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**Recorded in two parts on April 6 and December 7, 2016 in Budapest, Hungary**

**Summary**

Dr. Illés DÉSI (born on November 12, 1931, in Budapest). Medical doctor, retired university professor of toxicology, chairman of the Public Health Department at the University of Szeged. His parents were medical doctors as well: his father, Imre Deutsch (1896), was a urologist, one of the founders of urology in Hungary, chief physician of the Charity Hospital (Szeretetkórház) in Budapest until 1944. His mother, Anna Adler (1899), was a dentist, in private practice after his birth. She became chief physician of the Central Institute of Stomatology after the war. His grandparents on the paternal side, József Deutsch, an accountant, and Margit Waltner, lived in Budapest. He often had Sunday lunch at their place. His mother came from a family of rabbis. His maternal great-grandfather was a rabbi in Paks, his grandfather became a rabbi in Kiskunfélegyháza, then in Óbuda, and later he became the chief rabbi of the Rumbach Street Synagogue. He married Hanna Krámer, and had four children. Other family members were also rabbis, the most famous his mother's cousin, Sándor Schreiber, who became director of the Rabbinical Seminary in 1950.

The Deutsch family was religious, keeping a kosher kitchen, which became difficult after the anti-Jewish laws were passed (1938, 1939, 1941), when many Jewish businesses, among them kosher butchers had to close.

His father served in WWI as a first lieutenant, and became a POW in Italy. He was honorably discharged and remained in the reserve. He had to participate in every campaign of territorial gain: in the Upper Region [1938], Carpatho-Ruthenia [1939], Northern Transylvania [1940, for five month], and the Southern Region [1941]. From then on, until the German occupation on March 19, 1944, the family had a relatively peaceful time. They lived at Honvéd u. 22. His parents made excursions with him on the weekends. He has very fond memories of his father. They listened to the German language broadcast of the BBC, socialized mainly with their relatives and other Jewish families, and discussed the war. Sometimes, they also listened to Kossuth Radio, the Hungarian-language broadcast from Moscow.

His elementary school was in Hollán Ernő Street and run by the Jewish community. It was a co-ed school, very unusual at the time. His mother's sister, Margit was his teacher, and one of her cousins, Lili was in the same class. He attended this school until 1942, when he began his studies at the Jewish High School. He attended the first two years there. It offered protection from anti-Semitism. Most of his teachers were old, some recalled from retirement, since younger Jewish men were in forced labor. In September 1942, just after school started, the first bombardment of Budapest occurred: five small Russian planes dropped bombs on the city. Before that incident, there was no blackout order.

In Budapest, he does not remember experiencing anti-Semitic incidents before the German occupation, though he had such experiences while visiting relatives in Paks.

Soon after March 19, 1944, the family had to give up money, jewelry, and possessions, including radio and phone. His parents arranged to have some jewelry and money hidden with Christian patients of his father. He cut out the sample for the Yellow Star they had to wear, and his aunt Bella, the wife of Jenő Lévai, sewed the stars. On April 3, his father had to leave the hospital and was ordered to practice family medicine in a small village, Kápolnok Monostor

(now Copolnic-Mănăştur), close to Nagybánya (now Baia Mare, Romania). He and his mother exchanged letters with him, and his father sent them his salary. His father stayed in the village even after its Jewish population was ghettoized, taking care of the Christian population. In about two weeks, his father, too, had to move into the ghetto. The family tried to free him, but soon he was deported. The local pharmacist sent a wire: "the doctor left the country." After a brief stay in Auschwitz, he was sent to a quarry in Melk, a sub-camp of Mauthausen, where he perished on November 8, 1944. Mr. Dési still does not understand why his father did not go into hiding, as did many of his acquaintances, and why he stayed in the village even after the ghetto was set up.

In June 1944, he moved with his mother to a Yellow Star house at 3 Szalay Street. They shared a five-bedroom apartment – his mother was entitled to an office space to see patients - with the Csekő family, and another man, a relatively comfortable arrangement. Csekő Sándor had a daughter, Éva who was a year his senior. They had a limited time to go out. Once, after visiting his grandmother, he and his mother were briefly arrested by Arrow Cross men. His mother had a small bag of cyanide powder in her handbag, which disappeared after the arrest. When the Arrow Cross began raids, around mid-November, they had to flee. Initially, his mother found refuge with the Arrow Cross janitor of the building, who was in the Communist underground, then she fled to a former patient, a Social Democrat, Máté Belki. Her final hiding place was at the home of Belki's brother, Sándor Szolnoki, and his wife Rózsika, at Váci Street 146. The Szolnokis hid her, the Csekő family, and a deserter for money, which, as Mr. Dési emphasized, was still taking a great risk, since there was a standing order to hang anyone who hid Jews. His mother had a real ID, which she received from a former patient, Irén Szillich (sp?). His mother arranged to have him and Éva hidden with the help of a former patient, a deaconess, in the building of the Scottish Mission, where the Good Shepherd Committee had a shelter for Jewish children. They were betrayed to the Arrow Cross by Christian guards who took the children. He and Éva managed to flee and hide in the building. The deaconess got false papers for them. Eventually, on December 6, they made their way to the hiding place of his mother. The siege of Budapest began at Christmas. They moved to the basement. They were liberated by Soviet troops on January 13, 1945. He had only good experience with them. A major was billeted in their house providing meals for all of them.

After the liberation of Pest, his mother tried and eventually managed to get their apartment back. Most members of their extended family survived the war: his paternal grandfather died immediately after liberation. Arrow Cross men rounded up his maternal grandmother with all the inhabitants of a Swedish protected house and marched them to a brick factory in Óbuda. Three days later, Wallenberg freed them.

In May 1945, his mother got news through Mauthausen survivors that her husband had died. Later, she remarried. Her second husband was Dr. Leo Sinai, with whom he had a good relationship.

After the war, he continued his studies at the nearby Berzsenyi High School, where he was an outstanding student. He mentions two schoolmates and friends, Jews, who, after zealously following the Communist Party line both left Hungary in 1956: Bandi Sarlós/aka Andrew Sarlos, a Canadian financier and Péter Silfen, who practiced medicine in Israel. Initially he was a supporter of the Communist regime, as were most Jews, participating in student activities, but became gradually disillusioned, as were many others.

He went to medical school and graduated in September 1956. He got a position as an assistant in the Pathophysiological Institute of [Semmelweis] University. He had to go for military training in October 1956, which then was upended by the revolution. In 1967, he became section chief in the National Institute of Public Health.

He and others only learned after the war what had really happened to the deported Jews, what had happened in Auschwitz, and other camps. There were rumors about it during the war, but no one really wanted to believe it or could.

His aunt Bella's husband, Dr. Jenő Lévai, was the first Hungarian author who collected a huge amount of documentation and published several books about the Holocaust. As an investigative reporter, he was well known before and during the war. He revealed the corrupt machinations of László Endre in Pest County before the war, reported about the whereabouts and fate of forced laborers, ignored anti-Jewish decrees, risking his life on numerous occasions. When German troops tried to break out of Buda, he accompanied Soviet military reporters as an interpreter.

Mr. Dési was aware of manifestations of anti-Semitism after the war, especially in the immediate postwar era as surviving Jews returned and especially before the death of Stalin when anti-Semitism became official policy for a short while. He characterized the Kádár era as a period when the Jewish issue was passed over in silence. It was discussed informally, but not officially. He did not experience any kind of discrimination in his career.