Laszlo Spiegler

Laszlo Spiegler
Budapest
Hungary
Interviewer: Dora Sardi and Eszter Andor
Date of interview: May 2002

I don't know the maiden name of my grandmother on my mother's side, only that she was Mrs. Markus. She died long before the war. I remember when I was a child, she was ill all the time. She was always in bed. My mother had ten brothers and sisters; my mother is the eleventh child. They weren't born here in Ujpest but somewhere in the provinces, but they came to Budapest. It was a Neolog 1 family, but quite religious. I had an aunt, the wife of Uncle Herman, my mother's brother, who had been Christian; she converted to Judaism and she knew how to pray in Hebrew better than any Jew. She lived with my grandma. Uncle Herman never came back [from the war] and I don't know what happened to him. Miska Markus, another of my mother's brothers, was a victim of World War I; he got a disease, something to do with the brain, because a bomb had exploded near him and the pressure wave did him great harm; he later died - around the end of the 1920s. He was a merchant. Not in Ujpest, they lived somewhere in the Castle District [in Budapest]. His wife was Auntie Vilma.

My grandparents on my father's side came from Vagujhely, Trencsen county. My uncle lived in Puho. I must have been three or four years old when we were there. I remember Puho. My uncle, my father's brother, had a pub. No one was left. I don't know what my grandpa on my father's side did for a living because the poor soul died. I didn't know either of my grandfathers. My grandmother, my father's mother, could only speak Yiddish, because she was from the Felvidek 1. I couldn't tell you her name, I don't remember that, but I loved my grandma and she loved me. She was very religious, very kosher. She didn't have a wig, but her head was covered with a shawl. I was the only Spiegler boy and she had six granddaughters. I had three sisters, and my uncle had three daughters as well. I was the only one whom, when it was my birthday or Christmas, she took everywhere to buy candies I loved. This was your due for being a boy!

My father is Gyula Jakab Spiegler. His Jewish name was Itzchok. My mother was called Lenke Markus. Her Jewish name was Leye. My father barely spoke Hungarian. At the engagement he kissed my mother, who smacked his face. He said - because he couldn't speak Hungarian properly - 'I wish I had never got this smackering'. My parents spoke Hungarian with us, children, but they spoke Yiddish to one another, moreover, they corresponded in it as well. My mum's mother tongue was Hungarian, but she spoke Yiddish. In those days Jews used to speak mostly Yiddish. So they spoke this distortion of German, [that is Yiddish] moreover, they corresponded in it, too.

My father was an ironmonger, but he was also a wood- and coal dealer; I know that because it was written in my birth certificate. And when my father was taken to World War I, we already had a crockery shop. My mother ran it well during the war, while my father was on the battlefield. She bought a load of vessels and she only had to pay the advance, she even paid the tip because one couldn't find merchandise at that time. And then we said that I would take care of it - I was a little

child, about four years old. My father was on the battlefield for four years, in World War I, he was on the Russian battlefield in Siberia. He deserted from there and suddenly he was at home. We lived in the same house, but in a bigger apartment because we had grown up. I was happy, as my father took me here and there, to markets and all. My father looked after the shop when he came home, and then the family grew financially, and we became quite well off, too. My parents were tired people because they ran a shop; they went to work at 7am and worked until the evening, 6pm. Later, in 1927-28, my father opened an enameling factory in order that his daughters should have dowries. At that time there was deflation as well, the crisis of overproduction, and my father wasn't a cartel member. And then the enameling factory ruined my father because the cartel ruined him. They had a contract with a big company; it was called Hutter and Stran, where they made the enamel in stoves. And they cancelled the order and there was no work, but the day and night workers had to be paid regardless. At that time the factory had been running for about six years, but it went broke. It cost us the crockery shop. It cost us our house. They auctioned off everything we had.

I was born in 1910. My Jewish name is Leben. And I know my wife's Jewish name as well; she was called Pesl. My elder sister was born in 1908. She was called Anna. Her Jewish name was Miriam. She died in 1939. Her heart took her from us. My other sister, Marta, was born in 1909, but I don't know her Jewish name. My sister Tace was the youngest; she was born in 1912. Manci was her Hungarian name, and Tace was her Jewish name. After Anna's death three of us were left. I inherited something from my mother as well as my sister. My mother was very ill, with heart problems.

There was no Jewish elementary school in Ujpest at that time. My wife attended the Jewish school already; her father was a teacher there. I finished four years of middle school, then I went to commercial school. I finished three years, but didn't want to work in a bank. Then I went to help my father anyway, and I became an ironmonger. Well, I was a boy and wanted to do what my father did. I became an apprentice ironmonger, and I had to carry 100-kilo bundles. I could carry them, but I told myself I wouldn't do it. Then I just simply didn't go to work any more. They said that I had to learn something, 'Don't be a merchant, please, learn some sort of technical trade'. And then it was announced here in Ujpest at the Nasszer brothers, that they wanted apprentices. They had a watchmaker's shop, a house of their own. I learned the watch-making trade there. I spent five years there. Sometimes they gave me jobs like taking out jewels, and once I took out to consignment a pearl necklace such that one could have bought a house with it. They trusted me!

I have worked since I was ten years old. I had no time to go and play on the plot. I came home from school, studied for a while, and then if I had any free time, I went to the shop. There were the three girls; they went to the swimming pool, while I was in the shop. I had to keep things in order. I bought dishes by the thousands, and sold things in the shop. When I was ten years old I was already selling jars. The cucumber and paprika wasn't pickled as it is nowadays, but they bought the jar and pickled them themselves. We sold them [the jars]. They weren't brought into the shop because there were too many, and I slept outside in a lean-to with my sister. When I was already fourteen years old we had been buying dishes by the thousands. I used to go shopping by myself. They put me into the shop as soon as they could because my mother was sickly, and when she was ill I had to stand in for her. My sisters had their circle of friends, and I didn't really like to bother with girls, I would rather work; I got so used to work. I loved working so much.

I never went anywhere for the summer holidays as a child. I was 18 years old when I saw Lake Balaton for the first time. There were cheap trains to Siofok; that was when I first saw Balaton. My sisters used to go to Puho; they spent their summer holidays at relatives.

My father always said that when he was young they worked very hard and had fun for a few coins. We had fun, too. Later, when we didn't have the shop anymore, we went to have a good time on the banks of the Danube, I would drink a glass of beer and dance. We went to Margaret Island, and danced there as well.

Before the war there was cultural life for the youth in Ujpest, they gathered every Tuesday. There was a cultural center that was full every Tuesday. The oldest of us must have been about 25. There were only young people. There was culture there, Hungarian, Hebrew... They sang and recited poetry. There was no food. It happened, back when the Jewish school still existed, that we popped in there to get a slice of bread and butter. This was before the war in 1936, 1937, and 1938. There was always good company. They went in for sports there. In the old times [before WWII], for example, the cultural center used to have a choral union, a Jewish choral union. They won prizes too. They used to sing Hungarian songs as well.

We observed every Jewish holiday very strictly, the fasting, too. My father went to the synagogue in the morning and didn't come out until the evening. There used to be a synagogue in Bocskai Street - it was ruined during the war - and we used to go and pray there. And I also went to the Orthodox synagogue. I don't know how to pray very well, but my friends, the Lichtensteins, were Orthodox too, they lived here in the neighboring house. I was always ahead with the prayers; I can still follow the cantor.

My father prayed wonderfully, I wish I knew a tenth of it. We had such a seder that it's hard to describe. My father lit the chanukkiyah. We had a huge one, which we put in the window. At that time we used to live a proper Jewish life. I used to light it for a while as well, but now I don't do so anymore. We celebrated Purim as well. As for the sukkah, we didn't have one; the Neologs usually didn't observe Sukkot. There was an Orthodox Jew in our house, he had a sukkah, but he never invited us. Still the Orthodox kept their distance. They went to the synagogue in Virag Street, which had a mikvah as well; and there was an Orthodox house in Virag Street just for them. They had payes.

Every Friday evening at home we lit the the candle very rigorously. We used to go to synagogue every Sabbath. It was obligatory at school. My parents' shop was open until 7pm on Saturdays. And they had to stay open all the time everywhere. But if there was a holiday and a Jew didn't close he was denigrated. Shops were scarcely open on Jewish holidays. Moreover, 75% of the shops were closed in Ujpest; there were so many Jewish shops. They did everything properly for the holidays; my father said a blessing over each child on Yom Kippur. We took the rules very seriously at that time. Once we went to a football match during Pesach. And I was thirsty and drank a glass of water. I felt such remorse after that because on Pesach you can't just drink something somewhere, everything has its rules.

One couldn't sit down in the synagogue on Friday evening; it was full. During holidays they rented shops in order to pray there. They got a Torah. The grocers had a house, and they prayed there as well. In Klauzal Street, where there's a grocery now, we used to pray there in the shop, too, because there was room there. We couldn't get into the big synagogues. This was before the war.

My father used to go to Bocskai Street. That synagogue was old. It had a balcony, and there were tiny windows so one couldn't see the women from below. Men and women weren't together. Everyone from my family went to the synagogue.

The wealthy Jews used to go to the big synagogue; we were the middle-class. Many Jewish tycoons got into the big synagogue. But later my father got in there too. My uncle made seats for the synagogue and got a seat un return on the side, near the Torah; that's where he used to sit, and the seat is still there today.

As a child my head was always covered, I wore a cap all the time. We wore the cap at home, but later in school we didn't any more. My father for example, wouldn't eat without a cap. It happened that they went to one of his brother's and they offered him meat fried in breadcrumbs, but he didn't know it was rabbit, which isn't kosher. He put on his cap and we all ate wearing our caps. We prayed before and after eating and then it turned out that what we had eaten wasn't kosher.

When I had my bar mitzvah, a tight family circle of 75 people gathered. It was a dinner of fish dishes; the business went so well that my parents couldn't get away from the shop. It was at the house of my auntie, my mother's elder sister, because she had a big room, they were furniture-dealers, and there were tables in a circle and they sat around them. And there was singing, the 'Szol a kakas mar', the cantor couldn't leave that one out. [Szol a kakas mar is a Hungarian folk song, which was adopted by the Hasidic rebbe of Nagykallo, Hungary.] They shnorred money [collected donations] for various people. I got lots of presents. Books, jewelry, rings and watches. A wristwatch was quite a thing at that time. And then I got a lot of rings, none of which I wore, but the girls did. The whole community was there: the shochet, the cantor, his assistant, the main cantor and the rabbi. This was in 1923.

We ran a kosher household. We used to have a servant. The kashrut was something she was charged with very seriously. There was a sink for utensils used for milk products and a separate one for utensils used for meat. She couldn't ever get them mixed up. And there was also a separate cupboard for utensils for milk products and for meat. It would never occur to us to mix the milk products and meat. We kept the Pesach utensils separately, and every year they were made kosher and after that we couldn't eat bread in the house any more. They took the utensils out and put them away. I even remember that at the first dinner after Pesach there was bread with Liptauer [spiced ewe cheese mixed with butter]. There used to be a kosher slaughterhouse, there was 'Orthodox kosher', 'Neolog kosher', and there was a shochet. We went to the Neolog one because we were Neolog. Keeping the kashrut lasted until I stepped out into life.

Before the war I worked at Egyesult Izzo and then I was drafted into the army. [Egyesult Izzo was a world-famous Hungarian light bulbs factory.] I was in the army in 1936, 1938, 1939, in 1940 I was in forced labor service, in 1941 I was at home, and in 1942 I was in, the whole year.

When I was demobilized - after the end of the usual service, they held me back. They wanted to promote me but I wouldn't accept it, I wanted to come home. I became unemployed. I had a very good friend, whose uncle was the manager of the dispatch department at the Egyesult Izzo, he was also Jewish. He took me into Egyesult Izzo, and I was there until the end. I had a very good salary. I did everything, from 7am until 10pm. Manual work, administration in the evening, I did everything. I lived at my parents' house. At that time they yielded from their severity. We didn't eat pork, we didn't mix milk products with meat, but it was no longer as it had been in my childhood; for

example it was no problem if I didn't go to the synagogue on Friday evening. Despite this, I rarely missed it.

I went to Egyesult Izzo and took home a heap of watches to repair. And that was my pocket money. I gave my salary to my parents because they needed it. And when I went out with my wife she didn't let me pay for her. Then we got engaged, and from that time on I paid for everything for her, from my evening watch repairing.

Then I had to join the army in 1932-33. We went to Balassagyarmat for training. From there we went to Oroszi. And when the holidays came, we were in Balassagyarmat, and then the Jews of Balassagyarmat sent us lots of food: meat, milk loaf, and challah. Moreover, it was just then that we got off duty.. At that time there was no Jewish platoon. When we joined up it was a very kind company, including both the company commander and the training officer. The training officer called out the Jews, 'Look, boys, I called you because if you do this much it will mean that much, so keep that in mind.' We could understand that. It meant that if we made any little mistakes he would make big trouble for them, so we had to keep it in mind. Later they posted me away. I went to the Castle District. The fall holidays found me there, and going off duty, we went to the synagogue; as we came down from the Castle - I had never worn foot-cloth on my feet before - and so my feet swelled up because of it. I became lame, and then I ended up at the battalion command. I had a good life there. I was a switchboard operator and courier. I went to the governorship. I had one case; they called me saying that the Ministry of Defense was looking for me. God almighty, they're looking for Laszlo Spiegler. I could tap every phone call. It turned out that I had to go somewhere in Zuglo to repair watches. The ADC ensign, the Battalion's second-in-command, told me, 'Listen, be very careful because this watch is the promotion officer's, so do a good job!' I did a good job and they were very satisfied with me. I worked and repaired watches as well. And I helped at the office, too, I went to the governorship if I had to, and to the Ministry of Defense, moreover I was on sentry duty. They liked me very much at the battalion as well. And I got good food there, though it wasn't kosher.

In 1936 I was at a large army exercise. Then I got a boot that was patched from the inside, and the foot-cloth blistered my feet in such a way that the flesh was exposed. I couldn't walk, so I presented myself to the chief medical officer, 'I respectfully report that I can't walk, my leg aches.' He examined it. 'What's your name?' he asked, and I told him. 'You are a Jew.' 'Yes, sir,' I replied. 'Then you can bear that,' he said. I didn't deny it, even in that situation. I still don't remember how my leg got better.

Then I had hardly gotten home in 1938, when they called me back to the Felvidek. There I was part of the first Jewish platoon in the country. Neither the rank nor anything mattered, only that we were Jews. At that time there used to be uniforms, and there were dumdum bullets as well because we had to guard the wagons. We were in the first line. This means that their own people were in the rear and the Czechs were in the front. And they said, 'Well, we are going to send somebody for reconnaissance from the Jewish company; who wants to go?' We went. And we did a good job. Then there was another event. The Jewish platoon was already in existence, and there were bunkers between the Czech and the Hungarian border. They were underground bunkers, impossible to blow up. And we had to attack them, 'Who volunteers to do it?' The whole platoon stepped forward. But there were also Jews who were bad. They sent one to arrange accommodation, and he went to buy leather instead. He was bound hand and foot. Another one was punished because when he was on

sentry duty and wasn't relieved, he fired into the air. We had a sadistic battalion commander, it was terrible. We, Jews, couldn't get parcels, couldn't go on furlough.

Then I came home again for a short time, until I was called in again. I joined up in Szentendre; from there we went to a camp at Esztergom, we constructed a shooting-range for tanks. Then they brought us to the Ministry of Defense in Budapest, and we did unskilled work at a construction site. I did everything, but I didn't know how to put up a wall. We didn't have a bad time of it, especially me, because I worked hard.

When I was demobilized in 1938, I learned to dance and we used to go dancing. At that time there was a café right here at the corner, it was called Pannonia café, and there I met my wife. She was called Erzsebet Reich. She had three siblings. This house where I live at the moment belonged to my wife's family; her grandmother lived here. She was born in this room - there were no maternity houses in those times. Her aunt lived downstairs, and there were two tenants and a caretaker. And her grandmother had a glass and porcelain wholesale store as well. She sold it off, and my mother bought it. But at that time they didn't know we would be relatives. They were very religious; they observed everything.

Then I started to go dancing with her, and after a while I told her that I was going to betroth her as my fiancé. I pulled the ring off my finger and put it on hers. This was in 1939. After that we went out for five years, when finally my wife said, 'Well, we've been going out for five years, so I want to marry you properly.' My poor father-in-law was sitting out here, there was a big vestibule, and a worktable. He sat there, and I asked for his daughter's hand in marriage. Thereupon they went to my parents and asked them for my hand. This was in 1942. And immediately after our engagement they called me up again. It was only for two months. Then they demobilized me, and then called me up again. I was released from service again, and then they called me up in July 1942, and I was there until the end of the war. The wedding was held because they said in March 1944 that they would take away the girls but not the women. Then I came home - I was in forced labor service at Kassa - and we got married. It was a civil marriage. And when we came home we had our religious marriage in the synagogue of Ujpest. I had lived in Istvan Square before the war - I joined up from there -with my wife. But she was deported in May. Her brother was deported, too.

When we were in forced labor service we were in Keleti Karoly Street [in Budapest] and everybody was buzzing that they would convert to Catholicism because then they wouldn't be deported. It never occurred to me. It was then that they started to learn Catholic religion and cross themselves. It made me feel sick. 196 people out of 200 presented themselves, and all of them died. What I got was that I survived, and my wife, too, but my family was taken away. No one was left, they killed everybody.

I don't even remember when the Germans came in. I was in Buda, and the lorries were going up [to the Castle District], full of German soldiers. And then the sirens started to howl. The Germans were bombing. I didn't have anywhere to go. And this is when the deportations started. [Editor's note: Laszlo means the entry of the Germany army to Hungary in March 1944 after which the ghettoization and deportation of Hungarian Jews was launched.] They deported me to Mauthausen; I found out there what Auschwitz was, from the people who came from Auschwitz, because we were gathered in Mauthausen, and they sent us to Gunskirchen from there. I was liberated in Gunskirchen.

In Gunskirchen there was no drinking water, there was no water for washing, and we were sentenced to death. Peopled starved to death there. There was no crematory. There was nothing else but wood. Our guards were very evil. What the SS soldiers did with children was that they threw the bread down, sat in a circle, and the children snatched it from the ground. That place was for gathering us in order to be executed. We were to starve to death, and those who didn't would be burnt along with the entire forest. It was a Friday when we were liberated. Friday evening I didn't go anywhere, but on Saturday I started off towards Wels. An American woman came; she had been imprisoned as well, and she took us in to some house. My first wish was for paprika potatoes. A Black American man gave me a parcel. He said they were in the same situation as us [that is, the black people in America]. He said they weren't allowed to walk on the sidewalks either.

So then they gathered the Jews, because we were full of lice. I didn't have the strength to get in the car, we were so weak. Nothing but skin and bone, we had neither butts nor thighs. And they took us to Horsching; it was an airport. I got typhoid fever. I was in hospital because of that, for a month. I saw how they carried away the dead; they had a wooden ticket on their big toe, and there was wrapping paper around their body. They just took them away in lorries, all piled up topsy-turvy. The food was very poor. While in hospital, I ran away and begged for food. I didn't accept money. After the typhoid fever I ate 10-12 lunches. When I got out of hospital I thought, 'Well, now I should get home somehow.'

My friend had a bottle of oil, with which we would cook if we found something on our way. We left and the Americans took us as far as Wiener Neustadt, where they passed us to the Russians. We had cigarettes and they told us that a train was leaving at midnight for Hungary, for Sopron. And on the way we always had to give something to the Russians in order to drive the train further. We arrived in Sopron. I went to the Red Cross and they gave me some financial support. I went to the town hall; they gave me some financial support, too. In Sopron the train became full in a flash. How could I get to Budapest? On the top of the train; that's how I came home in 1945. We arrived at Kelenfold. I didn't have the patience to wait at Kelenfold, I walked across the Manci Bridge - this was its name, it was a pontoon bridge - I entered Nyugati station and slept there until morning. In the morning three women came. One told me, 'Your wife is at home.' I found out then. She had come home a month earlier. It was absolute bliss for me. But we had suffered very much. We didn't have children because we didn't want to. My wife said, 'Daddy, haven't we suffered enough? Should our child suffer as well?' She was in Worlitz. She got there from Auschwitz; she got into the workers group and escaped the gas chambers. The poor soul had been beaten so many times, she couldn't stand the factory, and they made her work at night; they made shell cases, and she fell asleep and they struck her down.

My elder cousin was a doctor and left for America in 1939. He survived. And he didn't want to let anybody know he was Jewish. He had a daughter and a son. His son started putting Jews down at university. Thereupon a boy who knew him said, 'But you are a Jew, too!' Thereupon he went home to his father, asking, 'Is this true, dad?' The answer was, 'It is, son." And then he told him what had happened to his parents. My cousin's last wish was to be buried in Jerusalem. And he is buried there. He turned back to Jewishness in his death, one cannot deny being Jewish.

They deported my parents, my family, to Auschwitz and killed them there. They killed one of my sisters, Marta, together with her two children; she had a twelve-year old son and a one-year old daughter. Once the Arrow Cross 3 men caught her and she begged them to let her off, because she

had two children. They let her off. They let her go home, then they took away all of them from there. Her husband was called Ede Viskovicz. He was a merchant.

When we arrived back home, we saw that we'd been looted, the house didn't have anything, not even a glass. Only the walls remained of the house where my wife had lived with her parents before the terror. When she came back, she couldn't enter her own house. She had to lodge an appeal against it, and then she got back one room. Those who lived upstairs were Arrow Cross people, and they moved downstairs. As soon as they moved downstairs the owner of the neighboring house claimed that it was his furniture. And so we got this apartment completely empty. We had no furniture at all, not a single chair or couch. We didn't have kitchen furniture or anything. Only one trashy ice-box. We found the pictures in the cellar. My wife was lying ill with a fever of 41 degrees [106 degrees Fahrenheit], and we had only one bed and a pillow. She had vitamin deficiency, was full of abscesses and they mistreated her. I put a cold compress on her night and day. I managed to save her. We didn't eat meat when we came back, only around September; her sister brought us chicken. Until then we just ate split peas and paprika potatoes. Then, when I could buy them, I bought a goose and cheap goose-fat. I also bought a sack of flour.

When I came home my wife wore gym shoes and checked clothes from the Lager [concentration camp], and she used them at home. She didn't have anything, not underwear, nothing. Then I started to work. This was quite an episode of my life too, that I came home one day and the next day I went to Egyesult Izzo because I used to work there and they reported my departure when they deported the Jews from Ujpest. When I came back I applied for work. They said they couldn't re-engage me; the factory was closed. They gave me financial aid, but that was it.

My younger sister was the only one in the family who survived except me. She got married after the war; she had a son, Pista. My poor sister was ill. She died about six years ago. Pista got married to a gentile, and he didn't have the brit because my sister was worried about him. My sister was in Auschwitz as well, and in Ravensbruck, and I don't know where else, and she was liberated weighing just 25 kilos. And she gave birth to her child, and it's been a delightful experience since he came to this world. I always loved him very much, I still do; I gave him everything. He has two daughters but they wear the Star of David. The elder converted to Judaism in the meantime, she was in Israel as well. The younger, Eszter, also considers herself a Jew. She attends university in Italy. Pista also has the heart of a Jew. When they built an organ in the synagogue here many years ago, he donated 200,000 forints.

When I came back, at first one could only buy things and peddle them. Well, I did everything to get ourselves together. I was a very busy man, because a watchmaker was always needed. I had a shop of my own here in Kemeny Street for four and a half years. Then they [the authorities] started to pick at me in 1952. If somebody entered the shop, they asked me what they sold, what they bought. There was a revenue officer and I asked him what it was all for. He said I had to join the co-operative; they hassled me about it. Then I joined the co-operative in July 1952. I left the shop. I had bought it for 300 grams of gold and I had to leave it. There was no one to buy it. And then I worked in the co-operative. My wife learned to be a typist and shorthand secretary. She worked at a company. But I told her, 'Mum, don't go to work, I earn our living, and you don't have to.' But she wanted to go anyway. I retired in 1971. Since then I help with the correspondence and everything at my old workplace.

When I worked at the co-operative I went to the synagogue during holidays. The personnel director and the party secretary came because of a worker. I came out of the synagogue and asked, 'Are you looking for me?' 'No', they said, 'but we were.' They asked me where I had been. 'In the synagogue,' I replied. This was around 1953. I didn't deny it. And I wasn't a party member either. I hated the whole thing.

I starved a lot, and I said then that I wouldn't starve anymore; I would eat what I could. My kosher regime was interrupted before I was deported, as I said, I was a soldier then; they took me to the camp, and of course they didn't give me kosher food there. And there was no question of eating with a cap on my head. I almost went crazy when I was told to parade in front of the cross. I never liked that. I never denied my religion.

Before the war I didn't have a single Christian friend. That's just the way I wanted it. I had a Christian friend who had a Jewish wife, but this was after the war.

Both my wife and I paid taxes to the Jewish community. I go to the synagogue every week, I only miss it when I'm sick. I feel very much Jewish. If I could pray according to my feelings it would be nice. I like Jewish holidays. I like going to the synagogue; I'm always there. And I like our rabbi, too. I go to Obuda, to the Jewish cemetery, to visit my wife every week.

My wife was excellent at making Jewish dishes. She cooked very well; I had such a good wife! She was clean and thorough. I have been going to the Jewish old age home since my wife died. Before that, for three months, I used to eat at my cousin's house and at my sister's for one month. But she couldn't cook for me that way, and I only eat Jewish food. I still don't eat pork, though I'm not so kosher anymore. If I go to a restaurant, I eat turkey, which isn't kosher, but I still don't eat pork.

We've never been abroad because we didn't know any languages. And my wife was scared of traveling; after all she went through, it doesn't surprise me. We never went to Germany either. She was scared. Very scared indeed. I was in Israel on a package tour in 1988. Not with Jews, but they loved me. They knew I was a Jew. I went there because I'm a Jew. I wanted to see everything. I didn't want to see the birth of Jesus but what a Jew is like there. I was very, very happy to be there. I felt that it was my home. I felt very good in Jerusalem. I didn't go to the wall because I would have had to walk for three hours, and I'm a cardiac patient. It hurts that I couldn't go there. During the wars in Israel [the Six-Day-War 4 and the Yom Kippur War 5] we followed the news and were very proud of the Jews, and that we are Jews. And I'm still very proud.

Glossary

1 Neolog Jewry
Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities. They all created their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

2 Felvidek

the territory of present-day Slovakia which was part of Hungary before WWI.

3 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.

4 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

5 Yom Kippur War

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.