

SUMMARY:

Veronika Varga (née Roth), born in 1921 in Hungary, near Kisvarda, speaks about her childhood, her father's work as a bank manager and his sudden death in 1928; moving to a new house (Horthy 28 in Kisvarda); her extended family and schooling; having an ordinary life in the pre-war years and early 1940s; the Jewish community of Kisvarda; their disbelief of news or personal reports of antisemitic actions elsewhere; her marriage in April 1944 to a member of the Hungarian army, a "sad wedding" as carts bringing people from the country to the new ghetto passed by the window; gendarmes seizing her mother's house, just inside the ghetto perimeter, the following day and moving more people into it; the brief, six-week-long existence of the Kisvarda ghetto and cruel treatment by the gendarmerie; deportation in June 1944 to Auschwitz, where her mother and grandmother perished; conditions in camp; being selected for a work detail; being taken to Birkenau; being disinfected with other women; traveling to Stutthof and their quarters there; living in a tent at Ollec; doing hard labor during a cold winter, digging ditches for cables, and her role as Blockälteste; the Germans fleeing in January 1945 and her escape with the woman who was Blockälteste for 50B; staying in various houses as they made their way out of Poland; walking and riding in wagons and Russian trucks; searching for her brother, Ivan, at a camp in Krakow; going to Red Cross in Kosice, Slovakia and learning her husband, Imre, had survived; returning to Hungary and reuniting with Imre at his house in Nyíregyháza; visiting Kisvarda only to see her father's grave; the birth of their daughter, Zsafia, in 1946; losing everything again, this time to the Communists; changing their surname to Varga to obtain visas; and immigrating to Australia in 1958. (Near the end of the interview, she displays two documents, a permit to travel through Poland and a Red Cross paper from Czechoslovakia to facilitate travel.)

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She agreed to make this testimony on the urging of her daughter, so her grandchildren would know her story. "I did it for love because it hurts me to think about it, to talk about it; I did it to please them." A recurrent theme is her difficulty remembering details of her early life and family because, she said, she was the only survivor among them and had no one over the years to reminisce with and keep those memories fresh. Another motif is her survival in the camps, which she attributes to the fact that she was alone and had no one to worry over, and being alone, she also did not worry about her own fate.

A note on the surname Varga: Her husband's name was Imre Weisz or Weisse miller*. When they sought visas to Australia, they encountered difficulty. On the advice of friends who had emigrated and changed their last name to the more Hungarian "Varga," they did the same, saying the two men were brothers. A record of their April 10, 1958, arrival in Fremantle on the Toscana is located here. (The L. Varga at "Melbourne 50, Glenhuntly, Eldwood," mentioned in the document may be that friend/"brother." The Vargas lived with their friends for two years. There is a Glen Huntly Road in the suburb of Elwood.) At the time, Veronika was 37, Imre was

53 and listed as a businessman, and their daughter, Zsofia, was 12. In the interview, Veronika mentioned they had been married 51 years in 1995.

* Indicates not positive of name identification. Time stamps are included in transcript, attached.

CHRONOLOGY:

- Veronika (Vera) Roth born in 1921. Brother Ivan born 1924.
- March 1928. Veronika's father (Miksa or Miklos Roth?) dies while building a snowman in the garden. He was a bank manager. Her mother raised the children in the new "modern" house she and her husband had been building when he died.
- Attended Jewish school. Matriculated in 1939. She did not go on with her education but learned dressmaking "really just for fun, to keep busy, do something." By the time her brother graduated, in 1941 or 1942, "they weren't taking any Jews" in university and he "went to learn a trade."
- Circa 1937, Veronika's mother remarried. Veronika referred to her stepfather fondly as Samu bácsi. A veterinarian, he was "very respected in town, even to the last minute, even with the yellow star on his coat. They take his advice, are not ashamed to go with him."
- From 1939 to 1944, Veronika described "life like usual," going out with friends, buying in shops, visits from her grandmother in the winter. Heard reports on radio and from "Slovak girls" who were hiding but didn't believe them, thought "this can't happen with us."
- April 19, 1944. Veronika was married in her family home to a man (Imre Weisz/Weiszmilller?) 17 years older because her mother thought she would be safer. Few people were present because travel was not permitted. Carriages were passing by the window with people being moved from the countryside to a new ghetto. "It was a sad wedding." Veronika's great-grandmother (grandmother?) died that day.
- April 20, 1944. Gendarmes took all furniture, "took wedding ring that was on my finger one day," moved more families into the house, which was just inside the ghetto at Horthy 28. About 30 people were living in the house.
- June 1944. After six weeks in the ghetto, all were transported to Auschwitz. Veronika's mother and grandmother were sent to their deaths. Veronika was sent to C Block.
- Taken to Birkenau. Arrived Cobercurny? Then in big room at Stutthof? with a sawdust floor for a few days, then arrived at "working place" peasants said was called Ollec?. Put in circus-like tent "and that was winter." Guarded by Wehrmacht, "much nicer than SS, more human," and dug in field, ditches for cables, tanks. Vera is named Blockälteste.
- January 1945. Gestapo runs from Russians. Veronika ran away with girl who was Blockälteste for 50B, went to a house where only the servants remained.
- Dates unmentioned. Arrived at Bydgoszcz?, told Germans were parachuting in, hid, then stayed in another house, working for a woman there. Took open wagons, Russian trucks, but mostly walking. Went to camp (near Krakow?) looking for brother, Ivan, found man who said her husband was alive and had arrived back home in October. Didn't stop in her own home, but went straight to Nyíregyháza? and her husband, who had his house back, and rebuilt his business with a partner.
- 1946. Daughter Zsofia born.
- 1958. "Communists take away everything again." Family, taking name Varga, immigrate to Melbourne, Australia.

PLACE NAMES (see attached transcript of narrative for time stamps, as many of the names here are phonetic approximations or based on tentative research. Kisvarda verified through research on family and the JewishGen ghetto history included with transcript):

- Likeavido,* Hungary (father was bank manager there; the Roth home before moving to new house in Kisvarda)
 - Kisvarda, Horthy 28 (street address for house Vera lived in from age 7; on inner edge of ghetto)
 - 15,000 in village where she lived; nearly half Jewish, was a Jewish community, “Kalitzia in Hungary”
 - Mother’s grandmother lived near Mischgourz? Mittgosch? Miskolc? Mizocz? in a little town where they milled flour. Was also home to a Hungarian freedom fighter named Rag?
 - Husband (Imre Weisz/Weissmuller?) lived in a town 45 kilometers from Kisvarda (Nyíregyháza?)
 - Ghetto was on a square between four streets, and included a synagogue. Czielegusa? (“very Jewish street”), Horthy street.
- <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Kisvarda/kisvardamap.jpg>
- Koschistza? Kosice? Wagon (train?) stop on way to Auschwitz; also where Vera went to Red Cross after war for news and obtained some money.
 - Bydgoszcz?, town reached by Vera and other prisoner en route from labor camp
 - Auschwitz, Birkenau, Stutthof, Ollec (sp?). Unclear where the Nazis took Vera after Birkenau, but there is a record in the Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names of a Vera Weisz née Roth, born in 1921 and from Kisvarda, among Stutthof inmates.

FAMILY NAMES:

- Veronika (Vera), b. Sept. 24(?), 1921, d. ?
- Brother, Ivan, 2½ years younger (born 1924), locksmith apprentice? (Geplak. tan.)
- Mother, Roza Barany Roth Burger. b. Nadudvar 1896, d. 6/2/1944, according to list of murdered persons.
- Aunts: Mother Rozi’ or Roza, had two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Theresa. They both had two daughters.
- Mother’s parents were Gyula (deceased before war?) and Karolina (Lina), née Klein.
- Father (Roth, first name unknown, perhaps Miksa or Miklos?) had one brother, president for the synagogue in his home town.
- Stepfather Samu Burger, veterinarian, born 1881
- One male second cousin in America
- Aunts and cousins “didn’t come back.”
- Husband, Imre Weisz/Weissemuller?/Varga, had at least two sisters
- In the camps, “I changed my name, too. Once I was Rot, once I was Weisz, once I was Doolga.” She was called Vera by her brother and that is the name on the pre-deportation record.