

## **MY FAMILY IN HUNGARY**

**by Judit Price**

My father, Alexander (nicknamed Sanyi), was born in 1902 in Nyiregyhaza, a medium-sized town in the northern part of Hungary. He came from a middle class background and was the oldest of four brothers. His parents owned a men's overcoat manufacturing business connected to a retail store. After his parents death, he moved to Budapest and he and his brother opened a similar establishment in Budapest, where he met Eva Szego, my mother.

Eva was born in Budapest in 1913, but she spent the majority of her life in Vienna. Her grandparents were of Austrian origin. Eva's birth father was a Captain of the Austro Hungarian Empire and died in the First World War. Eva's mother Lenke was the second runner up in a Hungarian beauty pageant and married the very wealthy owner of a liquor factory, Edwin Lorant. Edwin, my (step) grandfather, had one son who was later engaged but not married to Eva Gabor from the famous Gabor Sisters. While Lenke was married to Edwin, they lived a very privileged life style. They had homes in Vienna and Budapest and were part of the upper class Viennese society. Because of their wealth they were able to buy papers to demonstrate they were Baron and Baroness as well as papers that they were Aryans. Unfortunately, that did not save them from the Nazis.

Alexander and Eva were married in 1942. It was a relatively quiet period for Budapest Jewry. They were able to work and had some normalcy to their lives. The Hungarian countryside was another story. They arrested and deported Jews by the thousands and sent them to the camps to be exterminated. Most of the Hungarian and Austrian Jews did not want to believe what was happening and buried their head in the sand. For example, my mother Eva wanted to emigrate to the United States or Canada, but my

father Alexander would not hear of it. He had his business, he was making money, he was thriving (or so he thought).

Then things changed rapidly when the Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy suddenly resigned/fired in October 1944. The persecution of Jews accelerated and got worse in Budapest with Adolph Eichmann's arrival. Eichmann's sole goal and purpose was to liquidate and execute the entire Jewish population of Budapest and surrounding areas.

Two weeks before I was born in 1944, my father was shipped to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. My mother was hiding in the basement of the apartment house her family once owned. It was the same time period when Raul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat arrived in Budapest and his sole goal and purpose was to save as many Jews as possible. Wallenberg issued Swedish identity cards to people and organized safe houses for mothers and children to protect them from Eichmann's monstrous acts.

When my father was enroute to Auschwitz, he jumped off the train and hid at a farmer's property for four weeks. A neighboring farmer found out and reported him to the authorities. By then the Germans knew that they were losing the war and it was too late to send Alexander back to the camps. They sent him to a slave labor camp in Hungary where he was digging tunnels for the Nazis to use for escape. He was there until the so called "liberation by the Soviet Army".

Meanwhile my mother Eva and I were transported from the cellar where we both were near death by malnutrition to a safe house. My mother always told me that the only reason I survived was because she was lucky to have enough milk to nurse me. Many of her fellow Jews lost their children to starvation. My once wealthy grandparents, Edwin and Lenke, were in hiding as well as two of my father's brothers.

My grandparents were stripped of all their belongings and blackmailed by their Hungarian gentile friends and neighbors who ex-

horted as much as they could in return for the hiding places. My grandfather Edwin died at home since he was not allowed to go to the hospital for needed surgery because he was a Jew. One of my uncles escaped to Italy and became a physician. Another brother married the woman who hid him and took care of him for a year in her cellar. She was a Righteous Gentile. My father's youngest brother was shot to death in daylight by the members of the Arrow Cross (Hungarian Nazis). Of course, there was no retribution. My grandmother Lenke, who was only in her mid-50's, was walking home one night from visiting a sick friend when she was taken by the Hungarian Nazis who led her to the River Danube and shot her into the river. Unfortunately it happened to a lot of unlucky people. If you have visited Budapest, you may have seen the memorial known as "Shoes on the Danube Bank". It shows martyr's shoes lined up on the bank of the Danube River. According to my father, the Hungarian Nazis were worse than the German Nazis.

While all these atrocities went on with the Nazis, the Russians were at the border. The minute they broke into the city of Budapest and chased the Germans away they immediately started their own trouble making. They looted homes and shops. They molested and raped women regardless of age and physical appearance. They called themselves the brave liberators. The Russians were the one who lured Raul Wallenberg to the Russian Embassy on a pretext and murdered him.

Both of my parents survived the Nazi atrocities and remained in Budapest under Soviet occupation until 1965 when they were able to leave for the West. I was 21 years old.



Judit Price and her parents, Eva and Alexander