

RG-50.944.0002

Recorded on March 16, 2016 in Budapest

Summary

Miksa BRAUN, born on March 28, 1926, Nemesszalók, Veszprém County, Hungary. He was three years old when his family moved to Jánosháza, a small town in the same county. His father was a salesman who did not have his own shop but sold goods from a horse-driven cart at markets in the area. His mother was a housekeeper. He had two younger sisters, Klára and Edit (born in 1929 and 1931). His parents were not well off; they were renting their home but always had enough food and other basic necessities. Jánosháza had a sizeable Jewish population. It had a synagogue and a small Jewish school; grades 1-6, in one classroom and with one teacher. He attended that school. The names of his schoolmates: Lówinger, Holcer, Weisz brothers, Preisz, Schwartz, Benedek. He then became a tailor's apprentice of Károly Bodorkos. At age 17, he became a journeyman tailor. He was not religious, had mainly Christian friends who were also apprentices. They did not care that he was Jewish, and stronger boys (butchers) protected him, took him dancing, etc. He played cards with them in the pub for money. When he was 17, he and his friends were arrested after a night's game. He was ashamed of himself.

Within a week, in March 1943 he left town, securing a tailoring job in Budapest. His boss was József Zsankó. He earned little but also had his meals in lieu of payment. He visited his family in fall 1943, which became his last visit with them.

In 1944, after the German occupation, when everyday life became more difficult for Jews, two old friends came from Jánosháza and offered to hide him. He lacked the courage to accept and did not want to endanger their lives. Soon thereafter he had to enlist for forced labor in Jászberény. He learned about it from posters. He went together with his uncle, László Gutman, who gave him an extra blanket. He was in forced labor battalion 101/III/23/ 1st platoon. The unit was transferred to Szolnok by train but pushed out to the nearby town of Ujszász to make room for a German supply train, which was immediately destroyed by Russian [in fact: Allied] bombing. His battalion had to stay in Szolnok to restore the tracks and train station. They were treated well and had enough food (chicken paprika almost every day). From Szolnok, they marched to Budapest. They were housed in different schools, later in the Albrecht Barracks, doing all kinds of work in the city. Once, he had to go to the Buda Castle and transport paintings to a German boat on the Danube. This was after the Szálasi (Arrow Cross) coup. Once, he also had to go Ceglédbercel, where he drove a cart, delivering goods. After he returned to the Albrecht Barracks, one day he found his father in the courtyard. He had just been transported from the ghetto in Sárvár. After being rounded up, his family was taken to Sárvár from Jánosháza. He arranged to take his father into his battalion. Shortly thereafter, they were entrained together at the Józsefváros train station. Before that, his platoon commander told him that they will be taken out of the country and that he could hide him. (After the war, he unsuccessfully tried to find the platoon commander to thank him). Since the platoon commander could not hide two people, and he did not want to leave his father, they were transported together to

Austria, which took several days in an overcrowded wagon without food. From Austria, they marched back to the Hungarian border town Kőszeg where they had to dig fortifications. They were placed in a brick factory and slept on the snowy ground. His father became very weak. They continued marching along the border to Bozsok, where his father died. He was buried there. The forced march continued to Mauthausen and from there to Guns kirchen. Wehrmacht men guarded them. He knew that if he fell behind he would be shot. He heard shots from the back, but never looked. There was no food, no heat. In Guns kirchen, they worked on the camp's construction and lived in makeshift tents. People died all the time. He and some other prisoners collected snails and grass and cooked them. He wanted to live. He was 36 kg when the Americans liberated him. He was transferred to a POW camp in Wels for recovery. He had the opportunity to emigrate to the U.S. but wanted to return home.

He went back to Jánosháza but found his home empty. It had been robbed by Ukrainian troops. Nothing was left, no memory of his family. His mother and two sisters were deported to Auschwitz and did not survive. Later, four or five people came back from Auschwitz to Jánosháza. He returned to Budapest and resumed his work with his previous employer.

His uncle also returned but then emigrated to Israel. Another uncle survived but emigrated to the U.S. from Wels. He also has a cousin, Manci Koch who survived and left for Israel. His late wife also had relatives in Israel.

In 1948, he married Magda Zinner. They lived in the Népszínház Street. Their first child died, the second, a daughter, Klára Edit - names of his late sisters- lives in the U.S. with her family. He used to visit them, but now his daughter comes to visit him every year on his birthday. At the time of the interview, he was expecting her to come for his 90th.

He is satisfied with his life. He opened his own business at age 22, and had a very successful tailoring shop in Csanád Street. He had a lot of friends, loves soccer. He travelled a lot. He was three times in Israel. He went to the Mauthausen Memorial Day every year. He wanted to visit Auschwitz, but never managed to get there.