Ferenc Pap

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The family of my great-grandfather on my father's side came from Germany; they must have been very young when they moved to what was at that time, Hungary. Eliezer Kohn, my great-grandfather, was born in Dunafoldvar in 1837. He became a Chief Rabbi there. In 1875, when my grandfather was born – he was the youngest child – the family was still living in Dunafoldvar. My great-grandfather was appointed in Bekescsaba after that, where he soon became a Chief Rabbi again. [This happened] at the time of the so-called Congress, when the denominations came into being: orthodox, neolog and statusquo [conservative]. My great-grandfather became a neolog; he was probably more liberal. He also wrote sermons. I still have one of his sermons, printed in 1881. I think that he wrote out his sermon himself in Hungarian and printed it, probably in Bekescsaba. It is not very long; I only remember that he strongly praises Francis Joseph. Great-grandfather died in 1907. I have no idea about his wife, but she was Jewish, that's for sure.

My great-grandfather had eleven children; my grandfather was the youngest of all. One of his brothers was called Artur; he was a doctor somewhere in Transdanubia. And I think that he had another brother, called Guido, who was also a doctor. Unfortunately I know very little about his brothers and sisters.
My grandfather on my father's side, Illes Pap, wasn't religious at all. He needed no father, no religion, nothing. As a teenager he was sick and tired of the environment at home and he went to Budapest, and from that time on he was completely non-religious. He graduated from high school there, and then he also finished university in Budapest. He majored in languages: Hungarian and German, but he studied something at the Faculty of Philosophy too. The family believes that he gained two doctorates: one in linguistics and one in philosophy. Later he was a teacher of linguistics and literature, until the end. As a student in Budapest, he became a member of a literary group called the Kisfaludy Compan. He dealt with the works of Arany Janos [one of the most famous romantic poets in Hungarian literature], and with Lessing from German literature. He wrote a book on this. Besides this there was an old series, sort of like "Everyman's Library", which was probably much cheaper, and my grandfather's book about Ferenc Rakoczi [Prince of Transylvania, leader of the insurrection in 1703-1711] was published as part of this series.
Anti-Semitism in Hungary grew very strong at the end of the 19th century. At that time there was a radical party leader and Member of Parliament. Due to the disadvantages which were incurred [because of the Jewish name, Grandfather] Magyarized his name. It became Pap [preacher], because the neighbours always called them "the preacher-boys", because my great-grandfather was a Rabbi. [Besides] everybody who was called Kohn or Kohen or something similar is [of] kohanite [origin]. The name Pap could have come from here as well. He magyarized his name sometime at the very end of the 19th century, and all his brothers and sisters followed him and "Papized". There were eleven brothers and sisters, and he, the youngest, Magyarized his name, and then all of his brothers and sisters became Pap, too.

He met my grandmother Paula at the end of the last century [the 19th], probably in Vienna or Budapest, and I think they were distantly related, too. My grandmother's father was a distillery owner in Vienna. I know of one of my grandmother's sisters; she was called Olga, and she lived all her life in Vienna. Her husband was a factory owner, a rich man. They also had children.
My grandparents got married sometime at the beginning of the [20th] century. My grandmother learned Hungarian and she also wrote in Hungarian a great deal. Auntie Ibolya was born in 1904, as a first child. She was already born as Pap. At the end of the century there was a well-known linguist called Zsigmond Simonyi. It was said that my grandfather would be his assistant, but university work was poorly paid and high-school work paid a little bit better, thereupon my grandfather went to Kassa [today: Kosice, Slovakia] as a teacher. My father was born there in Kassa, two years after his sister. Three or four years after that, they moved to Szolnok. There was an educational centre in Szolnok called the Commercial School; and my grandfather became headmaster there. And then the events of 1918-1919 intervened: the end of World War I and the so-called Soviet revolution [the Hungarian Soviet Republic]. It was interesting that within this chaos both my grandmother and grandfather took sides. My grandfather was a so-called radical bourgeois and it was said that my grandmother was communist. After a short time they came to Budapest. In Budapest my grandmother was a member of the so-called Council of the Hundred – which was a kind of a parliament – and became the head of some kind of reformatory school. Then in March, of 1919, I think, this movement came to an end. When the whole thing collapsed they went illegally to her wealthy sister in Vienna. My grandfather sent from there all kinds of CV's and self-recommendations, and the Jewish high school of Temesvar [today: Timisoara, Romania] accepted his application. That's how they got to Temesvar in 1920 or 1921.
In Temesvar they lived in a tenement dwelling somewhere downtown. My grandfather taught Hungarian and German at the Jewish high school. There's a little story related to this. My grandfather was a passionate smoker. Many times there was a cigar hanging out of his mouth even when he entered a class. Besides this, he had moustache too. They drew him like this, with the cigar. Well, he was a huge man and his students nicknamed him "The oldster". A few of his ex-students are still living in Kolozsvar. He was a well-built, physically robust man, and my father reminisced many times, fairly shuddering, but also with humour, that he once ate for breakfast an omelette made of twelve eggs. My grandmother stayed at home and took care of the three children. On her own initiative, she lived out her intellectual inclinations. She wrote plays. One of her plays was performed inTemesvar. My grandmother died in 1929.
My grandfather's second wife was called Hilda. She was much younger than my grandfather was. I don't know where they met, but they got married sometime in the 1930s. She already had a grown-up boy at that time, I don't know whether he's still living or not, but at that time the boy went to Vienna. I think he was called Karlsten Erst. His second wife died in 1942; I didn't know her.
My father had two sisters; he was the middle child. The eldest was Ibolya. She learned to play the piano and she taught the piano. Later, after the war – in my childhood – I remember that she was a cashier in some kind of ready-to-wear boutique or clothes shop. She got married in 1940 to a teacher from the Jewish high school in Temesvar, called Hauben, who came from Bucovina, from Cernovitz. He was appointed there in Temesvar, and he taught Latin. This uncle of mine knew some thirteen languages. They moved to Israel in 1962. My aunt didn't work anymore there, and my uncle commuted to the university in Tel-Aviv from Netanya, where they lived. He taught there Latin and Old French. Meanwhile he went on some study-tours as well. They didn't have children.
The youngest auntie was called Klari. She had three husbands; the last one was called Mihaly

Suranyi. At first she lived in Brasov (Brasso) then in Bucharest. She was an official all her life. After retiring, in the middle of the 1960s she moved with her husband here to Kolozsvar, quite close to where we lived at that time. Her husband was a Gentile. I think he died in 1973, in the same year as my mother did. He was of mixed origin, a Hungarian-Romanian, but [in the family he was “the biggest Hungarian and Jew”]. They didn’t have children. My aunt died in 1994. They are both buried here in Kolozsvar.

My father had a rather eventful youth, because he (and his two sisters as well) went to Vienna with his parents in 1919. At that time, after World War I, there was a program that sent many of the children of the so-called defeated countries – and Hungary was a defeated country – abroad to “be fed up.” That’s how my father and my younger aunt got to London for a year. They attended school there. In the same period my elder aunt, Ibolya, went to one of her aunts on the mother’s side in Czechoslovakia, by the same right, and stayed there a while. This period lasted about a year, sometime around 1920. Then they all came back to Temesvar. My grandfather was a teacher already and they continued their studies there, in the Jewish high school. My grandfather was very strict, like some teachers are. He was especially strict with his own son. He taught him, and even more, he was also his form-master at one time. My father told me many times that he always had to be perfectly prepared, otherwise it meant big trouble.

The Jewish [aspect] at high-school was probably the fact that the whole high-school – the teaching staff and the pupils as well – were Hungarian-speaking middle-class Jewish people whose mother tongue was Hungarian, and to whom religiousness didn’t really matter. Probably they were obliged to go to synagogue on weekends. All of my father's classmates were Jews as well. Later on, over the course of decades, the company of friends dispersed. Very few of them remained in Temesvar. Some of them went abroad: to Hungary or to Anglo-Saxon territory. My father went to Kolozsvar. The Jewish high school was functioning until about the time of World War II. I think that in the ‘40s there was only a Jewish elementary school inTemesvar.

My father must have graduated high school in 1924, I think, and then the auntie from Vienna undertook his education. My father would have liked to be a doctor, but there wasn’t enough money for that, so he finished a one-year course in Vienna: the shortened, one-year course of an academy of commerce. That academy still exists; it is called the World Trade Academy.

[Then the father got to Temesvar, because he got a job there. He also met Ferenc’s mother there]

My great-grandfather on my mother’s side, Markus Rosenthal, started out as a leather manufacturer in Temesvar. Later, as a mature man, he had a leather shop in one of Temesvar’s neighborhoods. They had five children; the youngest was my grandmother, Gizella. She had two sisters and two brothers. The eldest boy was Zsigmond, the next one was a girl, Cecilia. Another boy, Jozsef, became a chemist in Papa. And another called auntie Rozsi, I think, her youngest elder sister. She got married to a manufacturer in Budapest.

Ferenc Klein, my grandfather, was a shop assistant in my great-grandfather’s shop and that’s how he got together with my grandmother, Gizella. My grandfather didn’t become an owner because he was too young. At that time my grandmother didn’t work, of course. My grandfather was there in my great-grandfather’s shop; he was in the store till the end of his life (he had a very short life). He died very young, of cancer, around 1909. My mother was born in 1909. I think she was a few months old when her father died.

My grandmother and my mother lived in Budapest until the middle of the ‘20s. In Budapest my grandmother worked for a long time in the factory [that belonged to auntie Rozsi’s husband]. In the meantime my mother learned choreography at a well-known ballerina’s school, Olga Szentpal’s

school, and from there she went to Wurzburg, Germany, where she graduated. They went back to Temesvar only after that. My grandmother had a separate flat; she was an official. I think that in the first few years my mother opened a [dance-] school in Lugos and then in Temesvar.
Somehow or other, at the end of the 1920s she met my father, and they got married in 1930. They only had a civil wedding [they were not married by a Rabbi]. At that time my father was transferred from his post in Temesvar to Bucharest, and they lived there for a while. From there they went to Kolozsvar, before my birth, sometime between 1931 and 1934. My mother had a school of choreography here, the so-called school of rhythmic dance and art gymnastics. My father was known in Kolozsvar– and he also introduced himself – as the husband of Vera Pap. This means that my mother, with her posters, was more well-known, at least by name, than my father.
My father was appointed again to Bucharest; I was born there in 1935. From there we went to Temesvar, where my younger brother was born. In 1938 we moved to Kolozsvar indefinitely. There was a Franco-Romanian insurance company and my father came to Kolozsvar as its manager. Then in 1940, when there was the change of power, they offered to send him to a position in the same company in Romanian territory, in Torda [today: Turda, Romania], but he didn't want to go. He was devoted to Kolozsvar. After a short time, from 1938, the three anti-Jewish laws were introduced in Hungary.
They ousted the Jews step by step; they began with the artists and then they extended it to the others and brought other coercive measures. In 1940 or 1941 they dissolved the insurance company, and my father lost his job. My mother wasn't even in an official post. After 1938, when they moved back to Kolozsvar, she didn't have her dance-school any more. There was something that stated that Jews couldn't have official posts, and then my father had a good friend, an old man who undertook to run the company in his name. Then this had to end too. Then my father dealt with selling books, and he wandered all over Transylvania with books. He told us for fun once, that when he came home, he went to a major railway station where he had book-business with the stationmaster. He introduced himself and the stationmaster told him that he would buy books from a man with such a nice name. He also stood him a treat, but he didn't know that he was a Jew. This happened in the 1940s.
The persecution of Jews in Temesvar – as a town in southern Transylvania [which belonged already to Romania by that time] – was less than over the border, in northern Transylvania, which belonged to Hungary at that time. The persecution of Jews between 1939 and 1944 meant that from time to time, the able-bodied men were called in to labour service. For example, the husband of one of my mother's cousins was in Karanszebes [today: Caransebes, Romania] in forced labour service, where they had to dig some ditches. We, just like the other members of the family, lived in Hungary, here in Kolozsvar. Kolozsvar [belonged to] Hungary between September 1940 and 1944.
In the summer of 1943 they took my father into the forced labour service. From that time on my mother looked after us; she invented a product, a masterpiece of fine workmanship. She had been preoccupied with industrial arts even as a child and she was in a terrible dilemma at that time: to choose to deal with industrial arts or to be a dancer. In the 1940's she took up her old knowledge of industrial arts and she made beach-bags. This was when plastic, the imitation of textile and leather, was brought to Hungary, and she made beach-bags and sold them in secret. And there was another thing; we let out one room to a lady who moved there with her daughters, and that's how we obtained the bare necessaries.
[The day before the opening of the ghetto in Kolozsvar, Ferenc's family got the opportunity to run away.]

On the 3rd of May 1944 a Romanian peasant from Tordaszentmihaly raised the price for a family – the Stossers – whom he wanted to evacuate to Romania. And so they were taken away – they were deported – and none of them came back. They found the price the man asked too high. My mother used to visit these Stossers, their ex-neighbours, and that's how it was revealed to us what they wanted to do. The Romanian man came to us very angrily and told us that if these people didn't want to save their necks he would help us flee us for nothing. It looks as if that man knew more than we did. That is how it happened that he took us for nothing. We lived in Zapolya Street at that time. We started from there. We hid in an attic until it got dark, then late night, we met this man at a given place and he took us over the border. There was my mother, my younger brother and I, and a woman from the neighbourhood who found out somehow what we were up to and pleaded to come along. The woman's husband was in forced labor service as well; he didn't come back but died there. They had no children.

I remember that we went through the forest a lot and it was very tiring. We went by horse and cart until the end of the Gyorgyfalvi road where we met this man and from that time on he took us on a very remote road. This whole thing made us more mature than we should have been at this age (I was just nine years old and my brother was just six). We remember quite a lot of details. For example we remember very well that before the end of the Gyorgyfalvi road they took us into a watchman's house in order to use up some time. The landlady was the sister of the man who took us over the border. At one point she told us: "Children, hide under the bed quickly, because the wolves are coming!" in fact there was some sort of patrol, some kind of control by the gendarmerie. After they noted that everything was okay and they didn't find us, we could come out. The lady gave us each a soup plate of "krumplipaprikas" [stewed potato with sour cream, seasoned with red pepper] with the words: "Eat, just eat, children; this may be your last supper..." To the left, at the end of the Monostor [today: Manastur] neighbourhood there is the Gorbo valley; somewhere there we got across [into Romania]. So it was not at the usual crossing-place, at the Felekteto [today: Feleacu], where they tightened control and caught many people fleeing, but we went somewhere else. This man knew the area. He took us over the border and left us before Tordaszentmihaly. Once we got there we entered a Romanian peasant house, completely at random. The man there probably guessed what it all was about. My mother asked him to take us to Torda. In Torda she had an acquaintance, we stayed there about seven or eight days then we went to Temesvar by train.

In Temesvar my mother was actually at home, but for us children, it was the first time we had been there. My mother knew very well where to go and what to do. We went to the house where our relatives lived: my grandmother and her sister Cecilia with her family. We hid there. It was quite a big house; controls by the authorities were completely incidental or did not exist, so we didn't have to fear them. However, sometime in July 1944, some self-seeking person denounced us. That's how we found ourselves at the Temesvar police department for about three days. The way we got out of there, was that a friend of ours bribed the chief constable.

On the 23rd of August 1944 was the royal shift of loyalties. The king had Antonescu and a considerable part of his government arrested and taken away. The Romanian government then went over to the Soviets' side. From that time on the military operations continued on the side of the Allies – American, English, French and Russian – against the Germans. Of course this change didn't happen in a flash, especially in the provinces. The change consisted of the fact that at the very beginning of September, the so-called red troops came to Temesvar. Then we – just like many other people – despaired and started to seek refuge in a nearby village. On the way we met these

troops and they told us to go back to the town because Hitler was “kaputt” [finished].
The liberation of Kolozsvar was on the 11th of October 1944, which means that the united Romanian and Russian troops defeated the Germans. I think that after a week my parents already came home to Kolozsvar. We were enrolled at school in Temesvar: my brother at a Jewish elementary school’s 1st grade and I in the 4th, and we finished school there. In the summer of 1945 we went back to Kolozsvar too. In those times there were enough houses. There were 17,000 Jews in Kolozsvar before the deportation and these people’s houses all became free in 1944. We children went to the all-ready house [the house had already been prepared]. Then I became a child again. I know that our parents had the opportunity to choose and they chose the flat – it was in a street towards the railway station – which though relatively quiet, wasn’t far from downtown.
At first my father was an official of a newly created Jewish organization which ran under communist guiding-principles. It was called the Democratic Union of Jews. For a while, my mother was the secretary of a retraining centre for Jews. At that time this wasn’t a governmental organization, the Jewish community of Bucharest [was the organizer of these centres, because] it wanted to give jobs to those who had lost their prospects. There were similar movements in every Central Eastern European state: to retrain for physical work those Jews who came back from the deportations and couldn’t continue the work they had done before. This organization’s name was abbreviated to O.R.T. It had many sections related to physical work: locksmith, turner, joiner, and things like that, and my mother was the secretary of this school for a while. In 1945 or 1946 they both got into their respective professions; my father became an official, a bookkeeper in a factory in Kolozsvar, then he got a position somewhere else. My mother became the teacher of the ballet class at the Pioneer Centre in Kolozsvar. The abdication or deposal of the king was at the end of 1947. During 1948 the communist government increasingly seized everything, step by step. The nationalization was concurrent with this. In ’48 my mother got into the Ballet High school of Kolozsvar where she was a teacher and a deputy-headmaster. At the same time, sometime in 1949 she got into the newly-made so-called Cluj Conservatoire. At that time it was mainly a Hungarian institution, actually, it was Hungarian and mixed. She taught the discipline called the basics of moving on stage. Then she remained here, also in the new united conservatoire, even after her retirement in 1965.
[In 1959, when the Hungarian Bolyai University was amalgamated with the Romanian Babes University, and today’s Babes-Bolyai University came into being, something similar also happened at the conservatoire]
I attended the Jewish high school in Kolozsvar from 1945 through 1948, until the so-called education reform, when it was closed down. There were a number of Jewish youth associations, not in the school, but outside of it, though many pupils took part in them. There was probably a sports organization too, but it was mainly education of Jewish consciousness. Some of these associations were more radical, so they were Zionist. They said the only way out, was for everybody to emigrate. Others adjusted themselves to the circumstances and said to themselves that this was an opportunity to create some sort of Jewish life in Romania. I wasn’t a member of any of them. In 1948, when they closed down all the denominational schools, the Jewish school among them, I took an entrance examination and went to the school from which I later graduated. This was called Classical High School. At that time there were only about six such outstanding school of this type in Romania: one in Kolozsvar, Temesvar, and Nagyvarad, two in Bucharest and one more somewhere else. This was the only type of school where they taught Latin and Greek.
My classmates knew that I was a Jew, but they didn’t care at all, at least they didn’t show it. But an interesting thing happened: In the first year, in 1945-1946 I attended a Romanian school. There

were many people, at least two, who thought that it was a very temporary condition [referring to the Jews]. During the breaks they passed their time by gathering around me and beating me up, as much as they could. Three years later, after 1948, one of them was my classmate in the Classical School and at that time he was the meekest lamb in the world, so his attitude underwent a complete change.

When I finished high-school I enrolled myself at Babes University, to the Faculty of History. I finished in 1956. After that I waited for a few months because the principal told me that I would get a job at the History Institution, but it didn't work out. I did all kinds of jobs for seven years. My first post was at a daily paper of that period, called Igazsag [the truth]. I translated the Ager Press's (Romanian news agency in Bucharest) incoming news for the foreign affairs column. This lasted about one and a half months at the end of 1956. There was no possibility of confirming me in my post. Andras Kovacs was the general editor at that time, and he later went to the Hét [the week]. At the beginning of 1957 I dealt with Romanian-Hungarian translations. Then came the time when I was a pioneer instructor. I was a so-called chief pioneer instructor, which was a paid job at that time. I didn't have to teach them but just to take charge of their activities in all fields. After that, for one or one-and-a-half months again, I stood in for a teacher of History, and I taught in Hungarian. Then my first real post came. In the spring of 1957 I became a proof-reader at the Kolozsvar press, and at the end of summer I got to the Korunk [our times]. I was a technical editor there for about three years. There were redundancies everywhere; that's how I got out of there. After that, for almost three years again, I worked in the Kolozsvar University Library. From December 1963, I worked in the Museum of History of Kolozsvar, at first as a museologist then as a chief museologist, then as a chief research worker. I completed my Phd in March 1981.

I devoted a lot of time to my thesis work. I also translated hundreds of articles. Mainly in the '50s and '60s the Hungarian scholars from Transylvania didn't really speak Romanian properly. And I was the only one who had Hungarian as his mother tongue and attended a Romanian university. I translated from Hungarian to Romanian for almost everybody who dealt with history, art history, folklore and philology. Besides the thesis work [for the doctorate] I devoted much time to the editing of the "Acta Musei Napocensis", the annual publication of the Museum of History of Cluj. [Ferenc sub-edited the annuals of 1984-1988 as an editorial secretary. The name of the museum today is The Transylvanian National Museum of History, in Romanian: Muzeul National de Istorie a Transilvaniei.] Besides this, I translated more than 20 books and excerpts too. At the present time I'm working on a very interesting manuscript from the 17th century.

I joined the life of the Jewish community later. In 1984 the president of the community at that time, Miklos Kertesz, who was a lawyer, (in his youth he was a good friend of my father), asked me to participate as a museologist in the preparation of Romania's first Holocaust exhibition. As proposed by the president of the religious community we organized the exposition with Mark Egon Lowith [a Jewish painter from Kolozsvar, still-living at that time] and with an architect called Daniel Lidianu; I, as a museologist, Lowith, as the art designer of the whole thing, and the architect, who was also a member of the organizers. The preparation consisted of the acquisition and placing of the materials. In some places we definitely had to obtain and to arrange artificial materials which were the nearest to the original.

For example we got so-called "Heftling" prisoner clothing from the Hungarian Opera and we dressed up a puppet in these clothes. There were pictures on the wall, which had to be arranged according to certain rules and there were many other objects in the exhibition. For example there was the so-called "Ilse Koch soap" as well. This Ilse Koch was the wife of one of the leaders of the

Auschwitz camp. She told her husband: “Why should we lose this precious material? We have to make soap from the dead Jews’ bones.” They made many soap of this kind, and there was a household soap, which we exhibited. There were also many certifying documents made by the Americans, referring to which people were in this and that camp, and which were liberated here and there. There was enough material for a room. In the synagogue on Horea Street, to the right of the Torah, there’s a little room, and we created this exhibition there. I’ve been a member of the religious community since 1984; for me, this is just as natural as the fact that I’m a Hungarian too. But I go there mostly to pay the member’s subscription. The best way we can put it is that I’m a Hungarian Jew, there is no more to it.

I met my wife through a colleague of mine – from the University Library – who she was friends with. Neither she, nor my parents-in-law had any objections to me because of my Jewishness. We had only a civil wedding. We got married in 1972. We didn’t think about whether we should raise our child as a Hungarian or as a Jew. It was all the same to me. The child confirmed; she became a Reformed [Protestant]. But nothing really depends on this. We don’t observe Jewish holidays at all, just Easter and Christmas.