

Interviewee: Judith Klein

August 24, 2009

Interviewer: Karen Codner

Judith Klein Farago (Tove Leah) was born in Berehova (Berekszaz?) Chekoslovakia, on October 10, 1925. Father's name was Vikter(?) and mother's was Brukhe. Father was a soldier in WWI, serving in Pershe (Judith's mother's town.) They were married in Budapest, by the maternal granduncle, who was a well-known doctor, Dr. Koperai.

How the parents met. The parents had a huge clothing store. They also had a vineyard, and prepared kosher wines. They exported to Austria, Hungary and more, in addition to the sales to restaurants. Father and brother went to synagogue every Friday night, bringing back a few Yeshiva students home for the Shabbat meal. On Saturday morning, the rest of the family joined the father and the brother too. The children played in the courtyard, waiting for the parents to finish praying. Father went to study Torah every day at 5 in the morning, at 7 went to religious services and then to the store.

There were 5 siblings, but only one brother. The brother was taken to the army at age 18, but it was really to work. The sister murdered in Auschwitz was her best friend. She was killed 2 weeks before liberation. For many years Judith was taunted by other children for not being able to talk normally. She did it at the age of 13. Her brother always defended her from the taunters and hitters in the school and at home. Her only consolation was to go up on the roof and talk to God. Many times she missed school because of that. When they came looking for her from the school, mother took them to the roof. Parents never punished her. Despite the frequent absences, she was one of the best students. She was better in the real subjects.

Meals. (Koshering the meat on their own.)

Vacations by the thermal baths.

When she was in the 2nd grade she was kicked out of school.

Hungarians entered the city. The Jews were moved to a ghetto. Father had gone on a shopping trip when the Germans entered the town. He was asked for his papers and, once they showed he was a Jew, he was taken in. He was returned home on the second day of Passover. Many had converted away from Judaism under the promise they will be spared. Father thought that the Holocaust was divine punishment for so many Jews turning away from Judaism. Later, when all the Jews were gathered prior to deportation, Judith was happy to have her parents for herself, without working, and getting the full attention. A maternal uncle who was a manager in the Rockefeller Foundation (?) had sent them all tickets to the US in 1938 but father refused waiting on news from his son. They also turned down an invitation by the rabbi to move to Israel in 1939, on that same basis and also because they could not abandon all their businesses there. The rabbi took to Israel all of his yeshiva students, about 40 of them.

They were in the ghetto and one morning the Germans came for them, put them on cattle trains and took them to Auschwitz. It was 1944. The train journey. Arrival in the camp. The Nazis mistook Judith and her sister for twins, but they were saved at the last minute when someone else pointed out they were not. They were put in lager A. They were sent to work in a quarry. Judith stole some potatoes and was caught by the Wehrmacht. Her punishment was death but she was spared. She only asked to wash up before her death sentence because she did not want to appear in front of God while unclean. Finding out about the gas chambers from a landsman who worked there. He was convinced he will be put to death too at the end since he witnessed the murders by gas. The roll-calls. Burying her sister in the cemetery. Liberation. Meeting Francois Mitterrand after liberation, who kissed her hand. When they found out he was not Jewish, Judith and her sister told him they cannot take him home to meet their father, so he left very sad. She was worried that father will find out she was kissed. She witnessed a dog eating a baby and other atrocities. They were there for 3 weeks.

Return home. They found Russians living in their home. She refused to stay there, and ended up sleeping in the street. Meeting her future husband when sleeping in the streets and marrying soon after.

After liberation, in 1945, Judith and her new husband moved to Hungary. Husband was a journalist. While there, they met a couple who advised them to emigrate to Chile. Husband agreed, but reluctantly at first.

They moved to the States in 1970 seeking medical care for her husband who suffered from cancer. He died after one year. Judith lived in the US 1970-1996.