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Summary

Klára Országgh was born in 1932 in Budapest. Her father, Sándor changed his name from Österreicher to Országgh. Sándor's father had a law degree, and he, the son received the best education: he had visited one of the best high schools in Budapest, studied law and economics at the university, and also studied in Leipzig and Oxford. He became the director of the Seeds of Monor, Sowing Seeds Improvement and Marketing Inc (Monori Mag, Vetőmag Nemesítő és Értékesítő RT., which belonged to the Baron Hatvany family's conglomerate of businesses.) His office was on Rákóczi St.

He had a much younger brother, Pál, a chemist, who moved to Nagyvárad (Oradea, Romania), had two children and immigrated to the United States.

Her mother, Margit Kovács (1901) came from a family of landowners in Zenta (Senta, Serbia) and her maternal grandfather was said to have been the wealthiest man in Zenta. Their landholdings were in Ada. She had a sister, Erzsébet who married a Yugoslav diplomat and had three children (Todor, Cveta, and Andrea), who later studied in Budapest.

Her mother was educated in part in Budapest, where she lived with her aunt and met Sándor Országgh at a dinner party in 1921. They married in 1928. Their first child Marika was born in 1928, and Klára in 1932.

They were not religious. The parents converted to Catholicism, and their children became Catholics as well.

Her family was wealthy. They had a villa at 32 Szemlőhegy St., in the elegant Rose Hill section of Buda; living room, dining room, salon, kitchen, the cook's and maid's quarters on the first floor, and four bedrooms and two bathrooms on the second floor. There was housing for the caretaker, István Matyók, and a garage. Her father also owned a four-story apartment house at 11 Fillér St, nor far from their family home, which he rented out. The caretaker was Vilmos Rétlaki.

Klára had a nanny, and later a young Swiss woman who taught her German and French. Classical music, literature, and the arts were part of her family's life. They socialized with neighbors – mostly, but not exclusively Jewish neighbors, and others from her father's social circle. She mentioned the Fejér family (deported, his wife and daughter returned), the Szijas, and Földeák families.

She attended elementary school in Áldás St. Since she was a sickly child, her parents sent her to the middle school close by run by Ursuline Sisters. She was very unhappy in the school.

There, in 1944, she was called "Jewish" for the first time in her life and was punished for it; she and another Jewish girl had to wash the classroom floor at the end of the school day to atone for the sins that the Jews had committed against Jesus.

She did not remember the German occupation, but did remember that she had to wear the Yellow Star and found it humiliating. At age 12, she did not understand what was happening. Her parents shielded her from the world.

On April 12, 1944, the Gestapo came for her father. He asked the officer whether he could eat lunch with the family before being taken away. She said that her father's arrest followed the arrest of their neighbor and her father's friend, [Károly] Rassay, an opposition politician. First her father was interrogated in the Hotel Majestic [Eichmann's headquarter, 12th District, Karthauzi St. 4/a], later transferred to the Pest Regional Court and to the internment camp in Kistarcsa. He was deported to Mauthausen where he worked in the quarry. Klára stated that her mother sent packages to her father, one even to Mauthausen, where, unbelievably, he received the package.

Her mother, she and her sister remained in the villa for some months. Her mother had to turn in jewelry, money, and shares to the authorities, and had dared to hide only a few pieces of her jewelry with trusted Christian friends. In the summer they had to move to a Yellow Star house to Pest, at 4 Alkotmány St., occupying one room in a four-bedroom apartment. Klára said that was the first time that she became acquainted with Jewish religious customs through the other families who lived in the same apartment. She remembers the Kóródi family (whose son András became a famous conductor) and the Spitz family.

She was very afraid of the bombings and anxious because of the uncertainty of their lives. Because of her father's fate, her mother knew about concentration camps, and they feared being deported.

After October 15th, when the Arrow Cross came to power, her sister, 17 at the time, was forced to line up one day and had to leave on one of the foot marches of women to the western border. Somehow her mother managed to get a papal *Schutzpass* which caught up with her sister in Szombathely, but the Arrow Cross company commander tore it up. Her sister was deported to Ravensbrück, Henningsdorf [sub-camp of Ravensbrück in the greater Berlin area], and Sachsenhausen. She was liberated by the Soviets, but she escaped with eight Belgian male prisoners. She stole SS guard's clothing and shoes, and, after getting a *laissez-passer* pass in Berlin, she somehow made her way home in July 1945.

After the Arrow Cross coup her mother found the Yellow Star house unsafe. Still in October, she managed to place Klára as a boarding student at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Catholic convent school in Váci St. The school had 25 Catholic boarders and was hiding an equal number of converts. She was cut off from her mother and her previous life. Her mother explained to her that it was in her interest and gave her a small notebook with names and phone numbers of reliable friends who could be contacted in case of an emergency. Klára said she had very good memories of the nuns. They were kind and caring. She fondly remembered Mater Ola who consoled her at night. They had regular schooling and a strict schedule, which distracted her from her worries. She felt safe in the convent, but it lasted only two months. The Arrow Cross district headquarters was across the street from the convent, and someone informed the Arrow Cross that the nuns were hiding Jewish children. The nuns were warned of an impending raid and tried to bring the children to safety. They asked the children to provide two names and phone numbers of persons who could be contacted on their behalf. Klára, after some consideration first provided the name Miksa Fék, "Uncle Maxi," a former associate of her father.

He came for her and reunited her with her mother, who was in hiding. As it turned out, in late October Arrow Cross men ordered her mother with all the inhabitants of the Yellow Star house to the courtyard and set them on a march to the Brick Factory of Óbuda. Her mother saw an open gate of an apartment building and, risking her life, stepped out of line and ran into the courtyard of that building. She tore off the Yellow Star and tried to find a place to hide. She went to their former home on Szemlőhegy St. and Fillér St., asking the caretakers to allow her to spend the night, but both refused. She visited her husband's associate, Miksa Fék, who told her that she could use his empty apartment in a 9th District apartment building, Páva St., but not without false papers, because the caretaker of the building belonged to the Arrow Cross. She asked one of the lawyers of her husband, Dr. Fekete, for help. Within three hours, he had all the necessary papers ready. Dr. Fekete did not accept any money for saving her life, neither at the time nor after the war. She became Julia Batiz of Mátészalka [eastern Hungary] who fled from the Soviets and Romanians and was officially a refugee. The refugee certificate had her photo. She was hiding with this certificate at 2/a Páva St. until the end of the war. Her situation became more precarious when Klára appeared, because she was a single woman, according to her new ID, and Klára had no false papers. Initially, they did not go to the air raid shelter, but when the adjacent building was hit, they had to. They explained their situation by saying that Klára was a niece sent over from Buda to visit her aunt, but was stuck there because of the fighting. They survived and were liberated by the Soviets in January 1945. They were hiding from the Soviet soldiers for a while as well. When it was relatively safe to leave, they went to her father's firm, *Monori Mag*, and left a message giving the Páva St. address. Her father and sister went there too and they found them. Klára said that she did not recognize her father when he showed up one day and called her mother that an old man was at the door. Her father did not wait for recuperation after being liberated by the Americans in Mauthausen, but went home with the help and intervention of Rassay. He was emaciated, not much over 40 kg. Her sister was in amazingly good shape, very much in love with a Belgian prisoner. She used her SS clothing, and especially the shoes for a long time. Their home was badly damaged by bombardment. They were not able to move in. They moved into an empty apartment in Fillér St. Her father went back to his job. Her sister finished high school and studied at the College of Horticulture. She worked all her life at the research institute in Martonvásár. Klára continued her schooling at the prestigious Baár-Madas Calvinist high school for girls. She had very good teachers (remembered Boriska Ravasz, the daughter of the Calvinist bishop, who taught history and Latin, and Mária Csányi, the physics and chemistry teacher). She was a good student. In 1947 – the last good year, she said – they moved back to the second story of their home. Her father had the villa renovated by selling one ring that her mother managed to hide. They rented out the first floor. Klára had a circle of friends formed of the other well-to-do neighborhood teenagers and schoolmates: Zsuzsa Bókay, Mária Markovics, Vivian Vágner, Zsuzsa Asbóth, Éva

Schüller, Gábor Bedő. Her best and lifelong friend was Zsuzsi Weissburg. What had happened during the war was not discussed.

In 1949 [after the Communist Party came to power] her father's firm was nationalized and he was pushed out of his job: one of the dockworkers in the factory was appointed as director. Her father learned Russian within a year and became a translator at the National Translator's Bureau (Országos Fordító Iroda) where he worked all his life. In 1950, after finishing high school, Klára's university application for archaeology was rejected because of her family background. She got a job at a big factory in shorthand and typing, skills that she learned at her father's insistence during her high school years. In June 1951, within 24 hours, her family, each with 350 kg had to leave their home. Their villa was assigned to Julia Kenyeres, the director of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) at the time. Her father became apathetic, barely able to put together some family papers and photos. They were interned at the Pacsó farmstead close to the town Mezőberény, about 200 km southeast of Budapest. Three other persons from Budapest and the peasant family shared the house. They spent two years there. Her sister married in December 1951, Dr. István Maninger, a medical doctor and was allowed to go back to Martonvásár.

Klára worked in the fields. She became a cigarette smoker, because 10-minute smoking breaks were allowed twice a day during work. Her parents, mainly her mother, helped out around the house. Her father was writing a detective story, which has never been published.

They were released in July 1953, during the political changes after Stalin's death, when the new Hungarian Prime Minister, Imre Nagy, abolished all internment camps.

They, however, were not allowed to move back to Budapest. Her father found a rental room with kitchen in Alsógöd, close to Budapest.

Klára went back to her workplace, but as a person coming back from internment, and thus politically unreliable, she was rehired for physical work. It took about two years for her to find a white-collar job again. She worked first in secretarial, later in administrative positions for the rest of her life.

She and her family were happy about 1956, but also fearful about emerging anti-Semitism. She saw people hanging from lampposts, burned out Soviet tanks, and Soviet soldiers.

In 1961, she married Endre Szántó.

In 1964, her son was born.

She did not talk about her husband and marriage.

Her mother died in 1993.

From the context we learn that her son lived in Los Angeles.

Asked whether her experiences were discussed after the war with friends, colleagues, or acquaintances, she said no, but talked about her internment a lot.

In the last part of the interview, Klára showed photos of her family, and some documents, among them her mother's false identity papers and her father's family tree.