

RG-50.944.0014

conducted on September 22, 2016 in Cluj, Romania

Summary

László NUSZBAUM was born in 1929 in Torda (now Turda), Romania. In the fall of 1940, the family moved to Kolozsvár (Cluj), which was in the part of Transylvania that Hungary reoccupied after the Second Vienna Award. His father was a Hungarian citizen, his mother, himself, and his brother, Sándor, two years his junior, were Romanian citizens.

Mr. Nuszbaum set his own agenda in the interview, concentrating on events that he considered most important to him, instead of describing the well-known events and circumstances that were common experience.

In 1940, he began his education at the Jewish high school that was set up that year in Kolozsvár, under haphazard circumstances but with excellent teachers, who were thrown out of Christian schools or universities in Hungary. The school provided safe haven for him and all Jewish children who were harassed and often beaten up by Gentile boys on the streets. The school had a formative effect in his life. He participated in 11 meetings organized for and by his former schoolmates, who survived the Holocaust and gather from every part of the world.

In 1942, the newly appointed Hungarian judge of the Court of Appeals politely, but in no uncertain terms, told his father that he laid claim to the family's spacious apartment. They had to move to a smaller apartment in the same building. He thought it was characteristic for the time that his father accepted the eviction.

It was another sign of the times that in 1943 his father made him and his brother memorize the addresses of their two uncles in Paris and in the USA, with the explanation that they might need them one day. They had to know them even if they were awoken in the middle of the night. Mr. Nuszbaum still remembered the two addresses. As he explained, his grandfather, a high-ranking military officer of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, let his four sons complete their education abroad: one at the Sorbonne studying philosophy, one medicine in Berlin who later fled to the U.S., one engineering in Prague, and Mr. Nuszbaum's father, economics in Florence. Later in life, he was in touch with his uncles, but declined to emigrate.

In early May 1944, the Nuszbaum family had to move to the ghetto, set up in a brick factory on the outskirts of Kolozsvár. Mr. Nuszbaum met his entire high school there. About 16-17,000 Jews lived under very crowded conditions. The most shocking experience for him was seeing his teachers lining up for the latrine. He said that it shattered his world.

In May 1944, he and his family were in the first transport to Auschwitz from Kolozsvár. Upon arrival, he said, he was dazed and did not fully grasp that he was separated from his mother. He and his brother stayed with their father for a short while, until their father was put on a transport. He could have gone with him, but his father told him to "take care of your brother!" His brother was 13, small and thin. He was consumed by the task of keeping his brother alive. There were regular selections, the biggest at Yom Kippur in October. His brother was also selected, but the gas chambers and crematoria were so full that the selected were kept in separate barracks for a few days. He approached a guard to save his brother, but the guard would only do it if Mr. Nuszbaum could convince someone else to take his brother's place. He had a candidate, but at the last minute was incapable of sacrificing the other person. His brother perished, and his death haunted him all his life. After his brother's death, he was put on

a transport. Fortunately, he ended up in a Junkers factory in Niederorschel, [Thuringia,] Germany, where the Kapo selected all the younger boys for work in the heated factory hall. The Kapo was Otto Hermann, a Communist prisoner. Mr. Nuszbaum, and many others owed their lives to him. He managed to keep them from deportation to Buchenwald in the last week of the war while many other prisoners were killed. Otto Hermann became one of the Righteous among the Nations.

Mr. Nuszbaum was the only survivor in his family. For two years after the war, he stayed with his maternal relatives in Torda. He remembers feeling old for his age and having a constant desire for solitude and quiet. Soon he met his future wife, Szilvia, who became a violinist and played in the Kolozsvár Philharmonic orchestra all her life. He became like a son to his wife's parents, who lost their own son after the war.

The first part of the interview leaves many questions, among them Mr. Nuszbaum's path after the war, unanswered.