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July 4-5, 2018 and March 1, 2019, Budapest, Hungary

Summary

Klára Zinner Köves was born on October 14, 1928 in Ujpest. Her maternal grandfather, Adolf Amszter, a shoemaker and his wife, Regina Gottlieb, had three sons: Mihály, Tibor, Andor, and a daughter: Szeréna. Her father, Pál Zinner had two brothers: László and György. László had a picture-framing business and traveled the world, settling in Brazil where he became a well-known sculptor. György had epilepsy and was unable to work. During an epileptic seizure, he was shot in the Budakalasz brick factory just before entrainment [beginning of July 1944]. Pál Zinner and Szeréna Amszter married in 1927. He was an accountant and a lifelong stamp collector. He spoke five languages, corresponded with stamp collectors all over the world, and was chief secretary of the Esperanto Alliance in Hungary. Both families lived in Ujpest. Pál Zinner bought a house at 78 Tél St, with two small apartments, occupying one while the Amszter parents lived in the other. The house had a big yard, where her father had a big L-shaped bunker built around 1942 or 1943, when air raids began. She showed a picture taken of her family in the bunker.

Klára was born in 1928, her sisters Vera in 1930 and Mari in 1938. They were not religious, but the Zinner family was, especially the very wealthy uncle, Mór Zinner (he owned 24 houses in Ujpest, and had all kinds of other business investments). Despite being religious, the Zinner brothers married Christian women. The extended Zinner family gathered for all the major holidays, which Klára described as “very boring” and she “hated” them.

She went to the Dorottya Kanizsai girl school, where she finished eight years. She remembered Erzsí Iszkovics and Olga Goldmann as classmates and friends. Because of discrimination against Jews she was not accepted in high school. For less than two years, until March 1944, she attended a trade school as a private student in Budapest. She said there was a lot of animosity toward Jews in the 1940s; she experienced it in public spaces and in school with classmates. In 1943, her father opened a stamp shop in a very grand location on Szabadság tér 15. He hired a *strohman*, István Csenda to lend his name to the business. He had very valuable stamps. Klára still remembered a small envelope of stamps that her father gave his mother, telling her keeping it very safe, because they were extremely valuable. However, she has never seen the envelope again.

In 1943, her father was called up twice for forced labor. The second time, he had to enlist in Vác and then transferred to the Bor mine (Serbia). He served together with the poet, Miklós Radnóti. The father was shot August 15, 1944, after he bribed his way into the first group leaving for the march to Hungary.

She did not remember the German occupation [March 19, 1944], but remembered that in April she had to wear the Yellow Star. They also had to give up their radio, bicycles, etc.

At the end of April, she with her grandmother, mother, and two sisters had to move to the ghetto. Previously, they left many of their valuables, among them the family silver and stamp collections with their neighbor, Mihály Pap. He worked in his family's shoe business and was in love with Klára. His father was an Arrow Cross member, and hated the Jews. Mihály Pap, however, remained the family's friend and helped all of them, before, during, and after the war.

The apartment in the ghetto where the Zinner women moved in with three other families, was on the second floor of 19 József St. On May 9, she and her sister Vera were sent for forced labor in the cotton mill factory in Ujpest (Hazai Pamutszövő). They were trained to work on the machines and worked regular hours, although Vera was only fourteen. Their accommodation was in a different location, and every morning and afternoon, the Jewish workers accompanied by two guards [she said: Arrow Cross – probably not before October 15] marched to and from work. Some people on the street yelled insults at them, others gave them a piece of bread, fruit, etc. They had little food. Their neighbor, Mihály Pap visited from time to time and brought food. On some Sundays, they were also allowed to leave under guard and go out to the Pap family, where they ate a regular meal. She remembered being together with Zsuzsi Polacsek, Zsuzsa Spira, Éva Bányai, Ági Neumann from the factory.

On July 2, her mother, grandmother, and sister Mari were taken to the brick factory [in Budakalász.] Her paternal grandparents and her uncle György were there, as well as the other uncle, Andor. Andor's wife, a Christian woman visited her husband and daringly smuggled Mari out of the brick factory, hiding her until the end of the war. She thereby also rescued Mari's mother, who would not have survived Auschwitz had she been accompanied by her six year-old-child. She was assigned to work and survived. So did Andor who limped, but was a barber and worked in that capacity in Auschwitz.

Klára and Vera couldn't say good-bye to their mother and sister.

After the day of the Arrow Cross takeover on October 15, 1944, she and the other Jewish workers were taken to the police for a day. They learned about the Arrow Cross coup d'état from loudspeakers in the factory and were very scared. Subsequently, they were allowed to go back to the ghetto to collect their winter clothing. During the summer, the ghetto was hit by bombardment and they had to climb into their former room.

Klára and Vera found two suitcases with their names: clothes and necessities that their mother had prepared for them. For a day, they were marched to the big synagogue on Wesselényi St., then back again to the factory. In November, they were told that they would go to work abroad. Arrow Cross guards marched them the Józsefvárosi railway station where they were entrained. They traveled under very crowded conditions for several days. One of the girls of the factory, Éva Bányai, became mad. She was shot by an Arrow Cross guard and thrown from the wagon. One late night, they arrived in Ravensbrück concentration camp. She was in the barrack with some of the girls from Ujpest, who had also survived. She was sent to a stone quarry where work was extremely hard in the winter. The Kapo was a Polish woman, very cruel, physically abusive. Vera worked in the airplane factory. Once she and Vera witnessed a guard using his weapon. A woman gave birth during *Appell* and did not want to hand the newborn over to the guard who shot them both. She also worked in a building where they sorted all kinds of goods taken from Jews. Food was bad and little, she described it as "swill" and said that bromine was in the food, which made the prisoners indifferent and passive. Many people also died of exhaustion and illnesses. In Ravensbrück., she heard about the gas chambers in Auschwitz from prisoners who were transferred from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück. One such prisoner told her and Vera that their mother was alive.

In mid-January 1945, they were transferred via Chemnitz to Venusberg by train. Venusberg was a small camp for women [subcamp of Flossenbürg that existed between January 8 and April 13/14, 1945], where she was assigned to the kitchen. She attributed her luck to an SS

Oberscharführer who liked her because she resembled his daughter. He showed her his daughter's picture and gave her a chain with a cross that she had to wear. She also had to clean the *Oberscharführer's* room. Because of her kitchen job, she had access to extra food that she shared with her sister.

In April, bombardments began and they had to evacuate the camp. Her sister had typhus, but in a relatively mild form. She was in the *Revier*. When she had to leave for the train, she managed to smuggle out her sister wrapped in a blanket and drag her to the train. They had several days of travel, but the train was bombed and they had to continue on foot. They walked for a day or so, her sister being very weak. Before they left Venusberg, she had made a mixture of margarine and sugar, which she smuggled out of the kitchen and they survived on that. They reached Mauthausen, in terrible condition. She was getting sick with typhus. They were in a huge tent in Mauthausen, open on the sides, getting wet from the rain. The only work they had to do was piling up the corpses, many still frozen and they had to be freed up with a shovel from the ground. She said she was very badly affected by this work. On May 5, they were liberated by U.S. forces.

The Americans transferred them to Gusen, which was turned into a recovery camp. She said that the Americans put them on a diet and fed them very carefully, and gave them distilled water to drink.

An U.S. soldier, Paul Hermann, fell in love with her. He took her and Vera to a friend of his, to a big farm close to Linz, where they were fed very well and helped out on the farm. Since she did not want to marry Paul Hermann, however, she [and Vera] decided to flee the farm. They walked for days through forests where they were frightened by fleeing German SS and military trying to avoid captivity. Finally, they arrived in a big U.S. camp where former prisoners were registered, clothed, and fed, and sent home.

On July 12, they arrived in Budapest. They registered with the Jewish community at Bethlen tér, before going home. Their mother was already in Ujpest with Mari. She was getting rid of the people who occupied their apartment. They received the most necessary furniture from the Jewish community, which was distributing household items from the goods left behind by Jews. Their neighbor, Mihály Pap gave back many items he was hiding for them: the set of silver utensils, the Herend porcelain, vases, and some stamp collections. Family pictures were also returned. Not everything was there. The missing items had supposedly been taken by Russian soldiers. Even the remaining stamp collections, however, were enough to restart their lives and provided their mother with an income.

She and her sister Vera worked for a while in the Pap family's shops and workshops. However, she had no intention of marrying Mihály Pap. In 1948, she found an administrative job with the JOINT in Ujpest. The JOINT provided monthly financial help, clothing, medicine, etc. for survivors. She worked with another young woman, Ágnes Kulka. Through her, she met her future husband, György Köves. He belonged to the Friedman Circle, a Jewish cultural association in Ujpest, which she also visited. He and his two brothers had a small carpenter factory with 14 employees. They married in April 1949. Her husband's business was nationalized. Her daughter was born in January 1950 when they had nothing, except the apartment at 6 Liszt Ferenc St. Her husband became employed in his trade in a state-owned enterprise and she became an accountant in the central office of the largest food store chain

(KÖZÉRT). She was a trade union functionary, and in the mid-1960, at the urging of her boss, she joined the Communist party. She did not like its ideology.

Her husband was religious. For his sake, she celebrated the major Jewish holidays: she cooked the traditional meals and went with him to the temple in Ujpest.

She said that her Jewishness was not a problem after the war. Many Jews left from Ujpest either for Israel or the USA. They were frightened by anti-Semitism, which surfaced from time to time. She said that at the time of the interview, currently, it was really bad.

Answering the question whether she talked about her experiences during the war, she said that people did not ask, and she and other Jews did not want to talk about it either. They could not “digest” what had happened to them, they stored it deep in their memory. She said that the interview was very upsetting for her, and after the first part of the interview she could not sleep all night.

She has a daughter, grandchildren, and a great-grandson, Samu, with whom she likes to play.

On March 1, 2019, in the third part of the interview, Mrs. Köves presented three silver objects that she donated the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: a silver goblet with her name that she received when she was born, a silver pencil that her father gave her when she went to school for the first time, and a silver cigarette holder that her father gave her at age 15, with the comment that she can smoke when she turns 18. She confessed that she began smoking in the camp, because it gave her relief from the daily misery. She gave up smoking a few years later. These objects were hidden by Mihály Pap.