

With My Parents At A Swimming Pool



This photograph was taken in 1939, when we were with our parents at a swimming pool in Zilina. At that time we were still named Herz. We changed our surname after the war, in 1945. From left to right: I, Jan Herz, my mother Edita Herz, my father Armin Herz and my brother Milan Herz.

My father was born in Horna Marikova as Armin Herz in 1900. My mother was born as Edita Lanyi. She graduated from academic high school in Kosice. She and my father were married on 5 September 1932 in Kosice. After the wedding she took my father's surname and was named Herz. After the war they changed their surname to Hanak, and so my mother's name was Edita Hanakova. My father attended business academy. After graduation he started working for a power plant in Zilina. Right at that time, a branch of the power plant was being built in Zilina. Back then electricity wasn't such a matter of course as it is today. There were only two hydro stations. One was in Bratislava and the other was in Zilina. Another one was being built in Kosice. Back then, my father was given the task of, among other things, setting up the Kosice power plant. He was renting a room from his future wife's mother. That's how they met. After his job there ended in 1933, my parents moved to Zilina. My father worked at the power plant as a manager. Back then only large cities had electricity, and it was gradually being introduced into the countryside. It was also necessary to deliver materials like power poles, wire, insulators, transformers, basically everything. My father was in charge of the supply department. Later they relocated him from Zilina to Bratislava. He used to work weeks there, meaning that during the work week he was in Bratislava, and for the weekend he'd return home.

In 1934, my older brother Milan Herz, later Hanak, was born in Zilina. A year later [1935] I was born [Jan Hanak, born Herz]. Our address was Moyzesova Street, Zilina. I can't talk about the mischief that we used to get into as children; if I did we'd be here for a week.

I'd just like to say that my father was a very wise man. When the visible persecution of Jews began in the world, in 1938, he had our entire family christened. I was only three at the time. They converted us to Roman Catholicism. My father had never studied any religion, and didn't devote himself to philosophy either. He didn't care if it was Judaism or the Roman Catholic religion. The main thing was how to protect us from danger. All he devoted himself to was his work at the hydro station, sports, wrestling, and he was also a sports official. Naively, he thought that conversion would make "a black man white". The evolution of the political situation back then was the only reason for the conversion.