

RG-50.944.0103

April 29, 2020, Târgu Mureș, Romania

Summary

Olivér Szántó was born on July 11, 1933 in Kolozsvár (Cluj), Romania, to a Jewish family. His paternal grandfather was a tailor in Szekszárd, Hungary. He had three sons and a daughter. His maternal grandfather was a well-to-do merchant dealing in wood and other construction material in Tövis (Teiuș), Romania. He had two houses and also an automobile. His father was a Hungarian citizen, his mother Romanian, which caused difficulties in getting a marriage license. They spoke Hungarian at home, but everybody spoke German and Romanian as well. His mother had a good education and was fluent in English and French. They were religious, celebrating the holidays, but they did not keep a kosher household.

He began his schooling in Tövis. However, in 1940, [in September 1940, Northern Transylvania was re-occupied by Hungary] his father, a Hungarian citizen, was expelled from Romania. He went to live with his sister in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș). He was called up for forced labor three times, but before the German occupation [March 19, 1944] he returned to Marosvásárhely unharmed every time.

In the same year, 1940, after his father left, Romanian authorities forced the local Jews, among them his grandparents, his mother and he to move to domiciles that they assigned to them. During the war years, they lived in four different apartments in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia). Jews were not allowed to leave their assigned domiciles, travel, work, attend public schools, and visit public places. His grandfather managed to sell one of his houses in Tövis, and they lived on that money during the war. He said that he did not suffer during the war; the Romanians were not cruel, and he did not experience humiliation. As a child he was told that they had to move and he accepted that. He went to the local Jewish school for the next three school years. Beyond the regular curriculum, he learned Hebrew.

He said that his family learned through Radio Free Europe [which did not exist until 1949, but Voice of America did broadcast after 1942] about the ghettoization and deportations of Jews in Hungary. Through personal connections they also heard that his father, grandmother, and uncles with their families had been deported. The only exception was his father's sister, whose husband, Miksa Elekes was a WWI injured veteran and as such was exempted together with his wife. He said that the Hungarian population treated the Jews in Marosvásárhely very poorly: they did not protest in any way against the mistreatment of Jews and denounced Jews in hiding.

After the war, he and his mother moved to Marosvásárhely, to the house of her aunt in Köteles Sámuel St. It was next to the Zionist agency that organized aliyah to Palestine. They also dealt with returning Jews. He inquired every day about his father. Finally, someone told him that he had met his father and knew that he was alive. His father was deported to Auschwitz, but was selected for work and survived in Bunzlau [a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen]. His mother went back to Gyulafehérvár because she was sure that her husband was expecting them there. He said that his father never talked about his experiences in Auschwitz. He also tried to find out what happened to his father by

talking to his father's friend and camp mate, József Orlich, but he did not talk either. Later in life, he read a lot about Auschwitz and traveled there with his wife. In 1948 or 1949, his aunt's house was expropriated. They lost everything: valuable furniture, carpets, household objects, etc. They were moved into a one room-kitchen apartment, located in the huge Mátyás yard where 23 families lived. They had no running water. There were outhouses in the yard. In the early 1950s, his family applied for passports for Israel, but they were rejected. He was allowed to go in the 1960s, but he was already married to a Christian woman and did not leave. He said that 80% of the Jews left Marosvásárhely, either for Israel or other western countries, and the USA. He had no understanding for those who moved to Germany. Every Saturday he visits the synagogue.