

## Childhood Memories from Budapest 1944-1945

Copyright © 2003, Mrs. Susan Winter (née Markovics Zsuzsi)

I will attempt to write down what happened to me and my family between 1944-1945. I am not sure I will succeed because I don't know what are my own memories and what I recall because of what others told me.

On March 19 the Germans entered Hungary, rather Budapest where I lived with my parents and grandparents. The same morning my father went to the Eastern Train Terminal (*Keleti Pályaudvar*) to buy tickets for my mother and I to go to Diószeg, which is today part of Romania, but at the time belonged to Hungary. He thought that it may be easier to survive in a small place than in a large city. I am not sure why he thought so. That was the last time I saw my father. His memory is quite faded, I recall only a few things related to him. At night when I had to go to sleep he read for me from a story book. I think it was always "*Pinocchio*". At the Eastern Train Station there was a "*razzia*", that is checking everyone's papers. Of course, they detained all Jews they encountered. At first my father got to 26 Rökk Szilárd Street, which used to be a Jewish school. From there he was taken to the Kistárca internment camp, and from there to Auschwitz on the first transport from Hungary. As far as I know by the middle of April he was no longer alive.

My grandparents, mother and I remained at 19 Nagydíófa Street. My uncle Hací<sup>1</sup> lived in the same building. Because of laws restricting the rights of Jews we had to surrender to the official government our jewelry and our Orion short-wave radio. Hací helped fill out the papers and meanwhile his son, Loki, played with me. He taught me to play "Person, don't be angry", where the

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg

objective is not to let someone throw you out of the game. Loki came to Hungary from Germany and in retrospect it seems that he was about 13-14 years older than I. It is possible that he was not that much older, since to a 4-5 year old child everyone over 12-13 is an adult. He must really have been a good kid to play with me for many days. My mother was nervous and thank God didn't have time to play with me. I was spoiled and I think that until 1944 I got too much attention. My mother and Hací found an important Fascist lawyer to bring my father out of the internment camp. Of course it didn't succeed, but he brought one letter from Kistárca.

Events happened in quick succession. A big girl became the baby sitter and watched three little girls, including I. Jews had to move out of a few houses. Two older distant relatives, aunt Irén and uncle Izidor moved in with us. My grandmother saw Jews from outside Budapest or from outside Hungary in front of the Kazinczy synagogue<sup>2</sup>. She cried out "*Ribajno Shel Ajlom*" and took a few people into our apartment. One was a dentist, who turned one of our rooms into a dental office. I thought that in my own apartment I can play with whatever I want, which the dentist didn't agree with and I think I got him very upset. Our apartment became a huge dining room, a large bedroom, a salon, a very large kitchen and a tiny maid's room. I no longer recall who was where.

New laws were passed and suddenly there were "Jewish Buildings". The building on Nagydíófa Street became a Christian House. We moved to Wesselényi Street 24. My grandparents were in a small room with their friends, my mother and I in a small room with another family. Now we lived separately, but in the same building. There were many children of all ages. It was never possible to go out to the street because Jews were only allowed out

---

<sup>2</sup> Budapest's main Orthodox synagogue

for an hour or two. We children played in a small place in the stairway.

We started making arrangements to receive Swedish papers. My uncle Miklós<sup>3</sup> lived in Sweden and we were preparing to move there. Occasionally my mother took me to the embassy for some papers. She was spared standing in line. Wallenberg came out of the embassy and with the help of a translator said that the lady (my mother) with the small child should come in.

The summer came. My grandfather used to go out to the cemetery, because he worked there. The number of Jewish dead were on the increase. My mother got a summons and had to go a place I think was called Kisok Pálya. They were interring the Jewish women. Only my grandmother and I remained in the apartment. When I looked out the window grandmother pulled me back exclaiming “*Ribajno Shel Ajlom*”; they are taking the Jews. I saw long lines of people marching with hands raised in the air. They were emptying the houses. The raised hands looked interesting to me.

The bell sounded in the court yard. They announced that everyone should go down. I was urging grandmother, “Let’s go, let’s go!” I was anxious to be able to go out to the street, because I rarely had such an opportunity. The street meant freedom to me. The man responsible for the house came in. He was not Jewish. He put grandmother behind a closet, and took me with him. He told the Fascists that I am his niece and my mother will come for me in the evening. By some miracle I didn’t say a word. The Fascists believed that I am not Jewish. Late in the evening my mother came home. She told us that most women were marched away. Somehow she stayed behind, she was supposed to go back the next day, but there is much confusion and she never returned there. By this time the Fascists ruled Budapest.

---

<sup>3</sup> Miklós Markovics, changed his name to Miklós Fokker in Sweden

We received the *Shluss-Pass*, which was a Swedish protection paper and moved to Pozsony Avenue 4. It was cold and the end of the fall. There were a lot of people living in the apartment. Many, many people. The air attacks and the outgoing artillery barrage<sup>4</sup> from the Danube’s direction were a constant background noise. It was cold and there was almost no food. We ate kosher food also there. My grandmother made “beggar soup”: hot water, salt, red paprika and a few caraway seeds. It was amazingly good.

They only allowed old people out to stand in line for bread, about every three days. The news was increasingly bad, the people standing in lines were often shot one after another<sup>5</sup>, just for “fun”. The problem was that this was reality and not just a rumor. Next day grandfather took his winter coat and together with two other old people wanted to go for bread, because hunger is a demanding master. Sometimes Jews gave their lives for a piece of bread. Mother and grandmother jumped at him like two vultures to remove his winter coat. Grandfather was very embarrassed to be terrorized like that by two women. The others in the apartment announced that they are not giving us even a morsel of bread because we are not going out to get bread. As far as I recall, in the end only one person went out and never came back.

Young street kids knocked on the door, looking for anyone who escaped from the army, and were looking for healthy women to clear rubble from bombed out buildings. Of course they were also looking for jewelry. Three young street urchins entered. Mother hid me behind her back. Suddenly I came forward and started to talk.

- What is that?

- This is a weapon, but you are too small and don’t understand that there is a war.

---

<sup>4</sup> the Germans were firing toward the approaching Red Army

<sup>5</sup> mostly by the Hungarian Fascists

- Yes I do (I responded), and you are also children, only older.
- Tomorrow we will be on the battlefield and will fight for Hungary, while the cowardly Jews are hiding.
- I am not a coward.
- Maybe, but you are only a baby.
- I am not a baby!

Then they sat on the floor and explained how to use the weapon, where is the bullet and where they plan to go to battle. The time was up, the bell sounded again and the street urchins left. They didn't hurt anyone and didn't take anything from people in our apartment. The child in them awakened, which was more interesting to them than playing grown-up. Often everything depends on a little luck.

They are emptying the Swedish protected houses and those who live there are taken to the Danube to strip and die in the cold river with a bullet in the back of the head.

Mother is teaching me an address. She makes me repeat it. She is teaching me that when we get to the corner I should bend down, should tie my shoelace and run in the opposite direction. This sounded very bad and I didn't feel like doing it, but in the end I promised to do as she asked.

The day arrived. They are emptying our building. I was a bit happy to be out of the apartment. We are walking toward the Danube in the middle of a bombing raid. The Fascist-brothers jump under various building entrances – they are afraid of the bombs. Mother, where should I go now? – I ask. Mother quickly grabs me because the Fascists are changing the direction of the march. We avoided the Danube ceremony, there is no cold river today. There is, however, a cold street. It was a very cold winter. We were walking by the Klauzál Square – corpses were lying in piles. There was a huge number of dead. It looked very strange.

- Tell me mother, these people are sick? (Somehow I didn't want to know that people are dying by the millions in the war, mostly because they were born as Jews. Mother quickly calms me that these people were in an accident.)

- Should we call the ambulances? (I quickly continued the aimless dialogue.)

- Others already called them. (Continued my mother, as expected.)

We got to Wesselényi Street. I saw our old house. Some type of commander started screaming and spoke to us in a very ugly manner. I recall my grandfather starting to respond, but grandmother and mother quieted him. Suddenly he felt sick and sat down on the ground. Later, when he got up, his walk was very unsteady and he was never healthy again. There were a huge number of us in the basement and lice, hunger, typhoid everywhere. We went up to our old apartment. There was no one in the large room, because it was ice cold and there was no window due to shots and explosions. A few of us went up, maybe 10-12. There were many people in the tiny maid's room and in the small room, because it was warmer there. Only in the large room was the window missing and our group of 10-12 people occupied it. 3-4 very nice Zionist young men came to help us. They brought two mattresses from somewhere and a huge tin sheet to cover the window. This way the wind was not blowing in and we were also somewhat protected from incoming bullets. This is how we passed the last ten days. I was mostly lying down and didn't eat at all. Then the first Russian soldier arrived and life started again.

After the war I was always waiting for a just punishment for the Fascists, but somehow that never came. It didn't depend on me. Since childhood I believed that if someone throws a stone one must hit back with a half a brick. There is no forgiveness for someone who hates and it doesn't pay to politely explain to such a person that what he did is not nice. If someone hates I hate them back

twice as much. Perhaps because I lived thru the Shoah and that didn't leave anyone unaffected and without leaving its imprint.