

GABOR MARKUS
MARKUS-GABOR
BORN IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY 1922

Gabor Markus was born into a Jewish family that was very proud of their Jewish identity; his grandfather offered him \$ 0.50 for every fight in school with a student who called him a dirty Jew. They had only a loose religious background, although they had religion in school as a regular subject. He had a big Bar Mitzvah and even preached twice in the synagogue. However generally, the Jews, particularly the middle class, tried to assimilate into the Hungarian culture. Life was reasonably peaceful until Hitler started to encroach on the neighboring countries. The Hungarian Jews knew what was coming, not from newspapers but from friends and relatives in other countries. His father was a director of the British-Hungarian Bank in Budapest, and he also had a younger sister.

After graduation from high school in 1939, he could not enter the medical school in Budapest because of the limited Jewish quota ("numerus clauses"). For a while, he worked in the pathology department of the Jewish hospital and then entered the medical school in Szeged, where Jews often were beaten up but not as bad as in nearby Yugoslavia. March 1944, the Germans entered Hungary. All Jewish leaders were arrested including his uncle who was a commercial leader. His father escaped arrest. A few months later, the Germans instituted a curfew, and the Jews had to wear a star, but there was nobody to protest to. The German army and SS troops were all over and arrested not only Jews but also socialists and liberal newspaper people. They had complete dossiers on everybody.

He wanted to leave Szeged, a small town, where hiding was not possible, and go back to Budapest. This was difficult because Jews were not allowed to travel. A Lawyer friend got him a travel permit (the same as for a prostitute) and took him to Budapest. On the train he encountered many nasty remarks. Antisemitism always had been widespread in Hungary, and the Jews never felt completely at home, This was quite different from the atmosphere he later encountered in the United States.

In Budapest, it was dangerous to go out, but one SS man told him: "it won't last much longer". However, things got worse. Jews were taken to a concentration camp near Budapest, and there were rumors that they would be sent to Israel, but nobody actually went. Then things got easier and people could just leave but in October, the SS came into the camp and shot some people at random.

He walked home and heard on the radio that the Governor of Hungary, Admiral Horthy, had declared that the Germans were a fraud and that the Hungarians should resist but was arrested immediately. The new regime and lowest-class street gangs made things worse. On October 15, 1944, all Jews were put into camps. The Nazis gave the Jews 5 minutes to get ready, and they were marched to the large camp ground previously used by the boy scouts. There he found his sister but she disappeared with his mother, while he stayed with his father. The Jews were taken to the Eastern front and had to dig ditches against the Russian tanks but they came too fast and went right through.

They slept in barns and had little and miserable food, and many came down with dysentery. There was a rabbi who held Friday night services. His father managed to obtain a chicken from a farmer, but people started to die. There also was one episode where he was in danger of being killed by the Germans. This went on for about one month. Then they were to be deported to Germany and marched to Budapest where he escaped with the help of a pediatrician friend. He got false papers under the name Arnold Hollander and met a courageous relative who had false documents as a journalist for a Nazi paper. This friend took him to the Convent of the Sisters of Social Service. There he found his mother, two cousins, one aunt and an uncle. His sister stayed with the lawyer who had previously brought him from Szeged to Budapest, while his father had become one of the many "Hungarian refugees" who had no papers and had come to Budapest in flight from the Russians.

The convent was founded and run by Margaret Schlachter, a feminist and the first woman member of the Hungarian Parliament. She tried to help the Jews and went to the Pope to prevent deportation of Slovak Jews. She and other sisters saved about 900-1000 Jews although some were caught by the Nazis and shot.

Some countries, such as Sweden, Switzerland the Vatican and Costa Rica distributed passports that were honored by the Germans although it was known that they were false. He did not learn about Raoul Wallenberg until much later.

He stayed in the convent for several months, and the sisters gave a lot of consolation. There was no pressure to convert, although a few did. Around Christmas, they were liberated by the Russians. Then he was arrested by the Russians but released as a "doctor". He met some classmates from the medical school and they all looked for their families. He found his parents, grandmother and sister.

After 25 years in Buffalo, he learned through Mrs. Bridged Murphy, wife of Dr. Murphy from Roswell Park Memorial Hospital, that Sister Margaret Schlachter also had come to Buffalo and died there. He wanted to nominate her as a Righteous Gentile but found out that someone else had already done so long before and that a tree had been planted in Israel in her honor.

His message is that there is something about the race and traditions of the Jews that lives on. The Jews are here to stay.

He had told his story to his family but never wrote it down. It's now on this tape. His is a rare case in that everyone of his family survived, and he feels no bitterness at this time.