dry one's washed underwear and wet hair. We had no change of clothes, just the ones we had on us. Three times a day, we received food, such as it was.
There were women from a great many different nations there, but mainly Polish, not only Jewish. There were even people saying ‘stinke jude!' [stinking Jew.] The main supervisors were German SS women [Aufseherin] and in the barracks, polish prisoners, Blokovas, who had been there for a longer period, as supervisors. Blokova Hanna always wished us 'Gute Fliegealarm,' [good air-raid]

because then we were taken down to the shelter in the factory and we could have a little nap, sitting on the benches.
Once we lived in the main building for a while- I don't remember why they moved us over there- and there were 4-storey bunk beds. Etel and I took the top bunk, to avoid having straw or other rubbish falling onto us. As soon as the lights were switched off, the cockroaches fell like rain, from the ceiling onto the top bunk, so we couldn't sleep the whole night. As it turned out later, the situation wasn't any better in the lower bunks, either. After two or three days, we were almost dizzy at work- we kept falling asleep- and then we were asked what our problem was. I count it as a good point, that the Germans put out cyanide in the room, while we were working. That was a respectable action for these thugs. Later, we also didn't know why, we were moved back to the barracks.
On the day after moving back, when we were returning from the day's shift, Etel slipped away from the line and went into the main building, because she wanted to get a plank for our bed, as one was missing. Meanwhile, there was an air-raid and we had to go down to the shelter, and Etel wasn't there. I was really worried. When the raid was over, we could see that smoke was pouring out of the main building and it was falling down. I was in utter despair, thinking that she had died there, but suddenly she appeared with the plank of wood and told me happily, that the walls had been moving, but she didn't know that the building had actually been hit by a bomb, only when she came out. Many Polish women died in that raid. This happened quite near the end of the war.
We didn't know anything concrete about the situation on the outside. We suspected that things were not going very well for the Germans, even though they wrote on the toilet walls ‘Deutschland soll leben' [Germany shall live] We also assumed something based on the fact that for days, the same faulty cartridge cases always came back on the production line, so they had no material supplies. Sometimes, when we went to the toilet, we could see train carriages with MAV signs on them standing there, and we used to daydream that we could get into one of them maybe it would take us back. But there was no chance of that, because we were escorted, even to the toilets, and we could only go when we were taken there. Then, one day, we weren't taken to the factory any more. We were taken there twice. We were told that we were going to work in the Stadtgartnerei, the city gardening company. I was even looking forward to it, because then at least we would be in the fresh air. But the Stadtgartnerei wasn't that at all, it was just filling-in bomb craters. There were such intense air raids that we were hiding under bushes. Even our guard was scared, not just us.
On 13th April 1945, we were rudely awoken by the Aufseherin supervisor women, in the barracks of the Leipzig camp, shouting, ‘Schnell, schnell!' [quickly, quickly!] we had to line up with all our blankets and belongings -which was hardly anything at all- because this camp was to be evacuated. The invading troops were coming.
That night, the march started in a long, snaking line; We just walked and walked, as we realized later, completely without aim, almost around the clock, for ten days. We were staggering half-asleep, they hardly gave these weak, emaciated, shells-of-people any breaks. On just a couple of nights, they let us lie down, of course, under the open sky, on the bare ground. During the night we could see the flames rising, and we could hear the bombs exploding. As a matter of fact we realized that we were going nowhere, because all the signposts were pointing towards Pirna. Being dragged along non stop, for ten days underneath the open sky, every road led to Pirna. According to German precision, we had to march in orderly rows of five. For ten days, we didn't receive any food or drink, apart from the little piece of bread we got when we started off. We chewed on grass that grew by the roadside. It was in the middle of April. The German peasants were just planting

potatoes in the fields, which were in big piles at the edges of the fields, by the road in many places; those who were suffering from starvation so much that they risked digging potatoes out of the piles, were shot dead and their bodies were dragged to the edge of the road, so that the whole line of people after them could see what happened to those who ‘stole' potatoes.
On the night of the tenth day, we were driven into a huge wooden barn, which was full of straw, and we crawled into it to get warm. We had a wonderful sleep, because finally we had a roof over our heads. By the morning, our entire escort had disappeared. Slowly, we struggled up and dared to come out of the barn. When we came out, we could see that hundreds of people, were passing with bundles tied to their bicycles, with packages on their backs, with prams fully packed with buckets, pots and other household items; like a huge exodus, they were just going and going in the same direction- now I know- towards the West. This exodus lasted all day, and we, who were still together from the lager, were just standing around, and waiting for somebody to arrange whatever should happen to us, because based on our clothes, anybody who was interested would have known who we were, but nobody cared about us.
In the meantime, it got dark. We were at the end of a village. The sign said Lorenzkirch, there were a couple of houses there. We tried to get them to let us in, but they'd only let us into the garden. We tried to sleep again, under the open sky, but at least leaning against the wall of the house. We woke up at dawn; in the twilight, it was very quiet. There were only six of us left there. One of the girls said she'd look around. She crawled down the embankment and saw that every sort of smaller and larger vehicles were standing there, fully packed but unclaimed. Apparently, when it got dark, the Germans had only wanted to save their lives, and they left their belongings there on the road. She came back, and brought the plunder; after ten days our first meal was a raw egg each, and some sugar lumps, stuffed into our mouths with our hands. This was the day we got free of the Germans and we were freed.
The second phase of our German travels started. Soviet soldiers appeared and they got us started us off towards the east. After a long march, we arrived at some wooden barracks. We received some good, hot food with rice there. There were basins and a lot of hot water there. Finally, after ten days, we could have a wash, we could wash our hair and after long months, we could lay in a bed, which had bed sheets and covers too. All of a sudden, we were awakened by lots of shouting, that we had to start quickly, because the Germans would arrive soon. Our belongings hadn't dried yet. We threw them on and rushed off with the others – we didn't even know where.
Next morning, the wandering carried on. From there on, there were really just six of us. We went without any escort, through many places. Wherever we went, we were looking for the Red Cross. Where our road led us, we met the soldiers of the Soviet Army everywhere. This was a bit of a barbarian army. Although in the daytime, apart from some exceptions, we had no problems with them, at night, they got drunk and went crazy. They always told us that we should go this way or that way. Finally, we got to a Red Cross camp in Spremberg, where we were put up in houses. We also had lots of experiences on this journey, because we met some Italian boys, and one of them even wanted to marry me. We spent six weeks in this camp. Here we got some food every day: mainly bread and potatoes, sometimes some sugar or flour, and very rarely, some meat. In the lager, I lost weight until I was 38 kilograms, and in those six weeks we spent in Spremberg, I got my weight up to 53 kilograms.
The way we came home was that on the 17th June 1945, they lined us up and started us off, saying that we would be put into train carriages and taken home to Hungary. We had been walking for hours, when a man came on a motorbike and went to our escorts, saying, ‘Turn around! The train's

already left!' So we went back. We spent two more days in the camp, and then we were started off once again, but this time we really reached the train. We were in open carriages, and we got some very bad seats, right behind the engine, so when it started, the sparks fell on us, so we had to hide underneath some blankets to avoid being burnt. Then the engine started, and we went across many broken bridges, so if you looked down, you'd have kittens that the bridge might really crumble underneath the train. Then later, we got into covered carriages. I don't remember the stations we stopped at. Here and there we received some soup and some bread. I remember that we were also in Prague. There we were told that we would have to wait a long while, so we were allowed out of the carriages. Then we went out, and I agreed with Etel, that we would beg for food at random, and from one family, we got some very delicious pudding dessert. After the bad soup we'd received at the station, it was wonderfully tasty. Then we went back to the carriages. The train was ordered to one side many times, because the soldiers were still going all over the place. In Bratislava, we received some money. I think we even received some papers from a Jewish organization. It was kind of a repatriation document, to prove where we had been. Whatever we declared, they wrote in. Just once, when we'd been working at the factory, we'd received some payment, and it had this name HASAG written on it. I still had this, and based on these two documents, I received my German pension money.
By the time the train started, it was 18th June, and we arrived home on the 29th June, just a day before my 33rd birthday. The train arrived at Nyugati Station; the tram on the Korut, [the inner city ring road] was already working, I know that. We got on it. People could see how we looked, so nobody checked our tickets – but I think, at that time, no-one was asked for their ticket yet– and we went as far as Wesselenyi Street, and we walked up the Street. A woman who Etel knew came towards us and she was shouting from a long way away already, that Mom, my step-mother, and the children were alive. This was a great experience. We went up to the third floor and into the flat; my children weren't there, because meanwhile, my sister-in-law, Iren had moved back to the flat in Baross Street, Klari moved with her too, and they took the two children as well. Klari and Iren carried on living together until Klari's death. Then we went there. I lived in Almassy Square with the children, as all our belongings were there, until we moved back to Matyasfold.
During the war, many of our belongings had been lost. My most beautiful things and those of my husband and the children were in two suitcases; I was no longer in Budapest at the time, but my husband was still in the city in forced labor, somewhere in Hungaria Avenue, in a school. There was this pig-trader who had been willing to look after everything for us. He took the two suitcases and we never saw him again. My husband took my favorite books to the wholesalers where he used to work, they were hidden there, but I never got to see them again either. I had a Persian lambskin coat that was gone too. I had silver cutlery, which was also taken away. Everybody had an explanation for it. Some said the Romanians took them away, some sold the stuff and lived off the money. But I said, I'm not going to sue anybody, I don't want to take revenge on anybody.

## Post-war

After the war, I was left alone with two children. I had to earn money to feed us, and I had no profession. But afterwards I made up for it and did a two-year course. In the end, I became a chartered accountant and certified auditor.
We arrived home on the 29th June 1945, and on the 9th August, I got into the Rokus hospital, to work. I managed to get in there through a friend of one of my cousins, who died. It was called the Institution Supervision. I got into the department where they dealt with the payroll and did other administration for the hospital employees. I did payroll and later, I became an internal auditor. It

was terrible at the beginning, because although I had attended commercial college and learned to type, this had back been in 1929, and I was completely out of practice. The first day, I was sat down in front of the machine, and the nurses came along one after the other, and a huge sheet had to be filled out with all sorts of data. It went dreadfully, so I overheard many comments, like: 'Why would they employ someone like that who's only plucking at the keys?' I wasn't sent away, and I quickly got into the swing of it. I worked there for seven years, and from there I went to the health ministry, where I worked for a very long time. I worked as a chief clerk and I carried out auditing work for a while, and then I became a deputy head of department. When I retired, I was a deputy head of department. So, I only did business-related work, but I never liked it.

Right after the war, I think everybody who couldn't obtain food in any other way, gave away all their clothes and everything, in order to ensure food for their family. So, there was kind of a barter-trade system working. Mom dealt with these things. We were busy because we entered work quickly, both my sister and I. My sister's husband came from Vanyarc, in Nograd county, and his parents were merchants and he had two brothers. One was taken away to forced labor and the other one escaped somehow, and he hid at the home of a many-skirted peasant woman who he later married. He was a good Jewish merchant- he could get hold of anything.

After the war, they provided food for us. And then there was the opportunity to give him our bread coupons and we received white flour in exchange, and Mom baked bread and we were provided with everything from Vanyarc. Mom even traveled on the top of a train. She took not only coupons, but also clothes and whatever was left, to Vanyarc.

We had moved away from Matyasfold on the 26th May 1944. The house stayed there vacant. It was completely derelict. I don't know who had lived there, but when I came back, the view that welcomed me was one of fallen plaster, and no doors, because the doors had been used as a ramp for horses. Later the Christian neighbors told me that the Russians had used it as a stable; it was full of manure – it was in a terrible condition. The front door had been taken away. It was probably chopped up for firewood. The parquet floor in our original bedroom had been taken up, and also probably used as firewood; even the bathroom doorframe had been taken away. So we couldn't move back there. At that time we were still waiting for our men to come home, but unfortunately, none returned: neither the husband of my sister, nor mine, nor did my father, or my sister-in-law's children. The husbands of my sisters-in-law survived. Iren was in hiding with her husband, somehow they could get Christian papers. Klari's husband was in the Ghetto. After the war, he worked at the OMZSA, the Hungarian Jewish Aid Organization. They handed out clothes and food. We also received clothes both for the children and ourselves, we received winter coats and all sorts of things. This was in Bethlen Square. There was also a centre there, where announcements were posted showing who had returned from forced labor. My poor brother-in-law got lice from clothes or I-don't-know-what, and he died of typhus.

Once, a married couple appeared at my workplace in 1946 and told me that they had been to Matyasfold; they needed somewhere to live, and they offered to move there. They weren't going to pay rent, but they offered to put the house back in order. I had two conditions: one, that we should wall up the door into the third room and open a door into the courtyard, and two, that I could go out there with my children in the summertime. We signed a contract and they moved in. They didn't make an ordinary door to the third room, but they put a wooden board there, which could only be closed from inside. And instead of the parquet flooring which had been taken up, they laid down cruddy boat-deck flooring, but one could live there. In 1947, I moved into that one room with two pieces of furniture, but we didn't live there during the wintertime, because it wasn't well suited

to it. In the summer, I was there with children, so they could get some fresh air. The tenant worked for BKV and he lost his job. He showed up at the hospital again, saying that he couldn't keep this contract and they could move into a friend's place for free. So then we moved in again, into the whole flat. We've carried out a lot of reconstruction in the house since then, as the children grew up.

In the 1950s, in my family, nobody had anything to fear. Nobody did anything, about which, he needed to be frightened. In fact, I was quite far from the detentions and from the dawn raids made by AVH. I heard about this sort of thing, but it didn't happen near me. At the party members meetings, it was read aloud, if things like that went on. I mainly read about this in the newspaper, but we were far from it. I only knew what was officially announced. We had party members meetings every month. There were many meeting rooms in the ministry, where such things could be held. In the course of these meetings, they related by and large, the political events, those they were allowed to, as well as about ministerial issues. Apart from that, there was nothing special; they didn't mean anything to me. When I was young, not only could I care less about politics, but I didn't even look at the newspapers, I was so uninterested. Indeed, I've never been interested in politics. When I was a party member, I wasn't interested either. One could stay out of it.

I was a party member. I hadn't been back home yet from the deportations, when my step-sister signed me up for the communist party in 1945. In 1956, I didn't want to rejoin the party, because by then so much had come out about what they'd done. In the ministry, one of the communist heads of department – we were on good terms, she had been in Auschwitz- tried to convince me to rejoin. Then I said, 'Look, I'm not rejoining because my sister lives in Australia and I will never denounce her. I also have relatives in America, and I'm not going to denounce them either.' I didn't want to rejoin, but the I went to the cemetery many times, to my step-mother's grave, and I also have many relatives in the Jewish cemetery in Kozma Street. So I went out there, and walked among those big gravestones, the common grave of the forced laborers of Balf and Sopronkohida, and then I thought I would rejoin the party in case , god forbid, something terrible like this were to happen again. I rejoined the party at the last party meeting. My party membership was acknowledged without any special vetting, or difficulties. I was a member of the party until the change of regime, I think.

There were times when I was a party branch leader in the ministry. The party members in the department were my responsibility, we had meetings and for a while, when I had already retired, they entrusted me with the writing of a short piece about what they were discussing in the party organization in Matyasfold.

The 23rd October 1956 8, was the day of my last exam at the ministry of finance. At the ministry of health, my room on the third floor had windows looking onto the banks of the Danube, and I could see students and soldiers and everybody, marching all day, below my window. We were to go to the ministry of finance for our exam at four or five o'clock and we did. There was an army guard at the ministry of finance already. We went in, and after I took my exam, I said that I'd go down to call my sister, so that she could call home. I didn't have a phone at that time yet. They had an acquaintance in Matyasfold, who had one. I went down, and the ministry gate was closed, and they didn't want to let me out, saying there was an alert and we couldn't leave the building individually. I begged so much that they let me out. When I got outside, there was a great din in the streets. They were shouting in the streets, ‘Down with Gero!' 9 and things like that. I was a bit scared, but I went to the phone box.

When the announcement of the exam results was complete, I came out together with a man, with

whom I was in the same study group. We wanted to take bus number 45. At that time, the end station of number 45, which goes to Matyasfold, was at Jegbufe. There was no bus, though just chaos and shooting on the street, it could be heard everywhere. The big scene at the radio station was already happening. At the corner of Semmelweis Street, there was a presso- it's still there today- we went in and I made a phone call to my sister to ask her what to do. She said, 'What can you do? Do you want to walk home to Matyasfold? Come here, instead!' So then I slept there. My sister's family had a telephone already and we called my sister's acquaintance from there. It was already midnight, then. We asked him to go over and have a look if they are at home. He called back to say that I could calm down, as they were there. The next day, I still couldn't get home, only on the third day; I got a lift part of the way, and I also walked a bit. When we could go out- because the curfew wasn't always on- we had to go into the ministry to work. Many times, I was picked up by a police car on the Kerepesi road, on the way to Matyasfold, and they took me home. It also happened that I was walking all the way from Matyasfold to work, and back home again. These were the hard times for me.

It was terrible- all those shootings. The first evening for example, we walked along Wesselenyi Street and there was a dead body lying on the corner. My sister's window opened onto Almassy Square, and the whole day, tanks and armed men were moving around. Once for example, we were at the ministry and we were walking, many of us; at the Klauzal Square market, near to Akacfa Street, a truck drove through the street with people shooting from the top of it, and we clung to each other, by the closed market gate.

I never wanted to leave the country. Judit and her husband thought about it. If she hadn't been pregnant at that time, they probably would have left. My sister Etel left on 5th January 1957, she escaped over the border with her daughter and her boyfriend. After the war, Etel worked as a stocking mender or did manicures, but later she just did office work. She worked in the builder's trade union, and in SZOT. When they left, she was a chief accountant in a branch of Patyolat.

From March 1957, we had a telephone. When the 1956 revolution was on, I told myself that come what may, I must have a telephone, because many times we were out of touch. On the day of the revolution, I took my last chartered accountant's exam. I couldn't go home that night, so we called a neighbor, to ask him to check whether the two boys, my sons-in-law were at home- because the students marched out of the university with the teachers- so I could relax. Judit was pregnant, and Marika was there with a small child, so I was worried. In order to receive a telephone, strings needed to be pulled. The ministry helped me. They stated that I was in a field of work in which I might need to be contacted in urgent cases; the minister and the party secretary certified this. I handed in my request in February 1957 and by March, the telephone was installed in the house already.

In the 1950s I hadn't been on officially organized holidays. After that I went many times, though. These were trade union workers' holidays. It wasn't free, but it was very cheap, even considering the wages back then. Everybody could apply for them, but usually there were more applicants than places. The trade union committee decided who could go. They considered work performance and social circumstances. But most people did get these holidays.

I've been to almost all of the most beautiful holiday camps in the country: Galyateto, Kekes, Matrafured, Matrahaza, Sopron, Koszeg. I never applied for summer holidays, because when I was already working at the ministry, I always said that since I had no school-age children who would need to have holidays in the summertime, autumn holidays would do for me. They were always easier to get. I went a great many times. At the beginning, I used to go for two weeks, but after a

while, two weeks were too much, and usually after ten days, I just got myself together and came home.
After the war, I used to go the theatre a lot, two or three times a month, because when I was working already, there was usually a cultural organizer. The children were already bigger, so I also took them with me sometimes. We had a season ticket for the opera too; I used to go to concerts a lot. I went to all of the school concerts which were in the mornings, at the music academy, and with all three of my grandchildren, it was I who took them to concerts. Later, Marika and I had a season ticket for the music academy.
I didn't encounter any Anti-Semitism during the revolution. In 1957, when it was already quite peaceful, I received a referral one of these holiday camps, at Karoly Castle in the summertime and there was a getting-to-know-you party. The Jews always find each other in places like that. I found myself in the same room with a Jewish woman, and I think she knew another Jewish man. There were comments, Jewish slurs, so I said that I'd go home, and then that Jewish man did too. So we came home together, well before the holiday was over. Things like that did happen. At my workplace, some knew it openly, others knew it in secret, where I had been during the war. We didn't really talk about things like that. Even with those who had been deported themselves, we didn't really discuss it. We didn't really know, who was Jewish. Nobody showed off about that, about being Jewish, or having been deported. We didn't even talk about it in the family, and now I regret that. We didn't talk about these things so much, not even about the deportation. I think we wanted to bury it, but unfortunately, you can't bury it, not completely anyway. My sister also really regretted that we didn't talk about it.
My daughter graduated from the University of Agriculture, and she had a Candidate of Sciences degree. It never would have occurred to her to attend that university, but one of her secondary school friends went to horticultural college, and somehow she liked it and she took the entrance exam for the agricultural university, and passed it. She attended the same year as her husband, Laszlo Sz... Laci, and they met there.
My daughter's husband's grandparents lived in Slovakia, my son-in-law was born in 1929 in Him, near Kosice and he went to school in Kosice. When the Hungarian resettlement was going on, his parents declared themselves Hungarian and came over to Hungary after the Second World War, and they got a house in Vertesacsa. When my daughter married him, his parents still lived in Vertesacsa. He still lived in a dormitory somewhere, because they were both students. They are not Jewish. Originally, I think they were peasants, but the father worked in the Hangya cooperative farm. The mother didn't work there, but they had a cow and they took butter to market in Kosice, that's what my son-in-law used to tell me. They did farm work here. I think it was some sort of farming cooperative.
They married in 1954, and later in Vertesacsa, where Laci's parent lived, they got married in a catholic church as well. I wasn't there; I don't even know why. Maybe they wanted to do it in secret. They went to Siofok for their honeymoon; my sister was at the builder's trade union, or already in SZOT, and I think she arranged this referral for a one week holiday for them. Later, my son-in-law moved to our place too. They graduated in 1955. They were agricultural engineers- that's what's written in their diplomas. Laci worked at the University of Economics- I don't know what position he had exactly- and in Keszthely, at some sort of Agricultural institution, and also as a professor of agriculture in Godollo.
When Marika graduated from University, she didn't work in her profession, because Marti was still a small child. Marti, my granddaughter, was born in 1955. At that time, maternity leave was very

short; then she started working and she worked in many different places: in the Central Statistics Office, and in some research institute in Godollo, and at the end, in the Agricultural Economics Research Institute. She even had a book published about the food industry.
Then a year later in 1955, Judit got married. Her husband was called Ferenc. He was born in 1931 in Tat. His mother was very well-known- they also had some land- but he was a mailman; he carried the mail for the whole of Tat. I didn't know his father; he died at an early age. He may have worked at a mine in Dorog. Ferenc graduated from a technical secondary school. You could attend university after that. Ferenc was accepted at the Technical University in Budapest.
Due to financial reasons, I never managed to become a doctor. I tried to plant this seed in Judit, to become one. After graduating from secondary school, she did take an entrance exam, but not for medical school, but for the technical university, which was absolutely not her thing. She didn't do very well there either. She met Ferenc there. They both dropped out of university. Ferenc took different sorts of jobs. I told Judit, when she dropped out, that she had to study; it just wouldn't do for her to have no profession at all. The Dental Technical Company used to belong to the ministry of health, which had many branches, both in Budapest and in the countryside, and lots of trainees. I was able to arrange for Judit to be accepted as a trainee dental technician. She was also very good at it. At the Dental Technical Company she did dental technician work. Much later, Ferenc received an engineering diploma at the Kando Technical College. In the end, he worked for BKV. He was a works manager, he was in charge of repair works.
At the beginning, Judit and her husband also lived in the house in Matyasfold; the two couples lived there for almost two years, the brothers-in-law used to quarrel a lot, because men always like vying for position, saying, ‘I do this, not you!' Then they were on good terms for years. At the beginning of 1957, Judit was pregnant. My husband's two sisters were both widows, and they lived in Baross Street, in a two room flat with modern conveniences and one of the rooms was rented out to a woman who left them, so they invited Judit and her husband over. Then they moved there. Their daughter, Katika [1957-], was born there already. They started building a house in Matyasfold. They began building it in 1964, when I went to Australia for the first time, and by the time I arrived back, they had divorced. They divorced in October, and in December they moved together again. Then they lived together, in a common-law-marriage for another 20 years. If I remember correctly, they married again in 1995. Ferenc became really sick, and I think that was the reason. He died in 1997, or in 1998 and Judit died in 2002.
Marika's family lived there the whole time; my son-in-law, Laci, still lives there. Once he was offered a job in Kaposvar, where he would have been provided with a flat for the whole family. Marika said that she wouldn't go without me, but I told them I wouldn't go to Kaposvar.
Their elder daughter, Marti [1955-], was born in 1955, Kriszti [1966-] in 1966. They didn't really care about this, but later they thought, it's either now or never- Marika was 34 at the time- otherwise there wouldn't be any more children. It worked and Kriszti was born after eleven years. I was working the whole time, but I spent a lot of time with the children. Marika and her husband took the children with them when they were smaller, and when they were bigger, they left them with me, and they could go on holidays, go out to the theatre, have evenings out, or celebrate New Year's Eve. I looked after my three grandchildren every New Year's Eve.
I very rarely got together with the relatives on my son-in-law's side. Only if they came. I didn't even have time, I had to study and work, I had to keep the household, and I was left here, with the house in Matyasfold, and there was a lot to do in the garden too. I only grew flowers, and there was a lawn, but when my son-in-law married my daughter, he made a little kitchen garden. He works in it

even now; he is already 74, but he still works in it. He produces vegetables: tomatoes, corn, sorrel- things like that. It's a small kitchen garden. In fact, that would be my home if my daughter were alive. I had been living there in that house, since 1929.
I retired in 1971, but I worked for another 20 years after retirement, there where I worked before, but only twice a week. When I had retired, I sewed a lot for the children. There were times when almost everything they wore was something I had made- for my daughters and my grandchildren too, and I also knitted a lot. And I worked in the garden.
When I was still working actively, I sometime invited a couple of colleagues to Matyasfold. I also visited one or two, but there were no close friendships. I have a friend with whom I keep in touch only by phone now. She used to be a colleague of mine; we worked in the same department in the ministry. She is also sick; she's 80 years old and I'm 91. And I have my friend Mari, who's just turned 60, but I met her when I was already retired. She's young, and visits me. Neither of them are Jewish. I had a friend from the Rokus hospital, who was 70 years old when she was hit by an army car. She was my Jewish friend. My other Jewish friend was the widow of my cousin, Andor Oblath. But she also died. Everybody has left me already.
My sister Etel left Hungary on 5th January 1957. She fled across the border with her daughter and her boyfriend. My sister's boyfriend was married. Then he completely disappeared in Australia. Supposedly, he came back to Hungary. Originally, they wanted to go to America. They were in a refugee camp in Vienna. They had a letter of invitation to America already. Aunty Netka's elder daughter already lived there. The official invitation was from them, saying they would receive them. America closed the quota though, so they couldn't go. Then somebody in the camp drew their attention to the fact that a boat was preparing to leave for Australia, and they applied for it. Somebody was waiting for them in Australia. A worker picked them up, who was already living there. I don't know when he went there – I didn't even know these people. They received them. I think Etel received some aid and she was able to buy a flat in Sydney with it. She never worked in Sydney. Occasionally she sewed, but later she just managed the household. She always used to say that she loved Australia, because she never paid a penny in taxes, but she receives retirement anyway. She learnt English; they needed to speak English in order to obtain citizenship. She did speak English, but not very well. She had many English-speaking acquaintances and card-partners and she could arrange anything she had to in English. She had been reading English-language books for many years. I sent her Nok Lapja, and Fules, because she really liked to solve the crosswords, and I also sent books. Every year, I sent her at least two packages of books. I always wrote to her. Less frequently first of all, but from the 1960's, regularly. A letter would come from there and I 'd answer straight away.
In 1958, Etel's daughter, Agi, got married to Laci, who is 14 years older then her- he is 80 years old now. Laci left Hungary in 1947 or 1949. Agi didn't work when they arrived in Australia. She sewed enough to cover my travel costs. She worked in order to get me over there. This was in 1964. The next time I was out there, around 1970, she was already working for a large company, and she stayed there until her retirement. She worked in an office. She was the manager of the children's clothing section. She kept stock and she ordered whatever was needed.
I've been to Australia six times. The first time, I went with a ship, and I flew there five times. I think, three or four times, I was there for six months, and twice for two or three months. The last time I was there, was in 1997. Once my children paid for the trip and once or twice, I saved up myself. I received compensation, and it was out of that money. Agi and Etel came home for the first time in 1971. They came many times since then. Etel always stayed, sometimes even as long as three

months. She lived there with me in Matyasfold.
She has just died. In October 2003, she would have turned 90. She was buried in a Jewish ceremony in Sydney. In December 2002, it was three years since my daughter Marika died. My daughter Judit died in July 2002.
The foundation of the state of Israel didn't mean anything to me at all. I know nothing about the Anti-Zionist court cases. I didn't know that it happened. I know what is happening in Israel, though. We have many relatives out there, with whom it was mainly Etel who corresponded- it was Etel who did the long-distance correspondence- and there were visitors from Israel too. I've never been there. My daughter Judit went to Israel with her husband, who wasn't a Jew. He was game for anything like that, for example he went to the seder with Judit, which was organized by the Jewish community in the eighth district.
It really upsets me if I hear unfair things about Israel here at home. And it's not just about Israel, but if I hear the word ‘Jew' with a sharp intonation, I could go up the wall; it annoys me a lot. Although I'm not religious, I only trust in god.
Concerning where I belong, I still feel Jewish. Not in terms of religion; everybody I love is Jewish. Unfortunately, I must say that to be Christian for a Jewish woman, is somehow not good. My daughters weren't Jewish, but emotionally, they were Jewish, as I am.

## Glossary

**1 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)**
Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon peace treaty - on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI – which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy. When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944, Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

**2 Hungarian Soviet Republic**
The first, short-lived, proletarian dictatorship in Hungary. On 21st March 1919 the Workers' Council of Budapest took over power from the bourgeois democratic government and declared the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The temporary constitution declared that the Republic was the state of the workers and peasants and it aimed at putting an end to their exploitation and establishing a socialist economic and social system. The communist government nationalized industrial and commercial enterprises, and socialized housing, transport, banking, medicine, cultural institutions, and large landholdings. In an effort to secure its rule the government used arbitrary violence. Almost 600 executions were ordered by revolutionary tribunals and the government also resorted to violence to expropriate grain from peasants. This violence and the regime's moves against the clergy also shocked many Hungarians. The Republic was defeated by the entry of Romanian troops,

who broke through Hungarian lines on July 30, occupied and looted Budapest, and ousted Kun's Soviet Republic on August 1, 1919

### 3 Middle school

This type of school was created in 1868. Originally it was intended to be a secondary school but as it was finally established, it did not give a secondary level education (graduation). Pupils attended it for four years after finishing elementary school. As opposed to classical secondary school, the emphasis in the middle school was on modern and practical subjects (e.g. modern living languages, accounting, economics). While the secondary school prepared children to enter the university, the middle 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.

### 4 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.

### 5 Yellow star houses

The system of exclusively Jewish houses which acted as a form of hostage taking was introduced by the Hungarian authorities in June 1944 in Budapest. The authorities believed that if they concentrated all the Jews of Budapest in the ghetto, the Allies would not attack it, but if they placed such houses all over Budapest, especially near important public buildings it was a kind of guarantee. Jews were only allowed to leave such houses for two hours a day to buy supplies and such.

### 6 Arrow Cross Party

The most extreme of the Hungarian fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The party consisted of several groups, though the name is now commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc Szalasi and Kalman Hubay in 1938. Following the Nazi pattern, the party promised not only the establishment of a fascist-type system including social reforms, but also the ‘solution of the Jewish question'. The party's uniform was consisted of a green shirt and a badge with a set of crossed arrows, a Hungarian version of the swastika, on it. On 15th October 1944, when Governor Horthy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the war, the Arrow Cross seized power with military help

from the Germans. The Arrow Cross government ordered general mobilization and enforced a regime of terror which, though directed chiefly against the Jews, also inflicted heavy suffering upon the Hungarians. It was responsible for the deportation and death of tens of thousands of Jews. After the Soviet army liberated the whole of Hungary by early April 1945, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross ministers were brought to trial and executed.

**7 19th March 1944**

Hungary was occupied by the German forces on this day. Nazi Germany decided to take this step because it considered the reluctance of the Hungarian government to carry out the ‘final solution of the Jewish question' and deport the Jewish population of Hungary to concentration camps as evidence of Hungary's determination to join forces with the Western Allies. By the time of the German occupation, close to 63,000 Jews (8% of the Jewish population) had already fallen victim to the persecution. On the German side special responsibility for Jewish affairs was assigned to Edmund Veesenmayer, the newly appointed minister and Reich plenipotentiary, and to Otto Winkelmann, higher S.S. and police leader and Himmler's representative in Hungary.

**8 23rd October 1956**

Starting day of the Revolution of 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. The Revolution was started by the university students and the factory workers and then spread to all sectors of society. 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 stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

**9 Gero, Erno (1898-1980)**

Politician and economist. After the fall of the Hungarian soviet republic in 1919 he emigrated until 1944. He took part in establishing the communist regime in Hungary and was head of various ministries. He was responsible, among other people, for the hardening of dictatorship after 1949. After the Revolution of 1956 in Hungary he went to the Soviet Union for several years.