

## Marita Pietsch Beck

Born : Budapest, Hungary on 1/ 9/1936. Father was Gentile, Dr. in Political Sciences.

Mother: Maria Magdalena Beck, Jewish. Converted to Catholicism at her wedding. Her Parents married against the approval of both families. Up to 1944 she did not know she was Jewish. She went to mass every week (Saint Esteban Church) to pray. Had a 1<sup>st</sup> communion.

In 1944 gentile help was denied for Jewish families. One Sunday morning her parents sent her to buy bread. Upon returning while crossing an Avenue she heard a horrible noise and for the first time German tanks appeared, Germany occupied Hungary by military forces. I did not understand what was happening as in those years Parents did not talk about these subjects in the presence of children, nor about money, business or politics, children stayed in their room with the Governess. However on this occasion they told me that the German occupation happened as the war had reached the Hungarian border and Russian troops were advancing, so the Germans decided to face the East and defend Hungary. I suspected that some unusual events were taking place and on one occasion I was walking with Mother and heard a newspaper boy shouted: THE WAR< THE WAR....I asked Mother what is WAR, She said: you see the Danube river and many boats on it, well they will not be able to be on it and bring the peanuts them, but you will be able to eat walnuts. So the explanation of war for a child was PEANUTS. But there was another signal that something was happening, I had a German Governess, she only spoke German, and I saw her one day with some black cartons and placing them on the windows, I helped her and asked why she was doing this. She said it was because plane would come to bomb our areas and we have to make sure no light is seen from the apartments. Children accept things as they are. My Governess had to leave, being Gentile she could not work for a Jewish family anymore, I was sad.

The situation in Hungary was not too bad as the country was a friend of Germany, as was Austria, which had been invaded and annexed. The first years were quiet, the war was far away, Jews lived quietly though there was antisemitism which appeared in the papers, but I did not read them, and other events of which I was completely unaware.

When I was born my Father had Tuberculosis and died when I was 2 years old. I became sick and was in a Sanatorium up to 4 years of age. So I started my life Fatherless, and my Mother could visit me only on weekends. I felt almost like an orphan. At age 4 I lived with a widowed Mother and her Brother in a small apartment. I was happy to be with my Mother who soon afterwards met my Stepfather Peter Von Nagal and married a year later. He was good to me, belonged to a Jewish family, his Dad was very religious and helpful, and he took an apartment in a very good neighborhood close to the Synagogue. It was a nice place 2 blocks from the Danube, 3 blocks from my school, and close to a shopping district. We had a cook, a cleaning and laundry maids and after the birth of my brother in 1940 a nursery maid. I had a French teacher who I did not like, she was very harsh and was replaced by a German one who was kind and took my brother and I to play in the park. Again she had to leave (gentile-Jewish question).

I was a good student but not great in Math. On the first day of school I met a Jewish girl and we became good friends, this continued for 4 years, we walked to school even with snow. Life was quiet, I did not know anything besides my school and the presence of Tanks, and the fact that we were Jewish but that I should not mention it. In 1944 they did not let me back in my school because she was Jewish. Also there was bombing every day, beginning at 10pm, had to lie down dressed, and I had with me baby bottles and diapers, Mother had a third child named Andrea. I finally understood war: sirens, run to shelter, hearing of explosions, etc...Once a bomb fell on the building across the street and after the all-clear sounded I looked out and saw the building in flames. Mother wanted to improve things for her children and called my paternal Grandmother who lived out of town. She came and Mother ask her to help her Granddaughter, to which she answered in a very dry way: I do not hide Jews. I still carry in me this terrible hurt. Mother continued to look through my Father family and found one of my uncles who would take me in, he lived on a farm in the eastern part of Hungary, close to the Russian border. They had a child of about the same age and they played well together. Once this kid asked her if she wanted to see the Russians, she said yes and he took her to the river where hidden in the grinery they could see across the way armed Russians. A few days later on October 1944 Russian troops were a few kms. from their village and they were ready to leave taking their property and even their animals. As war was getting closer they were going to Budapest. They had to make a large round so as not run into Russians It took them 1 week to arrive instead of the usual 2 hours. Finally they arrived at her Parents home. Their own family home was on Buda, they had to leave the horses in the street and also the big trunks full of their things (understanding that they could be stolen). Thinking what alternative was possible Marita's Mother mentioned the courtyard of Marita school, so it was done, but it was a bad experience for them. Next day they were allowed to cross into Buda and reach the small apt they had. She stayed with them 3-4days but told her Mother that the kid was misbehaving and treated her badly. Her Mother told her to take the local transportation and that she would wait for her at the other end.

Before that time they had a census of every building, how many people were there, how many gentiles and so on, also when Jews or Gentiles left. Mother looked and found a nice apt in another building, where her grandfather (from her stepfather) happen to live. Nobody thought they were going to be deported; the end of the war was getting closer. However, Jews had to wear the yellow star, could go out at given times from the house marked with the star of David. Her Mother had her documents of conversion and her daughter had her document identifying both Parents as Catholics, so they could go out as non-Jews, and her Mother was the one going out to shop for food, she was very brave.

On October 15, 1944 a change in the government occurred, and deportation of Jews to Auschwitz began. A younger brother of her Mother was in the resistance and told them what to expect. He had obtained several places where to hide after paying for them, Marita was placed at the apt. of the ex-wife of an uncle, she was Gentile. She lived in the same building where her maternal grandfather was hiding. She was told to act as she did not know him. But when she saw him the first time she said Hi and hugged him, He answered: who are you? I realized I made a mistake.

When leaving the apt. my Parents took very few things, mainly money, they left like they were going for a short walk. My uncle told my Mother that somebody was coming to take my 4 year old brother who would be taken to a place close to Austria, imagine my Mother handing her son to an unknown man in

the middle of the street. My sister born February 1944 went with Mother to the apt. of a maid who had a small infant and occupied the apt. of my uncle. My Dad hid in the apt. of a Gentile Female (whose husband and 2 boys were Jewish), they had to be silent throughout the day, no noise at all. The woman went to work, but the money paid for hiding helped to feed everybody. I did not know, nor should I know where everybody was hidden. I lived in constant fear, 600.000 Jews were taken by trucks, trains to Auschwitz and died there. Many Jews in hiding survived.

January 12, 1945, a group of Hungarians Nazis with an Officer came to our building and ordered everybody down to check documents, as informants had told that there were hidden Jews. I was scared and so was my Aunt who was panicking looking for her document. We had a dog and because he started to bark they shot him, I was running going downstairs while crying. It was winter, it was cold and there was snow in the courtyard. I was told to say: Father is dead and Mother is at Debrez, and being so frightened I reversed the statement to Mother is dead and Father at Dobrez. The officer who repeated the question and got the reversed answer said: AH! You are Jewish, go to the back wall (they use to take those people to the shore of the Danube, shoot them and let them fall into the river). Her Aunt was also sent to the back wall, as she was hiding a Jew, and she was there with her rosary praying.

Then a MIRACLE happened. A plane passed over dropping 2 bombs on the building, everybody trying to hide, the doorwoman took my hand and hid me into a sideboard in the kitchen and told me to keep very quiet, which I did from 10am to 4pm, I was frozen by then. The doorman took the Nazis into the kitchen and gave them strong liqueur not to take out but to drink right there and to get them drunk.

My Grandfather did well. He was helping as a Gentile, with the wounded when the Officer told a young soldier to take him to the men's room to check if he was circumcised. He gave 2 gold pieces to the soldier ( he happened to have them on him), and the soldier told that he was OK. Nice people saved us.

Russians and Germans fought street by street. On January 14, 2 more days hunting for Jews. The Officer in charge of the hunt in our building was judged and Grandfather was one of the witnesses.