

## **Judy Racz (interviewed in 1997)**

### **Summary**

Judy Racz [nee Szabados?], born in Szentes, Hungary (approximately 150km southeast of Budapest), in 1940, describes: being born an only child into a comfortable middle class Jewish family; her mother's family being Sephardic and her father's family being Ashkenazic from the north of Hungary; her mother's name being [Agnes Filady]; her maternal grandfather name being [Filady Dazsu]; her father, named Georg [Szabados], being from a poor, hard-working family; her paternal grandfather being named [Armin Szabados], but having changed his surname from [Schwartz]; not being affected by the war for a long time (since Hungary was not occupied by the Germans until 1944); her maternal grandfather owning a small paper shop in Szentes; how on a hot day her grandfather removed his jacket with a yellow star, someone reported it, and he was taken away and never seen again; her father being taken away for labor service, driving a truck in the Hungarian army for a unit that removed mines, and being one of only two survivors of his squadron; she and her mother being taken away much later to Szeged (approximately 53km south of Szentes) and living briefly in tents in a transit camp; being taken by train headed to Auschwitz but being diverted to Mannersdorf (near Vienna) because the rail lines had been bombed; her maternal grandmother attempting suicide (gassing herself) when she heard that her daughter and granddaughter had been taken away; her mother working in a factory in Mannersdorf; surviving on extra shares of bread and sugar given by other prisoners because her mother offered to clean the toilets; shortly before being liberated by the Russians, their camp commander obeying orders to transfer all prisoners to an extermination camp but sending them on foot instead of on trucks, so that by the time they arrived the extermination camp was deserted, thus sparing their lives; returning to Szentes but her parents divorcing after the war because her father had developed a relationship with another woman, not knowing if his wife and daughter had survived; her mother taking over her grandfather's shop, but business being poor; going away to a Jewish boarding school in Budapest when she was just six years old because her mother had to take care of her grandmother, who had become quite ill; her parents both remarrying after their divorce and each having a son with their new spouses, providing Judy with two half-brothers; her mother becoming an active Communist and ultimately giving up the paper shop to the Communist government around 1951 or 1952; her mother and stepfather selling their house in Szentes, moving to Budapest and finding work, but divorcing around 1953 because their money had run out; losing touch with her religious identity and eventually converting to Catholicism in the mid-1950s; growing to love science, determining to become a physicist, and attending a boarding school to support her ambition; being present for the start of the 1956 anti-Soviet revolution in Budapest; being denounced as a Jew in public by a complete stranger (indicating lingering anti-Semitism), thus prompting her mother to decide they would leave Hungary, declaring she "had no place in this country anymore;" escaping Hungary's closed borders into Austria; agreeing that they both had better prospects by parting ways; her mother emigrating to Israel (where she again remarried and had a third child) while Judy, with much effort, managed to gain entry to Australia; being placed with a loving Catholic family in Melbourne and attending a convent in Camberwell, where she studied chemistry and learned English; upon matriculation and confirmation, deciding to become a nun but ultimately leaving the convent as she began to value her Jewish identity,

while still embracing her Christian faith; attending university and falling in love with Joseph Racz (also from Hungary), getting married within a year; maintaining and developing strong relationships with both of her parents and their respective families; she and Joe having three daughters in quick succession while she worked as a teacher; settling in the outskirts of Melbourne; taking up painting as a hobby when her daughters were young, developing her skill and painting fulltime once her children were done with school, creating works based on religious, scientific and musical themes.