

Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic

Nikolai Mesko

Born: Nusn Mermelstein

Interviewer: Martin Korcok and Barbora Pokreis

Date of interview: July 2005

Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic comes from an Orthodox Jewish family. He lost his entire family in the war. In 1946 he joined the Communist Party and in it tried to make use of all the Jewish moral values that his parents had taught him. During the time of the Communist regime, rife with corruption and ill-gotten gains, he preserved a clean slate. Perhaps also thanks to this, he has for 48 years been continually elected by people to the Mukachevo town council. He is currently retired, but actively participates in the running of the town's Jewish religious community, as its deputy chairman and cantor in one.

My grandparents were born in Ruthenia [1], the same as my parents. When they were born, Ruthenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. I barely remember my grandparents, because they died while I was still very small. In those days I was the youngest member of our family, so that's why I don't know anything about my grandparents. In fact, my parents didn't tell me anything about them either. I don't even know their names, or when they were born and where they're buried.

My father, Salamon Mermelstein, was likely born in the year 1888 in the village of Rosos, in the district of Tjacev in Ruthenia. I don't know if my father had siblings, because I don't remember him being in contact with someone from his family. I don't know what schooling he had either, but I do know what he did for a living. He was a coachman. My mother's maiden name was Dora Stern, she was born around 1891 in Pasikovo, in the district of Svalava in Ruthenia. My mother likely had a primary school education, the same as my father. My mother wasn't employed, her job was to take care of children and raise them. At home we spoke exclusively Yiddish, but my parents also spoke Russian.

Our family was very poor and there were many children. I had three sisters – Golda, Chana and Roza and one brother, Jozef. I was the youngest. Between my youngest sister and me there was an age difference of 14 years. The rest of my siblings were about two years apart. My parents lived in the village of Rosos, in a family bungalow, I was also born there. When I turned 3, our family moved to Mukachevo, so I don't remember anything from my birthplace. I do already remember what sort of house we moved into in Mukachevo. It was in a street named Toltes. Our three-room house was very modestly furnished. It consisted of only a bed and wardrobe. We didn't have a tile floor nor even a wooden one. It was an earthen floor. Each and every week, before the Sabbath, we evened and smoothed out the floor. The house also had a courtyard and a very nice garden. In the courtyard we had stables for horses. The stables were made of earth. Our house wasn't made of bricks either, but of earth. The courtyard wasn't large, but for that all the more beautiful. It was planted mainly with fruit trees, but my mother and sisters planted potatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables. That's what we lived on. Like I said, we were a poor family. My father, as a coachman,

didn't make very much, because with a hay-wagon you couldn't make very much. The town had a stand for coachmen, where they stood with their wagons and waited until someone needed something moved somewhere. When, say, a rail car of flour arrived, because in those days there weren't haulage trucks, businessmen would come and ask the coachmen to transport it somewhere. Often it happened that he made nothing. I don't know how much coachmen were paid in those days for hauling a load. My mother didn't work, she was a housewife. My sisters didn't work either. My brother, Jozef, was the owner of a small spice shop.

As I've already said, I had four siblings. We got along very well, we were a good family. I didn't see my siblings very much, because my brother and three sisters were all married. Jozef was born in 1912 in Rosos. I don't remember his wife. I don't even know her name. They had one daughter. Jozef lived in our original house, from which we had moved to Mukachevo. In it he had his spice shop. As a child I wasn't used to visiting him. My sister Roza was born in 1914 in Rosos. Her husband was a very strong man. He came from Ardanov, where they also moved after their wedding. Ardanov is a village in the county of Irsavsko. They had one child. Golda was born in 1908, in Rosos as well. Her husband was, same as my father, a coachman. He was a red-haired man of short build. They had two children. Golda and her family lived in the same house with me and my parents, where they had their own room. Chana was born in Rosos in 1906. She had a very handsome husband, who made a living as a master carpenter. They lived in Kerecki. They had two children – a boy and a girl. They transported [during World War II] my parents and all of my siblings together with their families and gassed them. They put them into the gas chambers and gassed them. They dragged them away in April of 1944 and probably killed them during that same month.

My father was a very good man. I'm not only saying that because he was my father. He loved his family, and brought his children up well. He helped us in every way he could. He wasn't able to financially secure the family very much though, so none of my siblings could get more than an elementary education [they finished primary school, which consisted of five grades – Editor's note]. I would say, however, that our father lived for his family. My mother liked children very much, she tried to please our every wish and desire. She gave birth to five children, so she definitely had who to take care of.

My mother was a very devout Jewess. She always dressed in long, dark dresses and wore a scarf on her head. Her hair underneath the scarf was always cut short. In the morning she prayed right after rising. Likewise she also prayed at dinnertime. She prayed three times a day. My father also always dressed properly. He always wore a hat, beard and payes. For praying he used an outer tallit and a tefillin. He didn't attend synagogue every day, only when he had the time. During the Sabbath and holidays he always went. He never missed even one Sabbath. He didn't work on Saturday and during holidays. As a young boy, even before my bar mitzvah, I used to regularly attend prayers. Whether or not my parents used to go to a mikveh I don't remember, it's likely they did, but I don't remember.

When I was young my parents dressed me in a simple fashion. But they always cut my hair, I couldn't go about with long hair. I had only payes. All summer long my head was covered by a kippah, and in the winter I wore a cap. I most likely got my first long pants at the age of 13, when I became a man. By Jewish custom a boy becomes a man at the age of 13. But unfortunately I don't remember my bar mitzvah.

In Toltes Street there were no other Jews besides us. At the end of the street, however, there was a store that belonged to this one very devout Jew. He was named Chaimovich. But the store was quite far from our home. All of our immediate neighbors were Christians. They weren't as poor as we were. One neighbor was a fire chief. I remember that our house was No. 23, and at No. 21 there was this one nice, big house, in front of which was a courtyard full of grapevines. A butcher used to live in that house. Bucin, I think he was named. Each New Year's day, Bucin would lock the gate and wait for me. When someone knocked on the gate would open the window and look out to see who it was. If he didn't see that it was me, he wouldn't unlock it. He insisted that I be the first one to come wish him a happy New Year. I liked doing this very much, because he would then give me a pile of money and some food. He used to say that as a Jew I will bring him luck.

We had good relations with the rest of our neighbors as well. Such good relations that when they dragged my family off – I was told about it, because at that time I wasn't at home, but doing forced labor – our neighbors sealed our house and kept guard over it to make sure no-one entered. So that when my parents returned they would find everything as it had been. On the other hand, there wasn't anything to steal, we had only old furniture, we were very poor. In 1944, when I returned and had no one, the neighbors took care of me. You could say that I spent all of my time with them. They fed me, and when I needed they also took me in to live with them, that's how good they were to me. Then I volunteered for the Red Army. A lot of people did this in Ruthenia at that time.

My parents didn't associate much with anyone in particular, only when they would stop by the neighbors' for a chat. They didn't even get together with family, so that's why I don't know whether my parents had any siblings. Our family was completely apolitical. No one had any political opinions and so no one could have been in some political party. None of us, neither my father nor my siblings, were ever interested in politics. We lived a beautiful and contented life without any anti-Semitism whatsoever in that town.

In the time of my youth there were a lot of Jews living in Mukachevo. That's why Mukachevo was nicknamed the Jewish Town. More than half the town's population was Jewish. In all there were 17 synagogues and prayer halls, that they used to attend. Every family was devout, even little children. Every Jew in Mukachevo attended prayers at a synagogue. In those days our family belonged to a rabbi by the name of Shapira [3]. He was a very wise and thoughtful person, whose name became known worldwide. When the Czechs came [4], both presidents, Masaryk [5] and after him, Benes [6] as well, kept in personal contact with him. He was a very good and proper person. People loved Masaryk as well. He was a beautiful, tall and bearded man. I never saw him in person. We had no television in those days, but I saw him in the newspapers. Masaryk was a big democrat. People liked Benes as well, but not like Masaryk. Masaryk was very much, as they say: "A good father to his family." The father of Czechoslovakia. All the people of Czechoslovakia liked him very much.

There was a large cheder [a religious elementary school for study of the Torah – Editor's note]. Almost every synagogue also had a cheder. Children would go to study there. Mukachevo also had a Hebrew high school. The high school building was in Sugar Street. It was a large school. Jewish children from all over Ruthenia attended it. There were also many bocherim (yeshivah students) studying in the town. There might have been over 350 of them. The yeshivah stood in Mukachevo Street and was led by rabbi Shapira. I also studied in that yeshivah. I went there after finishing

cheder. Around 160 bocherim lived right in the yeshivah. They were housed in the synagogue courtyard, where the rabbi himself also lived. Of course, only those that had come from far away lived there. For example from Tacov and Beregov. Those of us that were from town lived at home with our parents. Boys from surrounding villages also made the trip every day.

The bocherim were divided into grades. There weren't many of them, only three – beginners, advanced and a grade for future graduates. Bocherim in the highest grade knew how to read the Torah and lead prayers. I also knew how to lead prayers well, daily as well as holiday prayers. The things I learned I still use fully to this day. There were only a few teachers in the yeshivah, but I don't remember their names anymore. It was a long time ago. I started attending the yeshivah in 1933 or 1934. I attended it for four years. After I finished my studies, because I wasn't preparing to become a rabbi, I started working. I attended that school because my parents were very devout, mainly my mother. My father not as much. You could see on my mother that my attending the yeshivah made her very happy. It pleased her very much that I had learned how to lead prayers. I did everything I could for my mother.

There was a very important rabbi in town, Shapira. I remember him only foggily. He was of medium build, and wore a big beard and payes. He was a very educated and broad-minded person. He behaved elegantly and expressed himself with dignity. Even we children led conversations with him. Goodness shone from him. He was a great man. As they say: "He was the right hand of God. In the same way that Moshe was the successor in the interpretation of the Torah – so was rabbi Shapira also his successor." [...from Moshe to Moshe, no one achieved what Moshe did!] – this well-known sentence originally characterized the noted rabbi Maimonides (1135 – 1204). People used these exact words to describe another Moshe – Moshe Schreiber, or Chatam Sofer (1762 – 1839), a rabbi from Pressburg (Bratislava). This means that Jews compared rabbi Shapira (1872 – 1937) to these two giants of world Jewry – Editor's note]. That's how much people respected him, he was widely liked. You could never have heard one loud word from him. He prayed beautifully, people respected him. When there was a conflict between Jews, people turned only to him.

I don't remember the exact number of shochetim in town. A shochet never came to individual households to slaughter poultry, but chickens, geese and other fowl were brought to him. I myself never brought him poultry, only my mother did. I remember once going with her and seeing how the shochet carried out his work. In the room there was a container similar to an elongated tub. The shochet cut the chicken's throat and threw it in there. The chicken shook about for a while, and when it was still he took it out. My mother then brought it home, plucked and prepared it.

There were Zionists [7] in Mukachevo as well, but I can't say anything about it in detail, because I didn't take part in their activities. There were many supporters of the Betar [Brit Trumpeldor – right-wing revisionist Zionist youth movement founded in the year 1925 – Editor's note] movement and other groups. Zionist groups competed amongst each other, but I don't know anything about them. I always behaved very modestly. My mother raised me only to faith. Only to faith. My father not as much as my mother. She raised me to live only for God. My mother would say to me: "My son – of course, she also said it to my other siblings, but she liked me very much, because I was the youngest – you should know that we've come into this world and are here only for a while. He who is born also dies. We must live and behave as if real life awaits us in the next world, in heaven. As soon as you awake in the morning, wash your hands and face and thank God, in whatever

language, for yesterday. Thank you God, for allowing me to live through yesterday honorably, and I ask You for today to be a good day. My son, you are in this world in order to go to synagogue and pray. Live your life in this way until the end.” She always said this to me and I follow it to this day.

Mainly Jews lived in Mukachevo. But there were also Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans and Russians. There were very few Ukrainians, they mainly arrived after the war. Individual ethnicities didn't live closed off in quarters, people lived together. Only Germans lived separately in one quarter, but not the others. During the war the Germans for the most part behaved well towards the others. After the war some of them were taken away to Russia. Most of them, however, stayed in Mukachevo and gradually moved away to Germany. After the war they also took away some Hungarians as well, mainly those about whom it was said that they collaborated with the Arrow Crosses [Arrow Cross Party] [8]. Those that were pointed out and whose guilt was proven, were led away. But there weren't many of them. Slovaks and Czechs were left alone. They only hassled the Hungarians, because people said that they were fascists.

Jews in Mukachevo were mainly businessmen. There were, however, also tailors, shoemakers and carpenters. Mostly they opened their own shops of various kinds. There were two fur factories that also had stores associated with them. One belonged to Stern and the second to Schüssel. Two large sweet shops. The owner of one of them was Neumann. Gottesmann had a huge bakery. Another large store belonged to Mermelstein.

The entire town didn't have electricity and running water, only the center. In the suburbs they drew water from wells. The street where we lived had running water. City streets were paved with stone. It can't be said that the streets were in great shape, but neither were they bad. In those days there were very few cars in Mukachevo, but a few were already to be found. There were about eight, ten at most. Only rich people had them, like for example the owner of the Star Hotel. His name was Imre Nagy. Most people used horse-drawn wagons.

The town market was in the same place that it is today. It was a covered vegetable market, where only fruit and vegetables were sold, nothing more. In the center of town there was a flea market where they sold secondhand goods and suchlike. They weren't big markets. Besides this there were many spice shops in town. There you could also buy various vegetables. The only people that sold things at the market were those that brought their goods from surrounding villages. There was also a fair that was held near the town. There they sold horses, pigs and cows. In other words, farm animals. The fair was held twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday.

All holidays were observed in our household. For Sukkot we didn't put up tents, but the houses themselves were built in such a way that they had a small built-in folding roof, that could be opened for Sukkot and you had a tent. So not in a room, but in front of the room on the outside of the house, we put up a tent. We ate in it all week. We observed this very strictly. During this holiday a similar tent stood in every Jewish courtyard in the town. It was the same in rich Jewish families, because rich Jews lived in Mukachevo too. When they bought a house, they rebuilt in this fashion, or had it built this way, so that there would be a roof that could then be folded open. We didn't spend all day in the sukkah, but only ate in it.

For Yom Kippur everyone strictly fasted. Before the Yom Kippur holiday, everyone left town and went to the river, threw in crumbs for the fish and prayed. It's called tashlich [tashlich – an

expression describing the symbolic casting away of sins. Devout Jews gather by a river and recite prescribed passages that speak of God's willingness to forgive a repentant sinner – Editor's note]. Because there were a lot of Jews living in the town, they didn't go to the river all together, but in groups. In every group there would be someone who would lead prayers. Kaparot [kaporot – a ceremony performed by some Jews on the evening before Yom Kippur, when sins symbolically transfer from individuals to a white rooster and a white chicken for women – Editor's note] however wasn't observed by everyone. You needed a rooster for this ceremony, for women something else. For men it was a rooster and for women a chicken. In our family only my father performed this ceremony, as we had only a rooster. I don't know any more what happened to the rooster after the ceremony, whether they slaughtered it or not. I don't remember. As a small child I didn't fast all day. I began to observe the fast when I turned 13. Not before then. For the New Year we had meat for supper. Our parents in some fashion saved money for this holiday. During the week we didn't eat meat. That's how it was in a poor family.

Our household was kosher, both during the week and on Saturday. As the head of the family, my father sat at the head of the Sabbath table. My mother sat across from him. Men and women sat separately at the table, not next to each other. On my father's left sat his son-in-law [Golda's husband], on his right sat Golda. On Friday evening we had a traditionally stuffed fish. Because this food was very expensive and we didn't have the money for it, my mother prepared a so-called falsch [Yiddish – fake] – a fake fish. Falsch basically means that one fish was bought. The fish was de-boned and ground up. Then bread and eggs were mixed into the ground fish so that there would be as much as possible. A real stuffed fish was very expensive, because it's slit open and then stuffed. In this way my mother made many fake fish from one fish. I don't know the exact soup recipe, but likely they put goose or duck fat and noodles into it. On Saturday shoulet and kugel (pudding) couldn't be missing from the table. We also always had kolaches [small sweet cakes with a variety of fillings] on the table. My mother baked them herself, as we had an oven. The oven wasn't made of earth like our whole house, but of bricks. The kolaches and shoulet were prepared at home. She would also bake two large braided kolaches and many small kolaches. The two large braided ones were for my father to say blessings over. To commence the Sabbath and broche [broche – blessing]. When the stars were already out, we went to synagogue. By the synagogue there was a room where a Sabbath table was prepared, and the rabbi would make Havdalah [Havdalah – a ceremony ending the Sabbath – Editor's note]. During the Sabbath we only rested and read prayer books. My mother attended synagogue every Sabbath, as well as on all other holidays. My father smoked a lot, but never during the Sabbath [during the Sabbath it is forbidden to smoke. In this case, however, the reason isn't that it's work, but that it is forbidden to start and use fire on this day – Editor's note].

On the evening before Passover we would have a small seder supper. Before that, it was necessary to clean everything. We had a small broom, made of feathers, goose feathers. My mother would buy a rag and clean all cabinet corners with the broom and rag. First we had to sear all the dishes with fire so that they would be kosher, as we didn't have separate Passover dishes. [Passover is the holiday of unleavened bread. During the holiday it is forbidden to eat or possess anything containing yeast, chametz in Hebrew. Food containing yeast must be removed from the house. As well, it is forbidden to use anything that has come into contact with yeast – for example dishes and cutlery. Families that didn't have Passover dishes had to make them kosher by searing them –

Editor's note]. We used the same dishes as during the week. How exactly the dishes were seared I no longer remember, but I know that a fire would be built out in the courtyard and that's where they would sear them. I saw that. The second thing is that during the day before Passover you can no longer eat bread. So if we had any bread left in the house, we would give it to the neighbors and the horses in the stable, so that not even a crumb would remain in the house. They swept up the crumbs with that little broom and burnt them in a spoon. Then we would write down what was left in the household – flour or similar foodstuffs – which was then put into a cupboard and my father would seal it. He would ask a neighbor to buy chametz from him, so nothing would remain in the house. The neighbor would buy it from us, and after the holidays he would sell it to us for the same price. We would get matzot from the Jewish community. During the holiday we ate mainly potatoes, eggs, onions and similar food, because there isn't much that you are allowed to eat during Passover.

I remember Chanukkah from when I was an older child. I know that we would go to synagogue. At home we played dreidel. We children played for pocket change. We would bet as to what number would come up. When someone bet on five, and a five came up, he won. When no one guessed correctly, nobody won. For Purim we would go from house to house and people would send kolaches to each other. They gave each other gifts. I don't know what the kolaches were made of, because that was my mother's affair. In Mukachevo there wasn't any carnival for children during Purim. Nothing similar was held.

When I was 6 or 7, I started public school. The town had Jewish, Russian, Hungarian and Czech public schools. Public school had five grades and was compulsory. Whoever finished public school could continue in council school. That school can't be completely compared to today's middle school, it was only something similar. Council school consisted of three grades, whoever finished it could go on to another school. Ruthenia didn't have a university. The nearest one was in Kosice. Ruthenia only had a Hebrew high school and commerce academy, which prepared for example bankers and various clerks. These schools were in Mukachevo.

I attended the Russian public school. I finished five grades of public school and then transferred to council school. After I finished it I got into the commerce academy. I wasn't able to finish it however, because my parents didn't have the money for it. I attended two years and then had to start working. At the age of 15 I started working for a furrier as an apprentice. I had to make money.

They liked me very much at school, which was by me also interesting, as we were so poor that my parents could buy me neither textbooks nor exercise books. In those days you had to buy everything, books, exercise books, pens, pencils. We didn't have money for these things. Two of my classmates lived not far from me. They weren't Jews. One's father was the chief of the fire station and the other's a railway employee, and made decent money. Their sons, however, weren't good students. So the boys' parents asked me to tutor them after dinner, because we had school only until dinnertime. These boys had textbooks, and by tutoring them I at the same time learned from the books. Studies were easy for me. Despite not having any educational materials, I attended school. The parents of the children I tutored began to give me exercise books as well, and paid me. In this way they enabled me to study. I tutored them in public school, council school and for two years of commerce academy. In the second year they didn't manage to pass their exams and had

to leave school. Thus I also left school, as my parents didn't have any way of paying for it.

I didn't have a favorite teacher. For me they were all good and they also all liked me. My teachers also helped me a lot, it happened that my teacher would buy me exercise books. At the age of fifteen however, I had to leave the commerce academy. I left to go work in one large fur shop, for Mr. Stern. Mr. Stern didn't only sell furs, but also had a workshop where they processed furs and made coats out of them. He was a very rich person, after all, furs are expensive things. I began as an apprentice. I got a decent salary, partly thanks to the fact that the owner took a liking to me. Slowly I worked my way up. I stayed and worked there up until October 1943, because in that year all boys born in 1922 were called up into the army. Because I was a Jew, I didn't go into the army but into forced labor. In October 1943 they led us away from Mukachevo.

As a child I didn't associate much with my peers, I was a loner. Most of all I liked to read books in our garden. My mother and father spoke both Yiddish and Russian. My mother tongue is therefore Yiddish. I didn't know any other language, only Russian, because that's what we learned in school. I learned Hungarian completely on my own, to read and write. I taught myself from books that my Hungarian peers lent me. As a 15 year-old apprentice, after starting work, I wasn't friends with anyone. There wasn't time. In the morning I went straight to work, at dinnertime home to eat and then again to work. After coming home from work I would pick up my Hungarian books and go read in the garden. There I laid down and read. I loved to read. When there wasn't money for books, I would borrow them. I was a good child.

I remember the fur shop well. It was at the end of today's Rakoczi Street, at No. 20, I think. The store had about 80 and the workshop around 120 square meters. Three furriers worked in the workshop. Working in the shop were the boss, who was also the owner, his wife and I. Furs were a very expensive item. Mr. Stern was a millionaire and wasn't able to trust anyone. There was also another fur shop in Mukachevo, but Mr. Stern's shop employed mainly only his relatives. He hired me despite the fact that we weren't related. Most likely he took a liking to me, but despite this they watched me carefully. Why? Because it was easy to steal in the store. There were expensive silver fox furs, those of course couldn't be taken. There were however also Persian furs from unborn lambs, and those are very expensive. If someone was to take ten of these legs, he could easily wrap them in a kerchief and stick them in his pocket. From those ten legs a person could in those days live decently for even two months. So maybe that's also why they watched me until they found out that I was honest. In time they began to trust me very much. Old Mr. Stern went to Leipzig, Germany every year, where he would purchase materials. He trusted me to the degree that when he was gone we left the keys to the store with me, and I would open the store each morning at 8:00. In fact, when he bought himself some material for a suit in Leipzig, he bought the same material for me. Once, when he brought the material, I told him: "Sir, you've brought me material, but for a suit you need the lining and other things. I don't have the money for it." He answered me: "Boy, go to this and this tailor and say that I'm sending you." He dressed me the same as himself, that's how much he liked me, and I felt very good with him. He paid me a nice salary and so our entire family began to live well. I helped my family very much. At home I gave my entire salary to my parents. I didn't need money for anything.

After this territory was occupied by the Hungarians [9] everything changed. Czech [the interviewee means the first Czechoslovak Republic – Editor's note] lasted until the year 1938. We had

democracy here. There were no racial divides between people. I can say that after 1939, when the Hungarians arrived, racial persecution [10] began. They began to chase Jews out of everywhere. A Jew couldn't be a public servant, at university they didn't accept Jewish students. While the Czech were here, nothing like that existed. Until then it didn't matter whether a person was a Jew or non-Jew. Everyone was equal.

In the beginning I only helped out in the store, and ran errands when necessary. Only very rich people had fur coats made, the poor couldn't afford fur coats and jackets, only for example baronesses and their daughters. When the coat was finished, it was my job to deliver it. This was wonderful, because I used to get tips. A certain French Jew, Mr. Berger, worked in the workshop. He was born in France and was also educated there. I have no idea how he got here. He spoke French and Yiddish very well. Berger was the head tailor and had three assistants that sewed furs. Berger's job was to take the measurements and design the fur coat. My boss wanted me to have a trade as well. That's why in the summer, when we had less work – it could be only in the summer, as winter was the busy season – he always sent me to the workshop for a few hours to learn. That's how much he liked me, despite the fact that we weren't related in any way. I worked for him until October 1943, when I had to go and do forced labor.

In October 1943 they called up all Jewish boys born in 1922 for forced labor. During the whole time of forced labor God always stood by me. Up until the end. They took us to the Russian front. We did heavy physical labor. We dug deep anti-tank trenches. Even there luck was with me. In what respect? Together with the other soldiers we got to the Russian front. They went with us right from Mukachevo. We slept in houses guarded by soldiers. There were two officers among these soldiers. One young captain and an older first lieutenant. I don't remember his name, but in civilian life he was an actor and came from Budapest. The first lieutenant had a soldier that worked as his assistant. Somehow he took a liking to me. He looked us over, and because I didn't look like a Jew, he asked me whether I could speak Hungarian. I answered:

"I know Hungarian well!"

"You know Hungarian well. And do you know Russian?"

"I also know Russian."

"Wow, so come over here then." I became his assistant, despite his already having one official one. Because I could speak Russian, he used me for finding him Russian women. He said that I was going to be his interpreter. That I was to find him women, as after all, I was still young. I was to translate for him at the table. I said to him: "I'll be at the table, but what about in bed?" He answered: "In bed I don't need a translator!". So I didn't have to dig trenches, it was luck. So this is what my forced labor consisted of.

In 1944 the Russians were already advancing very quickly. The front was approaching toward us. We set out on foot from Russia to the town of Cop. It was very far. In Cop they would have herded us into wagons and sent us to Germany. Most likely they would have gassed us. But the first lieutenant had taken such a liking to me, that he told me: "Miklos, let's go. When we get to Ruthenia, start to limp, and say that you're not able to walk any further. Tell another twenty – thirty men that you hold in high regard, that you're staying. I'll tell one warrant officer to go with you, you'll have no problems with him. I'll tell him that when you ask, he should let you go.

"We should stay, why?"

"Because you're walking to Cop, where they'll load you into wagons and send you to Germany. But

I don't believe that any of you will ever return from there." Before we reached Hust I started to limp. The warrant officer already knew what he was supposed to do. There were about 25 of us. The warrant officer assigned one armed soldier to us, as he couldn't let us go just like that. Because we couldn't manage the pace that had been set, we were supposed to catch up later. We walked very slowly, and when we arrived in the town of Hust, we said to the soldier: "Stay with us too, what're you going to do? When they catch you they'll arrest you." He agreed. Nearby there was a school that had been used by soldiers and was now abandoned. We stayed there. We waited for three days to be liberated. It was quite risky, because there were 'kakastollasi' [Hungarian constables] [11] around, they were horrible people, policemen. When they found someone, they shot him without batting an eyelash. We were shaking with fright. Finally, in October 1944 we were liberated by partisans. At that time the whole of Ruthenia was liberated. They let us go on our way. On 26th October 1944 Mukachevo was liberated as well. Immediately the next day, the 27th, I was already there [the Soviet Army occupied Mukachevo on 26th October 1944 - Editor's note]. I stayed in Mukachevo for about a month at our neighbors'.

After my return home I learned what had happened to my family. In April of 1944 they had deported every single one of them - my father, mother, sisters and brother together with their children. They dragged them off to Germany [in his interview, the interviewee considers all territories occupied by Germans as Germany]. In Mukachevo they collected them into one ghetto and from there deported my entire family. I don't know exactly where they took them. Somewhere to Germany. None of them returned. I never heard anything more about them. Apparently everyone who was deported from the Mukachevo ghetto was gassed. Apparently.

In 1944 I volunteered for the army, because of my parents. I wanted to avenge myself on the Fascists for what they had done to my parents. I got into the Russian Army [Red Army]. At that time there was already also the Czech [Czechoslovak] Army. The recruitment of volunteers was being done by two colonels. One was recruiting for the Czech and the second for the Russian army. I entered the Russian one. When the officer learned from my name - Mermelstein - that I was a Jew, I became trustworthy, because the Jews had been persecuted. Mermelstein, a Jew, and what's more he also speaks Hungarian. The colonel was very pleased and said to me:

"Go home and come back in two days."

"But I want to go! Because of my parents and brother and sisters! I want to kill! I want to avenge them!"

"Listen to me son, you'll avenge your parents. We'll transfer you to a place where you can avenge them. Why? Because if you go to the front, as a soldier, they'll either kill you right away or you'll kill a couple of soldiers, let's say you shoot them. But those soldiers maybe aren't responsible for anything and were forced to do everything! We'll put you in a place where you'll be hunting only the big Fascists!" And truly, from January (1945) I served a year and a half in the army as a Hungarian-Russian translator, who hunted Fascists in Hungary. We searched them out and jailed them.

I criss-crossed the whole of Hungary - Sopron, Eger, Nyíregyháza. Finally I ended up at the headquarters in Budapest. I didn't have an army rank, it wasn't like that. I wore civilian clothing or army clothing, depending on what was needed. When the situation required it for me to become an officer, I became an officer. We searched for agents and spies. I really was able to avenge myself. I avenged myself because we uncovered many Fascists that had persecuted Jews, and put them on

trial. The court gave them death sentences. Many of those curs got the death sentence. The war ended in May of 1945. At that time I submitted a request to be released from army service. They didn't want to let me go. They even suggested that I go to the Hungarian embassy and stay there as a Soviet, because I spoke Hungarian. I didn't want to. They stretched out my army service for another year and in June of 1946 I was discharged from service. It's interesting, that the general that wrote up my discharge gave me two pieces of paper. One discharge paper and one that was filled out as a leave permit. I asked him: "What good is a leave permit to me?"

"Listen, maybe you'll change your mind, you'll go home, be there a month, start to be bored and you'll come back." Because if he didn't give me a leave permit, I wouldn't be able to return. Of course he also gave me all documents that had to do with my discharge with the words: "When you get bored, come back to us. Did you not like it here?"

"No, I liked it very much!"

In 1946 I changed my name. In the unit that I served in there were many, very many Jews. Almost all the higher officers – lieutenant colonels, colonels, changed their names. For example, Litkovsky had originally been Lichtenstein. At that time in Russia they had passed a law that enabled you to change your surname, your patronymic [father's name] and given name [in the former Soviet Union people were given three names, name, surname and patronymic: the interviewee was named Nikolai Mesko and his father's name had been Salamon. His entire name was therefore: Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic – Editor's note]. You only had to submit one request to the Bezpeke [submit a request to the security institution that belonged under the KGB – Editor's note]. Not even a month went by. I had been born in Ruthenia, as my grandfather had been. They researched not only my grandfather, but also his father as well. Of course I got permission to change my name. They checked what my original name was, because many people were concealing their names – for example those that had committed some crimes. I got a new surname, they wrote up that it was according to what law, who passed the law, and so on. The law had been passed by Stalin. The others said to me: "Miklos, you don't look like a Jew. See, we've done it too. You're a proper young man, pick out a name that you want." So from Mermelstein I became Mesko, and from Nusn, Nikolai. I didn't want to change my patronymic, though. They asked me:

"Why Salamon, when it's a Jewish name?"

"Let it remain as a memento. I'm not changing my father's name!"

"In that case it's not worth doing."

"But I'm not concealing that I'm a Jew." And so I kept his name. So that why, in 1946, I became Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic. In Hungarian Mesko Miklos, because there they don't have a patronymic. To this day I still use the Jewish name of Nusn, because when they call me to the Torah, they call me Nusn ben Shloime. Because my father's Jewish name was Shloime.

In 1946 my life began anew. In June I returned home and immediately started to look for work. By then all of my friends were home. One of them, Tibi Berkovich, was already working. He was also a Jew. There was a factory in Mukachevo, and he had some sort of function there. He says to me: "Go to our office, maybe you'll find something there." I came as a discharged soldier and by coincidence the office manager was a former officer. Right away he took a liking to me. He took me on as a supply clerk. It was manufacturing – candles, shoeshine creams, various things for barbers – manufacturing where the products were sent to other branches of industry. We for example also manufactured buttons. But I had never worked in a warehouse before. I worked there for about a

month, and then told him that I didn't really like it. I went to see the director and got a new job. I became the head engineer's deputy. The head engineer was also a Jew, named Litvak. Suddenly they transferred our director, Alexander Ivanovich Krukov, to another factory. At a general meeting before his departure, he recommended me for his position. He didn't recommend the head engineer, but me. At the age of 24, in 1948, I became the director of a factory. At that time I wasn't even a Party member. A year later, in 1949, I had to join the Communist Party.

So this is how in 1948 I became the director and in 1949 a party member. In 1948 I was also elected to the town council as a deputy. I, a Jew, became a deputy and stayed one for the whole 48 years. This didn't happen anywhere else, not only in Ruthenia but in all of the Ukraine. In those days town council elections were held every two years, only later were they every four. During the entire 48 years they elected me again and again. At the same time I was a factory director. There was one factory in Mukachevo where they manufactured thread. The director of this factory was this one Christian, Glebn. The factory was in this one old building, so that's why they started to build a new one. Moscow allocated a lot of money for it. But Glebn drew out the construction for years on end, and somehow they couldn't complete it. At that time I had already been in the position of director for six years. Suddenly they threw Glebn out, they threw him out of the Party as well, and put me in his place, to finish the construction. The factory building was so attractive that they would come to photograph it, and even a TV crew from Moscow came to shoot it. This was in the year 1958. The factory became one of the most well-known in Ruthenia. They photographed it, in fact even shot a film about it. Thanks to this I got to Moscow for the first time in my life. The minister's deputy assigned me a car and driver so that I could have a look around the city. At the same time there was a construction company in Mukachevo – Remont, Rem Stroj Upravljenja. Its director was also a Jew, Klein. He didn't have a school diploma. He had a house built, not in an honest manner, because he worked in an industry where there were sufficient construction materials. Because he didn't build it in an above-board manner, they threw him out of the function and the party. Once again, they put me in his place. They always put me in the place of someone they had thrown out. I was director there for 25 years. From there I went into retirement.

Before the war I hadn't finished commerce academy. But when I returned from the army, I finished school by attending part-time. I finished 10th grade and then entered university. I graduated from university in Lvov, in 1958, from the Faculty of Economics. I became an economics engineer. At that time I already had the job of director. I was director of Remont for 25 years. They hadn't had something like this here before. Why? Because they stole. Everyone wondered how it was possible that Mesko is a town council member for 48 years straight, and for 25 years the director of Remont. He didn't build anything for himself, no house, no cottage. Since he got married he lives in the same apartment. Actually, this apartment isn't even mine, it's my wife's. She was an only child, she had no other siblings.

I could have retired when I turned 60. Despite this I've only been retired since last year (2004). At the age of 82 I was still working in various positions. They were making use of my experiences and knowledge. For example, they wanted to start up a second-hand shop in Mukachevo, where they would sell rags [the interviewee means clothing – Editor's note] and similar things. They called me from the town council, I hadn't been retired even a day, that I should become director. We also have a dormitory for students here. The director of the dormitory called me up: "Please do something with it, help me out. Be my deputy." I didn't feel like doing it. So the director said:

“Listen, you’ve got two granddaughters, and I know that you’d like for them to go teacher’s high school.

We won’t accept them unless you start working for us. They we’ll accept them at school!” So I worked there as well. My job was to bring about some order in the dormitories, where there were about 500 students. Boys were crawling into girls’ rooms through windows and so on. I was supposed to put it right. But what’s more important, when I was already working on it, they elected me chairman of the Mukachevo association of retirees. Thirty-seven retired army officers and many noncommissioned officers were members of this organization, and despite this, they elected me, an ordinary soldier, as chairman. I’m still a member of this organization, but I stepped down from the post of chairman. I resigned a half year ago. Even now they’re calling me back, making all sorts of offers and promises. But no, it’s been enough. And one more thing, the town council recognized what I’ve done for the town, the huge amount of work, what I had accomplished and I received a significant honor. I was elected, as the only Jew, to be an honorary citizen of Mukachevo.

How did I meet my wife? When I was a factory director, we also had clothing manufacture under us. She [Eva Gajdos] started there at the age of 15, an apprentice. I liked her and began to court her. As a 16 year old she was already my wife. We were married on 31st August 1947 and in October she turned 17. There’s an age difference of 8 years between us. We had a civil wedding, as my wife is a Christian.

After the wedding I moved here. My wife’s parents used to live in this apartment. It’s a beautiful apartment. Everything, even the furniture is theirs. Just imagine, I’ve been director for 52 years. Out of that, I was also responsible for a furniture factory for 9 years, and didn’t take a thing. At first we had only a small room, where my daughter now lives, that’s what we got. Her parents had two rooms, a hall and kitchen. An old lady lived in another room. After her death the city gave us her room as well. After her parents died the entire apartment became my wife’s property. My wife was born on 3rd October 1930. She’s named Eva Gajdos. Her father worked as a waiter and her mother was a housewife. She didn’t have any siblings. They lived relatively well, as her father was the headwaiter in large restaurants. Among others he also worked in the Hotel Star [Hotel Star is the most luxurious hotel in Mukachevo – Editor’s note]. They lived in Beregov, Hust, everywhere where he worked at the time. They weren’t a very rich family, middle-class I’d say.

My wife finished high school at a very young age. It was already during the time of the Soviets. After high school she began to learn how to be a seamstress, so she would have a trade [in the post-war school system of the Soviet Union, it wasn’t unusual for high school graduates to enter a trade school – Editor’s note]. When I met her she was working in a tailoring workshop, for the company where I was director. She didn’t work there for long, because after our wedding she left work and from that time has been a housewife. We had three daughters: Eva in 1950, Silvia in 1953 and Zita in 1955. Now, thanks to God, we have three of everything. Three daughters, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

As a director I was able to give each of my daughters a trade. My goal was, as they say: “To put bread in the hands of all my daughters.” Girls get married, which is as it should be. I always tried, and try even now (with my grandchildren), for the girl to not be dependent on only her husband after marriage. Because not all marriages are successful. That’s why it’s necessary for the girls to have a trade, to finish school. When her husband is good and capable, the wife doesn’t have to

work, but if the marriage doesn't work out, it's good for the woman to have an education too. This way she doesn't have to be dependent on her husband. All three of our daughters finished school. The oldest, Eva, finished teacher's high school and now works as a nursery school teacher. Silvia also finished teacher's school and after that university. Now she works as a schoolteacher. After finishing high school, Zita registered at the university in Lvov and graduated as a fashion designer. She works in Kaposvar (Hungary) for a company as their head fashion designer. She's been living in Hungary for nine years now. At first she worked in Budapest, but then when she met her husband, she moved to Kaposvar. Her husband is the director of the textile firm where she works. His name is Szigeti and he's Hungarian.

Eva's husband is from Lvov. He served as a soldier in Mukachevo. They met and he married her. Her husband worked in a furniture factory. At the same time, with my help, he got into university and also finished it. He worked as a furniture designer, but unfortunately died around five years ago. He was named Kaprovski. They had two children, Oxana and Natasha. They're both already married. I've also got great-grandchildren. Oxana, just like her mother, finished teacher's high school and then also university. Natasha also finished teacher's high school in Mukachevo and this year [the 2005/2006 school year] will also finish university.

Silvia's husband, Stefan Guarag also graduated from university in Lvov. He currently works and a physical education teacher. They have one son, Alexander. In the beginning they lived with Stefan's parents in Mukachevo. Because Silvia didn't get along with her mother-in-law, she and her son moved in with us. She and her husband don't live together. We brought up Alexander. Today he's 29 years old and is a small businessman.

I didn't bring up my children as Jews. Judaism is inherited from the mother. Because the mother of my children is a Christian of Hungarian origin, she brought up the children as Christians. To tell the truth, I didn't even want them to be brought up as Jews. They know I'm a Jew, my wife's parents knew it as well. In fact, that's why they also agreed to their daughter being married in a civil ceremony, because I'm a Jew. But I've always observed my religion and my family supported me in it. My wife always prepared what I asked her to. When I was fasting, they let me be. They respected my faith and do so to this day. Actually, before our wedding my wife used to go to a Roman Catholic church. When she married me, she stopped going. She did still celebrate Easter and Christmas, but she didn't go to church, and neither did our daughters. Nobody. Out of our entire family I'm the only one that goes to church (synagogue).

During the time of the Communist regime I didn't always go to synagogue, as I was a member of the Communist Party. It wasn't until the creation of free Ukraine in 1991 [Ukraine gained its independence from the Soviet Union on 24th August 1991 – Editor's note] that I began to again visit the synagogue daily, at that time people no longer cared about religion. Up until then they suppressed religion! I hadn't led prayers for sixty years, and I'm still able to do it. Services during the week, that's nothing, but on the Sabbath, that's music! Everyone wonders how it is that I'm able to manage it at the age of 83. During Communism I prayed at home. I didn't observe the holidays like I do now and I didn't keep kosher either. During the high holidays, though, I did go to the synagogue and ate there, because they had kosher food there. During the holidays they always served kosher food at the community, dinner and supper.

I read a lot – regional papers, Kiev papers, local papers, everything. I also very much liked to read books. I was mainly interested in books about management, but as well I liked Hungarian novels. My favorite author is Bagajev. He's a very good Russian writer, he's written nice books. As far as Hungarian authors go, I liked Mor Jokai very much. We have a lot of his books at home. While there wasn't TV, we used to go to the theater and the movies. Once we got a TV, we still went to the theater once in a while, but not to the movies very much. As they say, the TV occupied us fully.

I worked a lot. I never had my own car, but when I was a director, they gave me a government car. I always spent my time off with my family. We would go out of town, because Ruthenia is a beautiful place. There were beautiful places for recreation not far from Mukachevo, about 18 kilometers. We would always go there. In those days people still worked on Saturday, only recently, from Ukraine's independence, do we have two weekend days – Saturday and Sunday. Before there was only Sunday. My hobby is soccer. That's my passion. I played in all matches. When we had a meeting and at the same time a league game, I rather went and played soccer, it kept me pretty busy.

I had many friends. I met regularly with the director of a tobacco factory and the director of the movie theater, who was named Molnar. Another of my friends was Mr. Bilinec, also a director of some company, and the mayor in those days was also one of my friends. We would get together at either my place or theirs. Usually we played chess. On state holidays and birthdays we mainly met at the Star Hotel, but also in our apartments. I never had a conflict due to my Jewish origins. On the contrary, they respected and greeted me. For 48 years in a row people elected me to the town council.

I didn't react in any way to the creation of Israel. I don't have any family there. I don't have any family anywhere abroad, not even in Israel. Nowhere. I never thought of emigrating. I've never been in Israel either. Before 1991 I used to visit the West, I was in Austria and Hungary. I was there both during the war [World War II], and after. They respected me very much, and always, when the first party secretary – Emilio Vas – he was the first party secretary in Mukachevo and at the same time a very decent person. Always, when they sent a delegation to Presov, Kosice, Budapest and Moscow, he would put me in the delegation. I helped the town a lot, as I already mentioned, I was the director of a construction company. The situation was such that there was no place left in town to build, so they started to build apartments on the outskirts. But there were these buildings, one and two-story which had been built by the Czechs [this means that they were built when Ruthenia was part of the First Czechoslovak Republic – Editor's note]. I knew that those buildings had strong foundations, so one could add not only one, but even two or three stories. I suggested to the city, and to the party as well, that we should do this. At that time schools in the city taught in two shifts, because there were so few schools. One shift wasn't enough, and even two were completely packed. So I suggested that we build another story on the school and children could then attend in one shift. Various documents about the building were needed for this, building plans and so on. Project planners arrived from Uzhorod. They uncovered the school's foundations in several places in order to look at them and measure them. There are 17 schools in all in Mukachevo, but only two are ones that were built by the government. The rest are older. We built additional stories on 14 of them. We also rebuilt the Star Hotel, we built a soccer stadium, a library beside the Roman Catholic church. The library was small, like a village library, so we added two more stories to it. Now it has mainly books in Ukrainian, but you can also find Hungarian and Slovak books there.

There are about 10,000 Hungarians in the city, but I don't know their exact number. There are still Hungarian schools, even nursery schools. You won't find Hungarian Jews here, they only speak Hungarian [the interviewee meant to say that most Hungarian-speaking Jews in Mukachevo don't identify themselves as Hungarians, but as Jews – Editor's note]. There are many Russian Jews. They speak both Russian and Ukrainian. They came from all over Russia, from many Russian towns. They served here as soldiers and then stayed. Many were already born here, or their parents moved here. This was still during the time of the Soviet Union. Not all Russian Jews go to synagogue. There are those among them, mainly the young, that don't observe any religion at all.

Our synagogue stands in Beregovskaja Street, at No. 3. After the war there was only one Jewish community in Mukachevo. Around 700 to 750 of us returned [after the Holocaust], in the meantime the older ones have died, many emigrated to the USA, Germany, Israel and Canada. Today about 750 Jews live here. In 1952, or 1955, the religious community asked Kiev to send us a rabbi. And they did. Rabbi Hoffmann arrived. After his arrival Chaim Hoffmann founded a kitchen for poor Jews. About 30 Jews regularly visited the synagogue. In the beginning Rabbi Hoffmann behaved well. Slowly, though, he began to institute things in the synagogue that we weren't used to. This led to the community splitting in two. About 12 to 14 people who participate in prayers daily stayed with the rabbi. Now they pray where the kitchen used to be. Our religious community – under the leadership of chairman Leibovich – has about 25 men who regularly attend prayers. We pray where the Torah is. Many Russian Jews who don't know how to pray live here. A large majority of Jews don't participate in prayers. They only go to synagogue during the high holidays. Rabbi Shapira's grandson, Rabinovitz, had prayer books specially printed so that beside the Hebrew prayers there's a Russian translation, so they could read it. There are few of us that know how to pray properly [meaning to pray from Hebrew prayer books – Editor's note]. There's only five of us. Of these five, only three know how to lead prayers, Mr. Leibovich, Weider, who was born in 1922, and I. Leibovich leads prayers during the week. I lead prayers only on Friday evening, Saturday, and on other holidays. I also have to note that in Ruthenia it's only in Mukachevo that there's a synagogue where there are prayers every day, morning and evening. In other towns people go to pray mainly on Friday evening, on Saturday and holidays. We pray, morning, evening, every day. When our chairman, Leibovich, is away, I lead prayers. Shapira's grandson, Rabinovitz, who lives in the USA, is constantly helping us, whether it's with prayer books or supporting the kitchen, where they cook daily. We have a beautiful kitchen. He sends us money, and when necessary, he sends us bocherim from a yeshivah for the high holidays.

I actively participate in the life of the religious community, because I'm the deputy chairman of the community. I also lead prayers, meaning I'm a cantor. We don't have a rabbi, but I know as much as a rabbi, because I studied it. So I participate in prayers as a cantor. Thanks to the synagogue I have friends to this day, because we often meet there. One of my very good friends is Schneider, who was born in 1922, and who I knew even before the war. We attended synagogue together as children. Another is Ocsi Job. I see them every day. Most often we lead discussions on how Jews live in Israel. It's horrible, because there isn't any hope that there will ever be peace there. How much terror exists in the world.

Nowadays I don't go on holidays any more. I've only been to visit my daughter in Hungary. At that time she was still living in Budapest. Thanks to God I see my grandchildren and great-grandchildren every day. Everyone except for my daughter Zita lives in Mukachevo. Because it's

the summer holidays [the interview was done in July 2005], my wife is in Hungary with one of our granddaughters who just finished fourth grade of elementary school. They're visiting our daughter Zita, because she promised the little one that she'll take her for the holidays. She's still a small girl though, and so she went with my wife. I speak Ukrainian and Hungarian with my grandchildren.

I was compensated by the Hungarian Republic for being persecuted during the war, because my parents had been murdered. I got 1.5 million Hungarian forints [about \$7,500 USD]. People in Ruthenia don't care any more who is of what religion. Before it wasn't like that. You had to fill in what nationality you were, for example, Ukrainian, Russian or Jewish. You had to have it in your passport as well. Everywhere I had written Jewish nationality.

Notes:

[1] Subcarpathian Ruthenia: is found in the region where the Carpathian Mountains meet the Central Dnieper Lowlands. Its larger towns are Beregovo, Mukacevo and Hust. Up until the First World War the region belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but in the year 1919, according to the St. Germain peace treaty, was made a part of Czechoslovakia. Exact statistics regarding ethnic and linguistic composition of the population aren't available. Between the two World Wars Ruthenia's inhabitants included Hungarians, Ruthenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and Slovaks, plus numerous Jewish and Gypsy communities. The first Viennese Arbitration (1938) gave Hungary that part of Ruthenia inhabited by Hungarians. The remainder of the region gained autonomy within Czechoslovakia, and was occupied by Hungarian troops. In 1944 the Soviet Army and local resistance units took power in Ruthenia. According to an agreement dated June 29, 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the region to the Soviet Union. Up until 1991 it was a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After Ukraine declared its independence, it became one of the country's administrative regions.

[2] Forced Labor: Under the 1939 II. Law 230, those deemed unfit for military service were required to complete 'public interest work service'. After the implementation of the second anti-Jewish Law within the military, the military arranged 'special work battalions' for those Jews, who were not called up for armed service. With the entry into northern Transylvania (August 1940), those of Jewish origin who had begun, and were now finishing, their military service were directed to the work battalions. The 2870/1941 HM order unified the arrangement, saying that the Jews are to fulfill military obligations in the support units of the national guard. In the summer of 1942, thousands of Jews were recruited to labor battalions with the Hungarian troops going to the Soviet front. Some 50,000 in labor battalions went with the Second Hungarian Army to the Eastern Front – of these, only 6-7000 returned.

[3] Shapira, Chaim Eleazar (1872-1937): Rabbi of Munkacs, Hungary (today Mukachevo, Ukraine) from 1913 and Hasidic rebbe. He had many admirers and many opponents, and exercised great influence over the rabbis of Hungary even after Munkacs became part of Czechoslovakia, following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after World War I. An extreme opponent of the Zionist movement and the Orthodox Zionist party, the Mizrachi, as well as the Agudat Israel party, he regarded every organization engaged in the colonization of Erets Israel to be inspired by heresy and atheism. He called for the maintenance of traditional education and opposed Hebrew schools that were established in eastern Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. He also condemned the Hebrew secondary school of his town. He occasionally became involved in local disputes with rival

rebbes, waging a campaign of many years.

[4] First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938): The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

[5] Masaryk, Tomas Garrigue (1850-1937): Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher and chief founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He founded the Czech People's Party in 1900, which strove for Czech independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for the protection of minorities and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Masaryk became the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. Among the first acts of his government was an extensive land reform. He steered a moderate course on such sensitive issues as the status of minorities, especially the Slovaks and Germans, and the relations between the church and the state. Masaryk resigned in 1935 and Edvard Benes, his former foreign minister, succeeded him.

[6] Benes, Edvard (1884-1948): Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later Masaryk's right-hand man. After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935. The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little.

[7] Zionism – a movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel – the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfus, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract „Der Judenstaat“ („The Jewish State“, 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

[8] 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 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 on 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.

[9] First Vienna Decision: On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians. The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 square kilometer of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84 percent of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking.

[10] 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 percent, 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.

[11] Hungarian Constabulary: A member of the Hungarian Royal Constabulary, responsible for keeping order in rural areas, this was a militarily organized national police force, subordinate to both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The body was created in 1881 to replace the previously disbanded county and estate gendarmerie (pandours), with the legal authority to ensure the security of cities. Constabularies were deployed at every county seat and mining area. The municipal cities generally had their own law enforcement bodies – the police. The constables had the right to cross into police jurisdiction during the course of special investigations. The conservative governing structure didn't conform (with its outmoded, strict hierarchical principles) to the social and economic changes happening in the country. Conflicts with working-class and agrarian movements, and national organizations turned more and more into outright bloody transgressions. Residents saw the constabulary as only an apparatus for the consolidation of conservative power. After putting down the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Christian establishment in the formidable and anti-Semiticly biased forces came across as a coercive force able to check the growing social movements caused by the unresolved land question. Aside from this, at the time of elections – since villages had public voting – they actively took steps against the opposition candidates and supporters. In 1944, the Constabulary directed the collection of rural Jews into ghettos and their deportation. After the suspension of deportations (June 6, 1944), the interior apparatus Constabulary forces, sympathetic to the Arrow Cross, were called to Budapest to

attempt a coup. The body was disbanded in 1945, and the new democratic police took over.