

RG-50.493.0059

Summary

Elizabeth Marika Frankl (née Stein), was born on July 21, 1931 in Budapest, Hungary. She had a close, happy family before the war that included her mother, father, and younger sister. Her father and mother worked in a small factory or workshop that made auto parts, while a nanny took care of the children. Her father's name was Sandor Stein, her mother's name was Unla (?); and her sister's name was Eva. She had a large number of relatives, most of who lived nearby. There was a large concentration of middle-class Jews in her neighborhood. Until the spring of 1944 she went to a Jewish school, played piano and liked sports. She described her parents' religious affiliation as Reform but "traditional", observing all the holidays and lighting candles on Friday night. Relations between Christians and Jews seemed fine, though she believed there was an underlying antisemitism.

Although there were anti-Jewish laws passed in 1942, Ms. Frankl's life did not significantly change until March 1944 when the Germans arrived in Hungary. Jews were concentrated into certain houses, though not in a ghetto. Because her father owned a factory that was useful to the Hungarian army her family was allowed to stay in the factory, actually a small workshop, which was under a house. The family stayed there for quite a while. Her father was sent into forced labor. In October 1944 the Horthy government was overthrown and Hungarian fascists took over. This was when they had to leave the factory, but when the family was forced out her father joined them at the train station. She then described moving to a Christian house of a policeman her father knew. The family stayed there with false papers until their hosts became worried for their own lives. Her family then moved to another family's house, a former worker at her father's factory, and they stayed in the basement with that family and many others, Jews and Christians, who came to shelter there from the continual bombing. Elizabeth noted that her faith in God and her belief in an afterlife kept her from becoming very scared.

When the Russians came it was at first wonderful, but they stole watches and other possessions and tried unsuccessfully to rape Elizabeth, who was 13. Eventually life got better, they moved back to their apartment, her father reopened his factory, now serving the Russians, and she finished high school and then college, where she met her future husband. In 1955, his business was confiscated by the communists, and then the Hungarian Revolution came in 1956. She found that there was a lot of antisemitism in the opposition to the Russians, and it was then that her family decided to leave. Her sister and husband left first to Austria, then Elizabeth and her husband went to Switzerland. After a few months she decided to come to the United States. Her sister's family and then her parents joined her and her husband there. Elizabeth's adjustment to the U.S. was relatively easy. Both she and her husband got jobs as technicians – he was a chemist, she a physicist. But she still felt like a foreigner and culturally different. At the time of the interview in 1993 she was very worried about what was going on in the world and, especially, the increase in antisemitism in Hungary.