

Interview with Mrs. Edith LOGAK on October 7th, 2015, Paris, France

WAV file M4197009

1 hour 23 minutes 39 seconds

WAV file M4197010

27 minutes 41 seconds

Edith LOGAK (née SCHMELCZER) was born on December 25th, 1935, in the town of Janoshalma, not far from Szeged, the second-largest city in Hungary to Saloman SCHMELCZER (born in Janoshalma in 1902) and Clara ROTH (born in Transylvania in 1909). Saloman and two of his 9 brothers ran a small wine-producing and distributing company. Saloman's mother and his brothers and their families lived in a large complex of buildings, all attached. The SCHMELCZER's were extremely pious and practiced a strict Orthodox Judaism, whereas Clara came from a more modern Jewish family.

Madame LOGAK does not remember attending school before the war started in 1940. She lived a sheltered life with her extended family. She remembers that a non-Jewish maid watched her father hide valuables under the floor boards during the war and she felt anxious and fearful of her.

There was a one-room school house for the Jewish community and Edith enjoyed attending. Her little sister Marta, who she adored, was born in 1942. Marta suffered from some sort of deformation and her leg and hip needed to be encased in a plaster cast so that her bones would straighten properly and that she could walk. A non-Jewish doctor took the baby to a hospital in a larger city (it was probably Szeged) so that this could be done because, at that point, Jews were not allowed to travel. The cast had to be replaced every three months as the child grew.

In May, 1944, the entire family was rounded-up to be sent to a ghetto in Bacsalmas. Edith remembers that people were packed in railroad cars for hours, waiting for the convoy to leave the station. Edith's uncle Szmuel was no longer with them because he had been sent to a forced-labor camp. His wife was giving birth to a son and she and her mother-in-law, Edith's grandmother, stayed behind. Saloman found a way to get them and bring them to the station. The soldiers guarding the trains said that they should just get into any of the freight cars, that they were all going to the same destination, but Saloman remembered the number on the side of the car where he had left the others and banged on the doors until they opened them again. Therefore, the family arrived in Bacsalmas together, where they stayed 2 months.

One day, probably late June of 1944, the family was put on a train for Strasshof, a camp near Vienna. Eichmann had offered to spare 1 million Hungarian Jews in return for goods and equipment, including 10,000 trucks. (The deal ultimately failed, but 21,000 Jews were sent to Strasshof and most survived.) This was a sort of transit camp.

The family, including Edith's grandmother and aunt, with the children, were then sent to Lundenberg, which was considered Austria at the time, but was actually in Czechoslovakia. Saloman was the leader of a group of workers and was well-respected. Apparently, Edith's older brother Imre, who was 12 at the time, made friends with the local peasant and Roma communities, and they gave him food.

However, a terrible incident sticks in Edith's memory – her little sister Marta's cast needed to be changed, so they sent her to some Austrian hospital. The doctors said that that they were not going to waste X-rays on Jews, so they simply put another cast on, which turned out to be painfully tight. The child was in misery and Saloman had to cut the cast open. To this day, Marta limps.....

Sometime during the spring of 1945, the Jews in Lundenburg were put on trains going west again, but the trains were immobilized as Allies destroyed the rails, as well as the trains themselves. Locked inside the cars, the Jews could not take shelter from the bombs like the German soldiers. Edith remembers that thunderous air raids passed over them 9 times. The Jews were taken back to Strasshof.

After a few days, the German guards fled and the prisoners left their barracks and headed toward the bombed railroad cars, where they found food and clothing meant for the German troops. The Germans returned after a few days and told the Jews to leave because the Russians were coming and there would be violent combats.

Saloman found a lame farm horse and a wooden wagon and loaded their possessions on it. The entire SCHMELCZER family headed toward Bratislava, the closest city, on foot.

They eventually returned to their home in Jarosalma and Szmuel returned from forced labor, too, but now, the family had to deal with a new type of persecution. They were considered “Jewish bourgeois oppressors” and the children did not have the right to continue their education. They were relegated to Jewish schools where a Mr. Hefkovitch taught all the students. There were regular visits by the Hungarian state academic inspectors to make sure that the proper Stalinist version of history was being instructed. Edith was an exemplary student and her essays were even cited on the occasion of Stalin’s birthday.

Although she and her brother were good students, they were not allowed to pass the baccalaureate exam and go to the university. Imre eventually enrolled in a rabbinical school, the only option open to him. Both he and Edith escaped to France, travelling without proper authorization. Edith stayed with a relative in Paris and attended the Sorbonne. She met her future husband, Dr. LOGAK, on an outing to the country with other Jewish students.

Eventually, Saloman and Clara brought Marta to Paris because she missed her brother (Imre) and sister (Edith). They ended up staying in Western Europe and starting a new life. Saloman and Clara eventually moved to Antwerp, where an Orthodox community welcomed them.

Edith married and has three children and several grandchildren. Her husband still practices medicine in Paris.