

RG-50.944.0011

Recorded on December 8, 2016 and January 6, 2017 in Budapest

Summary

Dr. Bálint Füzeki (June 7, 1937, Budapest). His father was István Füzeki (1896) and his mother Livia Kóris. He had a brother, three years his senior, also István. The father was a mechanical engineer who worked in the Delmár Shipping Co., founded by his uncle. The mother spoke three languages, also learned shorthand and typing, but did not work outside of the home before the war. His father and mother were converted Jews; his father was Catholic, his mother Calvinist. His father converted during WWI, for which he volunteered and was decorated for his service. They rented a house in Buda, on Pasaréti Street 35. Every Sunday morning, father and sons went to the nearby Catholic Church for mass.

On one Sunday, on March 19, 1944 they did not go. They saw soldiers in motorcars – it was explained to him that they were Germans – racing down the street. One soldier set up a small cannon in their yard. His father took him to his sister who lived on top of the hill in Szemlőhegy Street and he stayed there with his aunt for a short while. The adults were filled with foreboding, anxiety, and uncertainty in April. He understood nothing, but sensed the atmosphere. His school, on Fenyves Street, closed in April. Soon thereafter his family had to wear the Yellow Star. He did not know that he was Jewish and also did not know what it meant to be Jewish. His parents said that they were not “real” Jews, but “designated” Jews, and that is how he felt that time and all his life, too. His father hoped that his WWI decoration would save him from further discrimination. In June, however, the family had to move to a Yellow Star house, to the Pest side, to Sziv Street 20, into an apartment on the seventh floor that they shared with another couple, the Fenyvesis, and two old women. His father went out when it was allowed and returned with canned and dried food. They lived in constant anxiety.

On October 15 [Arrow Cross coup], they listened to the radio [a hidden one] all morning. His parents and all adults were excited. In the afternoon, his father packed him and his brother up, and without much explanation walked to the Theological Seminary, where a priest opened the gate and took them from their father. That was the last time he saw him. [He cried while recounting this.] The next day, another priest walked with them to another big building, where they stayed for the rest of the war. He remembered a huge dormitory, where they slept in bunk beds. As for food, they had a lot of split peas, beans, and some bread. Nuns took care of them. One of them taught him how to be an altar boy. His mother came sometimes for hurried visits. He learned from her that their grandmother had died during an air raid. After a while, his mother stayed in the same building, but she told them not to call her “mother,” but [aunt] “Ili.” When it was winter, they had to go down to the very crowded air-raid shelter and stayed there until the Russians appeared one day. There was no electricity, and very little water. They used melted snow to wash.

He later learned that the nuns of the Virgin Mary Society (Szűz Mária Társaság) rescued them and it was on Vörösmarty Street 34/a, a building at the back of the infamous Arrow Cross headquarters on Andrásy Street 60. The nuns rescued ca. 50 Jewish boys,

and 20 women. As an adult, he realized that the nuns risked their lives every day when hiding them. In 1988 or 1989, he learned the names of two nuns who were still alive: Mária B. Molnár and Zsuzsanna Ván, and thanked them. He visited them regularly from then on. He also learned that their rescue mission was part of the larger rescue efforts organized by Giorgio Perlasca whom he compared to Wallenberg. [He cried when talking about the nuns and Perlasca, who saved more than 5,000 Jews in Budapest.]

His aunt also survived in a Swedish protected house on Pozsonyi Street. So did a cousin, Márton Tardos.

He remembered the liberation by the Russians as being really freed from the constant fear of death and from the basement where he was always anxious. He was full of lice and scabies, and remembers the bad smell of the ointment they used for treatment. During 1945, his mother learned that his father died in Buchenwald of typhus. Mr. Füzeki never learned why his parents left the Yellow Star house in Sziv Street. His father moved back to his sister to Szemlőhegy Street, where, during a raid in October, Arrow Cross men took him to forced labor in the town of Ercs. He was four days short of his 48th birthday, the age limit for forced labor. From there, he was deported to Buchenwald. Miklós Julesz, a fellow sufferer brought the news.

In 1945, after the war, his mother could not return to Budapest with them; they had no place to live.

His aunt – a converted Lutheran - arranged for his brother to board at the Sztéhlo Institute [32 boarding and day schools founded by the Lutheran pastor Gábor Sztéhlo, who rescued ca. 2,000 Jewish children at various locations in 1944-45, supported by the Swiss Red Cross]. For two years, he and his mother lived in a small house on land that his father owned in the Nyirábrány area, on the Hungarian-Romanian border. His mother found the jewelry that his father hid there and managed to obtain an apartment in Veres Pálné Street 30, Budapest, at the end of 1947. His mother found employment as a foreign-language correspondent. For the first part of 1947, he boarded at a Catholic school in Óbuda, which he very much disliked for its disciplinary atmosphere, but he finished the school year there. In 1948/49, he also went to the day school of the Sztéhlo Institute. Sztéhlo-founded schools were famous for cultivating an inquiring spirit and a humanistic approach in education. Here he felt that he finally came “alive”. The year was formative for him.

He became one of the seven founding members of the Sztéhlo Foundation. Schoolmates were: Bandi Andrásy, Mátyás Sárközi, Ottó Orbán, Tamás Perlusz.

He had a photo of Sztéhlo on his wall; he said it was a good feeling for him to look at the photo, as it was a good and confidence-inspiring feeling to meet Sztéhlo as a child. He emphasized that Sztéhlo rescued Jewish children, not because they were Jewish, but because they were persecuted. Sztéhlo was always on the side of the persecuted and disadvantaged.

In 1948, for political reasons, the Sztéhlo schools ceased to function in their original form.

He went to the public high school in Eötvös Street. After that, he applied to medical school and was rejected twice as he belonged to a politically unreliable category due to his father’s social status before the war. Finally, after many students left Hungary in

1956, he was accepted in January 1957. He became a psychiatrist, because he wanted to help people who struggled.

In 1956, his brother was killed, after being captured as a member of the revolutionary National Guard. In 2007, he put up a plaque in memory of his brother in the big hall of the National Széchenyi Library.

He never considered himself a Jew, only a “designated” Jew. As an adult, he became a nonbeliever. However, he always felt solidarity with the persecuted, whoever they were.

In 2014, he joined the Living Memorial Society (Elevén Emlékmű Társaság), founded to protest the memorial statue that the Hungarian government raised for the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust. The official statue suggests that only the Germans were responsible for the Holocaust while denying the responsibility of the Hungarian authorities. Between May 15 and June 9, 2014, the Living Memorial Society demonstrated every day in memory of the Jews who were deported daily in 1944.