

**RG-50.944.0042**

**Cluj, Romania, November 17, 2016**

### **Summary**

Judit Steiner Szabó was born on June 5, 1928 in a small town, Szent Anna (Sfântă Ana), close to Arad, in Romania. The population was predominantly ethnic German, with few Hungarians, even less Romanians, and seven Jews. She was the only Jewish child. Her father, Izidor Steiner was a well-to-do leather merchant with a handful of employees. He came from a large and very poor family. He had no education beyond trade school, but was an autodidact and became a very cultured man. Her mother, Jolán Bárdos came from Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), where she grew up with six siblings. She had a high school education. All her life, Judit was very close to her father whom she called "her best friend." The family was not religious, but celebrated the big holidays and kept a kosher kitchen. They spoke Hungarian at home. They also spoke German, but little or no Romanian (mother). Judit Steiner attended the Romanian elementary school in Szent Anna in order to learn the language of her country. She continued in high school in Arad, but only for a year because after 1940, Jews were excluded.

In fall 1940, Arad and its area was not occupied by Hungary; it remained part of Romania, but after the Fascist Legionnaires came to power persecution of Jews began. Jewish businesses were liquidated. Her father's protégé and shop assistant, Franz Jäger joined and became the leader of the local *Hitlerjugend*. He, in green shirt and a young Legionnaire in white shirt stood guard at her father's store to make sure that no one entered.

After June 21, 1941, when Romania - at that time under Marshall Antonescu - along Germany joined the attack on the Soviet Union, Jews were ordered to "evacuate" overnight from their homes in the villages and go to the county seats, in this case to Arad. The Steiner house was plundered immediately during the night, while the family was still there; people carried away their furniture, household items, all moveable property. Some promised, and indeed returned certain items later. Judit Szabó pointed to the china cabinet behind her, which was the only item that remained from their furniture. An ethnic German bought their house at 10% of its market value. In Arad, they stayed with one of her father's brothers for a few weeks while looking for a furnished room to rent. Later on, they managed to rent a small apartment in the house where her best friend lived. Her father was called up for public work. He worked in different towns, but returned from time to time. Life was hard, because she very much missed her father. Her mother, unable to speak Romanian, found no employment. She did some babysitting for other Jewish families for food and necessities. They did not have to wear the Yellow Star, but could not visit public places. There was a non-accredited Jewish school, which she attended. In 1943, her father managed, through bribery and on the account of his history of TB, to get exempted from public work outside of Arad. He did some light work for a few hours a day. Generally, bribery was the means that everybody used to get restrictions eased. The livelihood of Jews diminished, but their lives were not threatened. She remembered though that the village idiot of Szent Anna, "Pista the Fool" was beaten to death in the insane asylum to which he had been "evacuated."

After Romania turned against Germany on August 23, 1944, a few weeks later, on September 13, 1944 Hungarian troops occupied Arad. Some Jews fled and were killed by the Hungarians. The next day, Jews had to put on the Yellow Star and were ordered to move to the fortress.

They knew that they would be deported. Her father didn't want to comply with the order to move to the fortress. He prepared a hiding place for them, knowing that the war was soon ending.

The Lutheran and Catholic Church leaders, however, intervened on the behalf of the Jews and managed to get the order postponed, first for three days and then for another five days. On the last day, Romanian and Russian troops attacked and, within two days, they had reoccupied the city.

She and her family didn't know about deportations and Auschwitz before the Hungarian occupation of Arad in September 1944.

After the war, they learned that her mother's parents and siblings: Miksa, Nándor, Jenő, Géza, Zelma, and Aliz Bárdos were all killed either in Auschwitz or in Kassa. Géza who married a Christian woman and converted, hid Jenő and his wife, but they were denounced in late 1944. The brother and wife in hiding were shot on the spot, while Géza was stripped naked, doused with water and left outside in wintertime to freeze. The sisters and their families were killed in Auschwitz. Two cousins, young women were sent to Ukraine to serve German troops and never returned. She kept in touch with one cousin, Bandi, who survived forced labor.

After the war, she continued school. In 1947, she finished high school and went to medical school in Kolozsvár (Cluj). She is the first woman to become a general surgeon in Romania. In 1953, she was assigned to a position in Felsővisó (Viso de Sus), in northeastern Romania, where she worked for ten years. Her parents moved with her.

1957, her mother died of cancer.

In 1959, she married László Szabó, a dentist. The same year, her father was briefly arrested because during the war he had hidden some gold coins with the help of an ethnic German neighbor, Mrs Száli Jäger. During the Communist dictatorship, private ownership of all kinds was eliminated.

In 1963, they moved back to Kolozsvár. She had a teaching position at the university and also practiced as a surgeon.

After the war, while a student, she was very enthusiastic about socialism and joined the party. She became disillusioned soon, but remained a party member – silent all the time.

Under Ceaușescu [1965-1989], they went hungry and cold. She operated at 13 degrees Centigrade and most patients came down with pneumonia. There was a shortage of medications and all kinds of medical equipment.

She said that the revolution on December 21, 1989 [date is for Kolozsvár] was "beautiful." She operated all the time in the first days, after many people were killed on the city's main square. She managed to save lives.

Being asked about her experience as a Jew in post-war Romania, she said that she never was promoted to professorship, because she was not Romanian: she was Jewish with a Hungarian last name. She thought that Romanian nationalism played a much bigger role than anti-Semitism in denying her the promotion.

She said that she never really had a Jewish identity, although she never denied that she was of Jewish origin. She joined the Jewish community in Kolozsvár and meets her friends at the community center. She remained non-religious.

Anti-Semitism is still there, but she thinks it is much stronger in Hungary than in Romania.

Her strongest attachment was to her father. At the end of the interview she sang the song, which she wrote at age 13 when her father left leave for public work. She also showed photos of her father and mother.