

RG-50.944.0006

Recorded on May 6 and August 23, 2016

Summary

György Sándor, born on October 24, 1932 in Budapest, in an assimilated Jewish family. His grandfather changed his name from Schwarzenberg to Sándor. His father, László Sándor, born in 1902, was a traveling salesman, rarely at home. His mother, Sára Ney, born in 1903, made artificial flowers and had a small shop in Sütő Street. They lived in Hajós Street until 1942, when his father was called up for forced labor. Then they moved in with his maternal grandmother, Irma Ney, at 29 Andrassy Street, a big villa on one of the most distinguished streets in Budapest. His grandmother and great aunt, however, had a modest apartment at the back staircase, and he never entered the front part of the house. His father died already in 1943, in a small village in Russia, but his mother heard it only years after the war.

Jewish religion entered his life when he was not accepted in the local public (i.e. state) school, around 1938, and his mother signed him up for a small school run by the Jewish Community on Eötvös Street. A rabbi taught in the school and the children regularly sang in the synagogue on Kazinczy Street.

In March 1944, after the German occupation, his mother had to close her store and went to work as a custodian and cook for the Jewish Community on Magdolna Street, where, initially and temporarily a small internment camp was set up for Jews caught on the streets by German and Hungarian authorities.

In summer 1944, his family had to move to a Yellow Star House in Dohány Street, where his paternal grandfather, Miksa Sándor, and his great uncle, József Sándor lived. After the Arrow Cross takeover [October 15, 1944], Arrow Cross men appeared there several times and rounded up people from the house. In November, his mother managed to move them to Magdolna Street, which became a Swiss protected house with a Swiss Red Cross sign in front, granting collective protection for the Jews registered at that house. His mother, with the help of one of the Hungarian policemen guarding the house managed to get food and cooked; mainly legumes, and the meat of dead horses. During the siege of Budapest [December 26, 1944 – January 18, 1945], they had to be in the air raid shelter (basement), had no water, electricity, etc. Every time they had to bring water from a well, their life was in danger. On January 11, his mother suffered a serious injury to one leg during an air raid. Because of the fighting she could only be hospitalized weeks later, after liberation, and became an invalid.

On January 18, fighting stopped in Pest. He emphasizes how grateful he is all his life for the Soviet liberation, which he perceives a true liberation from Fascism that saved his life and the lives of Jews in Budapest. On January 18, he returned to Andrassy Street with his grandmother and aunt, while his mother was hospitalized. On the way home, he remembers dead bodies piled up everywhere; civilian and military victims of the siege, whose bodies remained frozen during the extremely harsh winter of 1944/45. Their apartment was intact and they found all their possessions thanks to the Roma family (a famous Roma violinist) who lived on the first

floor. Some members of the Roma family moved into their apartment with the intention of guarding it. There was no food; his aunt, although in bad health, travelled to the countryside to exchange valuables and clothing for food. His grandmother had died in 1945, and his mother was in and out of hospital. His aunt died a couple of years later. At age 13, he began working as an errand boy for the DEGOB (National Committee for the Care of Refugees) on Sas Street, an organization ran by the JOINT to reintegrate Jewish survivors into society, also taking their statements. He does not remember names of refugees, did not hear their stories, and claims that everybody concentrated on their daily survival and future, and not on the past. He received a small salary and, during the inflation [1945-1946] food as well, supporting his mother. Later, his mother, as a war invalid, was allowed to open a tiny tobacco shop close to their home.

In February 1945, he saw the public execution of Arrow Cross members on the Oktogon [Square], a symbolic action close to the Arrow Cross Headquarter [60 Andrassy Street].

He joined the KISZ (Communist Youth Movement) at the JOINT. Later, age 17, he entered the Social Democratic Party, and then, after its fusion with the Communists, he became a member of the MDP (Hungarian Workers Party, the Communist party). He was an active party member, also party secretary at his workplaces until 1956.

1949-1956, he served in the military and became an officer. Later, he became a journalist at *Esti Hirlap* [famous nightly newspaper], and he was also the head of the passport section of IBUSZ (Hungarian Travel Agency).

He married [year ?], his wife was a survivor too, but died at age 60 of cancer. He has one son, born in 1956, two grandchildren and several great grandchildren. After retirement, he began collecting Judaica and traveling all over the country looking for old synagogues. He feels Jewish when he encounters anti-Semitism, which, as he clearly suggested, was the case in 2016.