

**Facts and memories  
about the history in the 20th century  
of the Jewish community in Sátoraljaujhely**

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“Whoever is a Jew attracts shares of persecution, and the portions form  
the whole totality”

Simon Wiesenthal



## Translators' Explanation

The following text is the translation from Hungarian of a booklet prepared by a retired school teacher, Mrs. István Dankó, who wanted to chronicle the death of the Jewish community in her home town of Sátoraljaujhely.

Sátoraljaujhely is a provincial capital in the west of Hungary, on the border with Slovakia. Agi's family is originally from the town (one of her ancestors was the first Jewish mayor of the town, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century). The long name of the town translates into English roughly as "The New Town under the Tent". The Tent refers to the large tent-shaped hill at the edge of town.

We found this little booklet and had the honour of meeting Mrs. Dankó while on a visit to Sátoraljaujhely in June 2004 with our immediate family and with other relatives from the USA. An important reason for our trip to the area was to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation of Stephen's parents from another part of Hungary to Auschwitz and their subsequent murder.

We were so moved by the efforts of this wonderful woman to ensure that the life and death of her friends was documented that we felt it deserved broader distribution and so have decided to translate it into English and make it available on the internet.

Note that throughout the text in square brackets with an asterisk [\*] we have put some additional comments which clarify facts and events for readers who are not familiar with Hungary and her history.

Agi and Stephen Casey  
Sydney, Australia  
November 2004

## INTRODUCTION

I was born in 1921 in Sátoraljaujhely. The place and the time of my birth determined that I lived alongside the Jewish community. Although I am a Catholic I was brought up in a circle of Jewish friends.

The era was the 1920s and 1930s. At first there was a flourishing economic situation, then widespread economic crisis, and in the later years a nascent recovery. Intellectually, open mindedness was dominant. After the fall of the Peoples' Republic [\*in 1919\*] there were some anti-Semitic movements, but that was soon followed by religious and racial indifference, tolerance.

In the development of this atmosphere, the church schools played a positive role. In the parochial school of the "Pious Fathers" not one of the teachers discriminated against or put any Jewish boy at disadvantage. Neither did the teachers give any aristocratic boy [\*Christian\*] an advantageous position. From that period every student has a story of how one or other teacher (Abelsberg, Kontraszti, Korcsiák) made an example of the clever Jewish boy to the badly prepared young baron. In the "Sisters of Mercy" convent school, the teachers behaved similarly. The equality of treatment there explains the large number of Jewish students in both establishments.

That situation lasted till the outbreak of the Second World War, when even individuals started to turn Fascist, and more and more fell victim to Arrow Cross [\*Hungarian Nazi Party\*] policy thinking.

The second determinant of the history is the location. A quick glance at the map of Europe and it is clear that the way to the west from Galicia, Poland and Russia is through the Hungarian Highland. So that is how Munkács region and the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains come to be inhabited with great number of Jews. Since the XIV century - in many waves - a lot of Jewish family came to Zemplén county [\*Sátoraljaujhely is the capital of the county\*].

Sátoraljaujhely, at the crossroads of highways and railways, was a focus of commerce, particularly in wine, and there were strong judicial and health institutions at the beginning of the 20th century. This created favourable

conditions for Jewish commerce and intellectual life and a fitting atmosphere for their settlement. This produced the liberal environment in which I was raised along with my contemporaries, and which was so drastically ended by the 1940s fascist trend.

Sátoraljaujhely, 20 May 1994

Mrs. István Dankó, nee Márta Majnik

## **SHORT HISTORICAL REVIEW**

Already from King Zsigmond's time [\*1385-1437\*] we come across records about Jewish immigration and settlement. Later the Turks were expelled [\*after 150 years of occupancy in 1686\*] and Hungary lost a considerable part of its population. The Jews, along with others, played a significant role in populating the empty regions.

On the end of the 18th Century the statistical number of the Jews was 1.7% in the country, but in Zemplén county it was 3%. The reason was the county's geographic and economic position.

The owners of the land granted permission to settle, subject to different conditions, or in return for different services. There was usually patronage by a gentile and for a city dwelling there was a high price.

The Jews habitually lived in the same neighbourhood, partly for a feeling of security in the community, but mostly because they needed a certain number for their religious ceremonies, and they kept their traditions. Those Jewish families were generally poor.

In Sátoraljaujhely the Jewish community grew with the town. In 1754 the county hall was built, and the first synagogue was ready in 1791. Today it is a museum, behind the old county hall.

In the time of József II [\*1780-1790\*] it was possible for the Jews to freely change residence, it became possible to buy property. Elsewhere in the country the Jews were mostly in commerce, but in Zemplén county they started to buy vineyards, produce wine and sell it domestically and abroad. In this area there were more Jews whose occupations were agriculture, animal husbandry and transport, than anywhere else in the country.

### **A few facts about the Jewish establishment**

In 1781, the number of Jewish inhabitants in Zemplén county was 6,370, they lived in 1,925 houses. In 1812 their number in the county was 15,000. The data of the 1881 census survives in Sátoraljaujhely, which indicates that the total town population was 11,264 and among them

3,892 Jews.

The oldest Jewish grave in Sátoraljaujhely is from 1760, but the engraving is illegible.

In time of Jozsef II, Jews were required to take family names. It is worthwhile reflecting on their choice of those names. Greater part, out of reverence to the “Hatted King” [\*Jozsef II liked to wear hats instead of crown\*] took up German-sounding family names. Often rhetorical, or according to their physical build, there were names like Rosenberg, Lõvenkopf, Blumenthal, Schwarz, Klein, Grosz, Frequently the Jewish surnames end with “ics” or “vics” Kivovics, Davidovics, Markovics, Iskovics, Moskovics, etc. Later Hungarian names appeared as well; Füredi, Verö, Székely, Korányi, Mezei etc. These were the surnames they chose in those times, before a later period in which they adopted new Hungarian sounding names [\*in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many Hungarian Jews with foreign-sounding surnames voluntarily chose new Hungarian surnames in order to better assimilate\*]

It has to be mentioned that a Jew from Zemplénagard took the name of Hitler at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the War of Independence [\*1848\*] 100 Jewish boys from Sátoraljaujhely enlisted in the national home guard. That proves that along with the Hercegkut and Károlyfalva [\*neighbouring townships\*] Swabians [\*people of Germanic descent\*], the Jews also adopted the Hungarian reform movement and actively defended it.

In Sátoraljaujhely, 40 years after the defeat in War of Independence two veteran Jewish lieutenants, a corporal, and three infantrymen were still alive. One of the infantry men in his old age was a destitute beggar.

After the War of Independence was defeated, the Austrian government levied a war ransom on the Jewish population, which is further evidence of their Hungarian nationalistic feelings.

### **RABBI TEITELBAUM.**

One can not discuss the history of the Jewish community in Ujhely, [\*the

name Sátoraljaujhely is usually shortened to Ujhely\*] and not recall the character of Rabbi Teitelbaum.

The Hassidic movement - whose purpose was to strengthen Jewish identity and control the rabbinical court - gained more and more ground. The followers of the Hassidic movement complied strictly to the religious rules, studied the Torah, at the same time the festivities were celebrated, with songs, dancing and alcoholic beverages were not scorned.

One of their most famous rabbis was Moses Teitelbaum, who is regarded today as a “miracle rabbi” (1759-1841). “Prophet Jeremiah’s soul lives in him”- said his contemporaries. Far beyond the boundaries of the town was he known and gave many sermons. His strict morals, sense of order, prophetic capacity and undoubtedly highly cultured mind distinguished him, far the best among the average rabbis.

In the town there is a legend that he cured the 9 year old Lajos Kossuth, and predicted that this little boy would become a man of great importance. [\*Kossuth,1802-1894, became governor general in 1848, but after the defeat in the War of Independence he had to go into exile and died in Rodosto, Turkey\*]

Rabbi Teitelbaum’s grave is even today an international site of pilgrimage. Between the two world wars - from the second half of the twenties - on the rabbi’s feast day, the Czechoslovakian border was opened, so that the crossing for the Jewish pilgrims was more comfortable.

Today, every year in cars and buses, pilgrims come from Russia, Ukraine and the USA to his striking memorial.

## **SCHOOLS.**

It is worthwhile to mention the Jewish schools separately, as Sátoraljaujhely lead the country in that respect.

When Ferenc Kazinczy [\*1759-1831, the leading figure of Hungarian language reform\*] was school commissioner, there was a significant expansion in the schools of the Highland and with them, the Jewish schools also expanded. His motto was: “the whole nation has the right to

the treasures of knowledge.”

In Ujhely, and even beyond the boundaries of the county, the Kaestenbaum school was well known. Marton Kaestenbaum, was a self-made man. He was married twice, but he had no children. So he left his fortune - 262,000 gold forints - for the establishment of a school [\*for Jewish children to learn Hungarian, and have the equal opportunity, to go to higher education --- for a history of this school in English, see <http://www.geocities.com/dagreerga/Kaesztenbaum.html> \*] When the sheriff of the county read out his will - according to witnesses - he was so touched that his eyes were full of tears. He considered this prominent figure and generous contributor to be a great example. So the Kaestenbaum school came into existence, raised its standards slowly, grew in numbers, and for 106 years educated the Jewish children. Before the establishment of the Kaestenbaum school, only the “cheder’ [\*religious school\*] was possible for the Jewish children, where they learnt only Hebraic subjects [\*in Yiddish\*].

Here I have to insert my personal remark. Even in my student years, it was customary to say, about a pupil who crammed meaninglessly that “he can only drone on in Hebrew”. We didn’t even know exactly what it meant, but it expressed the essence of the fact that even the majority of the Jewish children did not know the meaning of the Hebrew text, which they had to memorise.

Previous to the Kaestenbaum school, the more rigorous or affluent families who didn’t want to send their children to the religious cheder school engaged private tutors for their children. It was a big step to open the Kaestenbaum school. The school opened in 1838 with three teachers and three classes. Only boys could attend. The lessons, from the beginning, were conducted in Hungarian [\*this was an important step in the integration of Jews in Hungary who had previously been taught in Yiddish\*].

In 1847 they had big plans to develop the school but the state of war thwarted the plans. [\*The Hungarian War of Independence, 1848\*]

In 1852 they enlarged the school, and it was operating from 1860-72 as

“Royal Israelite Model school”. After 1872 it was under the direction of the Jewish denomination.

I was able to make a study of the 1902-03 school reports. By then the school had six classes, with 124 boys and 132 girls.

#### SUBJECTS of INSTRUCTIONS:

Hebrew reading, praying and biblical history in all classes

Hungarian reading, writing, grammar in all classes

German reading, writing from the III class

Mathematics in all classes

Geography in III class

History from IV class

Handicrafts

Gymnastics

Drawing

Singing

Analysing the subjects it can be ascertained that it used a demanding and high level education method, which the teachers who were better than average put into practice. One of them was Ignác Füredi, who translated from French to Hungarian Rousseau's Emile, and prepared a Hebrew-Hungarian dictionary. Mozes Felmar could not have been a run-of-the-mill teacher, as his students who later in the Second World War suffered the pains of hell, even from the other side of the globe continue to remember the teaching of this prominent man. Dr Vilmos Schön doctor, who was a highly respected personality in the town, dedicated all his free time to the school affairs, in addition to his medical practice. As the deputy principal, he worked for a high level of training in the Hungarian language, not only for the language itself but he also insisted in the “development of national feelings”. This mentality raised the standards of the school so high, that they were as strong as any institution in the country.

It is no wonder that this school has given the foundation to a number of pupils, so they were able to obtain higher culture and higher education.

Here I have to mention another school, which belonged to the town, but by all means had a prominent place in the local and neighbouring Jewish

community, that is the Sátoraljaujhely Municipal School of Commerce. It was founded in 1911, though there were already plans for it towards the beginning of the century. The rule for the establishment of the school was the following: “to provide general cultural education with practical studies, to give a moral basis and knowledge to be able, after graduation, to be a merchant or to enter in any clerical position in banking, in industrial or agricultural enterprises.” This program was suited very well to the developing Jewish society, in the town and throughout the county, and so they enrolled their 15-16 year old sons in growing numbers. From the first yearbook it can be ascertained that among the enrolled 50 students, two thirds was from Jewish origin.

Beside the boys’ School of Commerce, a course of commerce was functioning for the girls (one year, later two years). There they trained the first secretaries, shorthand writers, typists, and among them were a great number of Jewish girls.

The Jewish community by the turn of the century was differentiated into classes, socially as well as religion-wise. This showed even in their appearance.

In Ujhely one could find the elegant, fashionable dressed, well-to-do, educated Jews, as well as families who wear ritual hair locks, ritual clothes and often were in want of culture.

In the town and in the county we find three separate groups of Jewish communities:

The Hassidic congregation, whose members wore ancient attire, was very strict in religious laws. They didn’t communicate with anyone outside their community.

The Orthodox, who already made the first step to assimilation. They keep the religious laws, keep the Saturday as holiday, dress themselves in a modern way, and speak Hungarian well, but at home in the family they use Yiddish.

The status-quo (who wanted to keep the present situation) congregation is the largest. Most and the very best of the solicitors, doctors, financiers, and businessman in the town are from that community. Their cultural demand is well developed,

so they are in the theatrical societies, musical assemblies, cultural organisations, and they buy the greatest number of newspapers and books in town.

The split between the Orthodox and status-quo communities was about 1870. The Orthodox demanded autonomous congregations, while some of the congregation wanted to continue the liberalisation that was the present situation, (hence the name of “status-quo”) and live accordingly. The father of that intellectual freedom was Jeremy Löw the Rabbi of Ujhely.

The orthodox and status-quo split was not only in religious matters, but they also broke from each other socially and economically. In the town both had separate synagogues, schools, bathhouses. The people from the surrounding villages as a rule, followed the Orthodox tendencies.

#### THE TOWN'S SOCIETY AND THE ROLE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FROM THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.

In the age of the developing capitalist society, our town was the county seat with an advanced state of industry and widespread commercial activity. The civil service and the courts attracted the newly impoverished former landed gentry [\*Christians\*], who in large numbers had lost their lands, while the civilised Jewish merchants, doctors, and lawyers determined the social conditions.

Around the turn of the century different organisations like trade guilds, scientific societies, relief funds, youth and ladies clubs established themselves in significant numbers.

One part of the Jewish organisations definitely detached themselves and perpetuated a separate Jewish identity, but the other part blended in the town and county's organisations.

In the first group is the “Status-Quo Jewish Association” whose purpose is to establish and protect the usage of the ritual bath, the kosher butcher and other religious institutions. Similarly the “Jewish Women Club”, with only Jewish members, established in 1888, whose aim is to help the needy Jewish women.

The following two Jewish social association aims were very noble. First “The Relief Fund for Poor Jewish School Children” helped the needy and worthy with school equipment, and with clothing. Their only purpose was to promote interest in education. Second, “The Chevra Khadisha Nursing and Funeral Organisation”, whose aims were to attend those who need nursing, give assistance to the people who require help, visit those who suffer, bury the dead and uphold religious ceremonies.

We also find Jewish citizens in all the other non religious gatherings in town. For example, the Fire Brigade, the Winegrowers Association, and in all sort of industrial associations etc. In particular they played a big role in The Industrial and Commercial Youth Society and Sick Relief Fund whose members, and board of directors were mostly Jewish youth. Their functions were beneficial, contributed to cultured entertainment, and if needed, for charitable proposes.

It is very interesting to note and indicative of the character of this town that even the president of the hunting club was a Jew. And so was the chief medical officer, Dr. Lörinc Löcherer.

It is also worth mentioning the great number of mixed marriages. I am not thinking about that well-known cliché of the novels, the marriage of convenience between the children of impoverished gentry and the rich Jew. Instead it was simply the reality that young people who lived close by listened to their heart and chose their partner for life without concern for each others’ religion. From the 1930s it became more usual that the Jewish partner converted to Christianity, but even at that time the basis of their union was the affection which drew them toward each other. Several of their descendants - who considering the Nazi-era laws are only 50% Aryan - still live in Ujhely.

Jewish society in the town also contributed its share in the First World War: 150 Jewish boys went to war, among them 36 died a hero’s death.

Naturally, the Jewish merchant took advantage of favourable wartime commercial conditions, as the state of war had an adverse effect on the Polish wine trade.

We came across the first anti-Semitic movement in July 1918: police

raided the synagogue, supposedly looking for deserters, but they could not find any, so they beat up the people who were praying there. On 30 July the next police raid on the trains, where everybody with a beard was arrested. On 3rd of August a deputation consisting of Jews and non-Jews went to the high sheriff of the county and to Wekerle, the prime minister to complain about the atrocities, and indicated that this sort of behaviour would have an adverse effect on commerce, especially the wine trade. Wekerle was outraged and promised urgent measures, even more so as the London Times published an article about the anti-Semitic occurrences.

These events were the harbingers of the dark shadows of the future, though supposedly the reason was that they were looking for some people who were illegally crossing the border from Galicia.

The local Jewish citizens also took part in the eventful period of the Frostflower Revolution and the Hungarian-Soviet Republic [\*in 1918, at the end of First World War, a peaceful revolution installed a democratic republic; in 1919 this was overthrown by a communist republic which instituted a “red terror\*]. The local leader of the communist dictatorship, Károly Csuta was a Christian, and the greatest number among the people who were later executed as a consequence of their participation in those events were Christians. But the leading personality of the events was Ernő Bettelheim Bólyai [\*a Jew\*], and Harry Kroó [\*a Jew\*] also played a leading role as he was a commissar. Both left Ujhely, Bettelheim went to Budapest in the spring of 1919, and Kroó left for Czechoslovakia and subsequently to Israel just before the collapse of the Republic. The foreign occupation [\*Czechoslovakia occupied that part of Hungary\*] put an end to the communist republic. The subsequent White Terror [\*instituted by new right-wing Hungarian regime\*] did not have any great significance for the Jewish population and it was not worse here than elsewhere. Only those Jews who had an active role in the communist republic were subject to harassment.

Between the two world wars, the changes in commercial life firmly impacted on the life of the local Jewish community. After the Trianon Agreement [\*the peace treaty that ended World War I and created new borders, including one between Hungary and Czechoslovakia which went through Ujhely and split off one of the town’s neighborhoods\*] there were

commercial difficulties and foreign trade problems, but the Jews were able and willing to help. The wine merchants established a Wine Exchange in the Central Cafe.

In 1920s came the first “numerus clausus” [\*laws which restricted the number of Jews in the universities\*]. From Zemplen county, only 6% of Jewish students were allowed to enter universities [\*as that was the situation in the country as 6% of the population of Hungary was Jewish\*]. Then, for the first time the Jewish boys started to go to foreign universities. Also the Zionist movement started in those years, which was popular mostly among the young.

In those years the Jewish hospital in Sátoraljaujhely had wide-ranging activities. It is not by chance, because their eminent doctors attracted patients even from outside the county. To name just two: Dr. László Székely surgeon, and Dr Sándor Zinner internal specialist. The hospital was where the health centre is now, opposite the present day hospital. During the war it was destroyed with a bomb, and the ruins were demolished.

In those decades a prominent personality in town was Samuel Roth, a rabbi whose tall Apponyi-bearded stature [\*Apponyi was the Hungarian Prime Minister\*] had great prestige even in anti-Semitic circles.

In year 1929, the Depression was felt in our town too, with significant industrial and commercial stagnation, and unemployment. A number of Jewish businessmen became bankrupt and they tried to avoid total ruin by transferring the shop on the name of their spouse. According to the law at that time, spouse’s property could not be forfeited. On the signboards everywhere one could spot the new “Mrs.” sign. A humorist gave the town a new name Mrs. Sátoraljaujhely. [\*in Hungarian it sounds simpler as it becomes one word “Sátoraljaujhelyné”\*]

Unemployment is a good breeding ground for anti-Semitism. All over the country, politicians took positions more sympathetic to German policies, and that trend came to our town as well.

When the Second World War came our town no longer had its old liberal spirit. In 1941 they passed the first “Jewish Law”, [\* Jews could occupy

only 6% in any public employment, banking, theatre, music etc\*) and the first summons for forced labour service were issued. In Garany (north from the town, today Slovakia) they established the first interment camp. There was even a joke that “Silence is golden; to speak means Garany!” [\*in Hungarian gold, *arany*, rhymes with Garany\*]

It is interesting to note that Jews and Christians adapted to the new anti-Jewish law with little disagreement. The Christians, mainly the young ones, had been fed up with the international economic crisis and unemployment, and now they sat happily in one or other of the Jewish shops, in the banks in the place of the Jewish clerks, or they took over the Jewish vineyards and wine cellars. In the Jewish community in the meantime, the general opinion was that if they observed the law, no further harm would befall them.

In 1941 came the first call-up for forced labour for the younger men. They took them to Ukraine. In the coming years increasingly older men were called up. Numerous diaries and personal statements give us a full account of life in forced labour, those dreadful experiences and bitter fates, and about those tragic episodes I do not want to dwell on now. These events all took place outside our town and unfortunately many people from Ujhely were involved.

The German occupation in March 1944 brought its tragic consequences to our town too. One remarkable occurrence was the famous jailbreak [\*in the chaos of the occupation the prisoners tried to escape and were shot\*], which impacted the Jewish population as well, but did not give expressions to their consternation. In a paralysed state they were waiting for the events to unfold. Characteristic to their profound belief in God that most of them manifest their emotion by saying, “it is impossible that God would not protect us.”

By that time the possessions of the Jews were seized, mainly the shops, the vineyards, the cellars. In the town, they took hostages to prevent disturbances, Dr Zinner, Dr Safir and Dr Scweiger were the hostages. Prohibitory and restrictive bulletins appeared continuously: the Jews could go out only at certain hours; could shop in certain places, and they were obliged to hand in their valuables.

By now it was compulsory to wear the yellow star [\*from 4th of April 1944 every Jew had to wear a prominent yellow star, sewn on their outside garment \*]. That meant an incredible emotional blow, mostly to the elderly, as all their life they considered themselves as equal and respected citizens, but now they suffered public humiliation.

On 15<sup>th</sup> of April they started to establish the ghetto. It was delineated by the streets currently known as Rákoczi-Szigeti-Virág-Wörösmarty-Posta köz- Dózsa György- Aradi Vértanúk-Árpád-Kisfaludy-Kölcsey-Zápolya-Munkácsi. They started the process of moving in the Jews, not only from the town, but from the whole county as well. Under other circumstances, the administrative authority of our town always waited for orders from superiors, but now it displayed its independence, by not waiting for those orders and ignoring exemptions to the requirement to move to the ghettos, such as for those with a medal for courage in the First World War, or because they occupied a prominent post in the Slovakian-Hungarian affairs, etc. They took those people to the ghetto too. There were some incidents as Ella Hajos, a clerk, took her own life as she could not face the horrors of the future.

The whole resettlement took place in four days. In that short period they found time to organise a special auction of the animals which had belonged to the Jews, as they could not let the animals suffer hunger, unlike the human beings...

They took care of the harmless lunatics too, those who were not a public danger: they moved them in the ghetto. The conditions there were crowded and there was a danger of epidemic infection. To handle this infection was entrusted to the Jewish doctors in the ghetto. Josef Azary-Piroda, the chief town clerk, proposed to the higher authorities, to transfer the Jews, as those cramped conditions were a centre of infection and could spread to the town. The proposal was accepted...

The bureaucratic machine ground on even in this tragic situation: the town office asked the county office whether they should provisionally or permanently stop the Jewish pensions. History has given the answer, with the adverse outcome that for most of the elderly it was a permanent

situation.

It took them from 16 May to 1 June 1944 to transport the Jews. In the ghetto the situation was so terrible, so cramped and the privations so unbearable that consequently the Jews went of their own accord, without resistance towards the wagons, figuring that whatever happened could not be worse than they had already endured.

First they assembled the people who were destined for deportation in the synagogue. They checked their parcels and took any small hidden valuables, occasionally in the course of these searches they beat the Jews.

The loading in wagons happened on the “small station” (today Nové Mesto in Slovakia). The destination was Auschwitz and Birkenau [\*Nazi death camps in Poland\*]. They loaded 80 people in a cattle truck and by June not one Jew was left in Ujhely, a situation which had never occurred since the town had been established.

The previous sentence notwithstanding, there were some Jews left. One of their trustworthy employees walled in the Izsáks, the baker and his family, in their own attic. This man fed them and looked after all four members of the family until the Russian troops arrived in December. The parents have died by now, but as far as I know one son lives in Budapest and the other in Israel. There is talk of a similar occurrence in Tolcsva, where a whole family was hidden in a gigantic concrete barrel, but I was not able to substantiate that.

Now the hunt for Jewish assets started. Some were given - from the owner to a trusted person - for safe keeping, but much was unlawfully appropriated: people moved into the furnished flats, took over the vineyards, the wine cellars. I have to mention here that the assets which were given for safe keeping - sometimes very valuable - were only partly accepted for noble reasons, and some people escaped with them to Austria or Germany. But there were instances where the objects were really kept safe with the people who were entrusted with, they were handed back, if there were anybody alive to whom it belonged. Those trusted persons were primary the cooks, who served in the Jewish family.

Much has been written about the horrors of the camps. All the mental and

corporal torments have been chronicled by some of the survivors. For this reason I do not want to go in details, giving only the recollection of some of the survivors from Ujhely.

Mr. Miklós Vértes-Weisz describes, first the dreadful journey to Birkenau. There, he was engaged in road building, then he had to carry corpses, finally as a watchmaker, he assembled explosives, - despite the ever constant danger of detonation he was at last working inside - and received minimal food. He was there until April 1945, when the Russian army reached them.

Mr. Benjámín Eisenberg from Ujhely, who lives now in Ottawa tells us the following touching story: one of his fellow prisoners fled the SS soldiers looking for him to execute him, but then Mr. Hirsch, the rabbi from Ujhely presented himself and said they should put him to death instead of the escapee, as he was already old. And they executed him...

But, we have heard stories to the contrary too, as people react differently in the shadow of death. There were men, even women, who for the slightest privilege, such as a few morsels of food, betrayed their fellow sufferers, disclosed their covert valuables, or made known their escape plans. I know about someone who is alive, but has not dared to come back to Ujhely, as he is afraid of the just revenge of his co-religionists.

The prisoners who came back to Ujhely from Auschwitz remember the image of SS soldiers who announced that anybody who ate on the day of Atonement [\*a day on which Jews traditionally fast\*] would receive a double portion and a glass of beer. But nobody was eating! On the other hand an elderly German soldier occasionally gave to one or other prisoner a biscuit, or a piece of bread with margarine.

At a rough guess, 1,200 Jewish citizens from Ujhely perished in the hell of those concentration camps. In the new Jewish cemetery a humble gravestone commemorates their memory, but the painful remembrance of them will live for many of us in our heart until we die.

According to Mr. Imre Szamek, who is a resident here, 250 Jews came back to Ujhely from the concentration camps, but this number includes people from the neighbouring countryside as well. The people from the

forced labour camps came back in relatively larger numbers. In a sense it is understandable, as although they were there in the inhuman conditions longer, they were generally young, healthy men who could endure more than the old, the women, and the children in the concentration camps.

After 1945, the life of the Jewish community moved in contrasting directions. In the first two years, the people who returned started with a great urge to rebuild their old lives. Frequently were the new marriages, as there very few families where both of the spouses came back. Lots of little photographs were in the homes of these new families, in remembrance of the perished children. They found employment and started working. I have not any knowledge of personal vendetta in Ujhely, partly because of the presence of the Russian army, but partly because the leaders who brought in the spiteful merciless measures of the war years left with the German army, and never returned. In 1946 an Arrow Cross guard was hanged in the prison court, after the judicial hearing found him guilty.

The decisive year [\*1948, the year when the pro-Soviets came to absolute power\*] brought sudden changes in our town too. The county of Zemplén was abolished, they took all the establishments, like county hall, school-inspectors office, administration of inland revenues, state constructing management and moved them to Miskolc. That meant that hundreds of people had to endure every day twice the 80 km journey, and certainly not in the best of conditions.

With the never before experienced hermetically closed Czechoslovak border, the town regressed more and more. Building activities, industrial developments were non-existent, professional organisations gone, the aggressive farmers' co-operative movements destroyed the agriculture. Satoraljaujhely became a ghost town, and was even put on an official list of towns that would be allowed to wither.

The returned local Jewish community sensed those circumstances and responded accordingly. Many of them emigrated, they went to the USA, Canada, Central and South America, Israel. At one time so many people lived in Caracas from Ujhely, that the local indestructible humour

suggested that Caracas be incorporated as a sister city.

A number of people went to live in Miskolc or Budapest. The Jews who stayed were mostly elderly married couples, some shop owners, or bank clerks. Any exact information of those particular years cannot be obtained, considering that by then not even the census was useful, as for example, the column for “religion” was totally missing.

Once more, 1956 [\*the year of the popular uprising against the pro-Soviet government\*] had an effect on the life of the Jewish community. In Ujhely at the uprising that community, small in numbers and advanced in years, did not participate, instead they kept their distance from the events of that year. I met and often exchanged views in those days with my husband’s friend Mátyás Löw-Lévai, who was a photographer by trade. During the war he lived in Israel, but after the war he came back to settle in Ujhely. He remarried, had a child, and managed the tobacco shop. In 1957 he emigrated again, went back to Israel. His motivation for that decision was his general impression that the slightest antagonism entails a fresh rise of anti-Semitism. After all he said and despite the decision he made, he never really felt that Israel was his country. To his very last days he fought against homesickness. Nevertheless, he decided that time that he could only feel secure among his own people and left his native land to settle in Israel with his family. Until his death he sent fabulous photographs, which he had taken, mainly portraits from Israel, and yet between every line, I could see his nostalgia, his displaced status.

And a lot of others, the middle-aged intellectuals and businessmen followed the exodus after 1956 and left Ujhely for the same reasons.

In the seventies, we witnessed the start of a nostalgic return home for a visit, and to look for old friends and seek memories. The visitors are typically first generations who do not feel home neither there nor here.

There are hardly any Jews left in Ujhely. The latest I have seen were the Menczel couple, who were promenading Saturday morning on the main street, as once upon a time was the practice of the hundreds of Jewish inhabitants in Ujhely.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION TODAY?

In Sátoraljaujhely currently there are 11 individuals who adhere themselves to the stern Saturday rules. They are 4 men and 7 widows. They could not in fact keep to the demanding rules, as they need 11 [\*this must be a printing error as it needs 10\*] men for services. So for New Year's celebration they bring along men from outside to be able to celebrate the festivities properly.

Mr. Lipot Klein from Budapest is acting on their behalf, he is the one who is helping in all religious matters, and his deputy in Ujhely is Mrs. Ödön Rosenberg. This is the first year [\*1993\*] that they have not a reader, as the older ones have died, and none of the younger ones are familiar with the ordinance of the faith.

Typical is the fate of the widow Mrs. Gottlieb nee Lea Friedman, who supplied me with the particulars that I needed. She was a manager in a shop, today she is a pensioner, who lives with her ailing son in their family home. She, as so many local Jewish girls attended the higher elementary public school where the teachers, characteristically did not discriminate between Jewish or Catholic children. On the whole that was the custom in the other schools as well. After so many years of sufferings, she still speaks with affection about some of her teachers (Mrs. Ida Jozsa, Mrs. Jozsa nee Sára Tarnovszki) who brought with devotion the view that little county girls should be imbued with high cultural values.

In her report on the situation of today she speaks with bitterness. "In a few short years it is impossible to eliminate anti-Semitism from peoples' hearts and minds," they were her words. Even today she feels stigmatised, not only because of the effect of her Auschwitz number on her forearm, but socially as well. To this naturally contributes her personal strokes of fate and feelings of isolation.

POSTSCRIPT from the author.

The purpose of my work was to demonstrate the life of the Jewish community of Sátoraljauhely. There is hardly anyone of that community in the town now, however occasionally we find anti-Semitism, mainly among those youngsters who have never met any Jewish person.

Fortunately that is not widespread.

I feel that, just like disappearing trades and folk art should be preserved for posterity, small town liberal sentiments, such as Jewish and Christian coexistence, also deserve to be remembered.

#### POSTSCRIPT from the translators

You may have the feeling that the English text is not perfectly correct. Yes, you are right. There are different reasons.

First we wanted to give a true picture of that period. Then we wanted to reflect the true feelings of that noble Christian lady who wrote this booklet in her seventies and so movingly states, among other things, “in the new Jewish cemetery a humble gravestone commemorates their memory, but the painful remembrance of them will live for many of us in our hearts until we die”. We tried hard to translate it word by word, to render it how she wanted to tell her story. Last but not least, English is not our mother tongue. Our younger son, John, looked over our grammatical mistakes and helped all the way in preparing this work.

At the end of the publication Mrs. Dankó put a list of notable Jewish ex-residents. We have not translated the full details she has given about each of them, but to keep the spirit of the publication and to place their names on the record, we have listed them below. Some of them were born there, some of them lived there, but all of them contributed to the high standards of this town.

Agi’s grandfather lived in Budapest and she was born there, but she will never forget the stories he lovingly told about Ujhely. Those memories inspired us to translate this book and to take the liberty of adding some Reichards, Agi’s original family name, to Mrs. Dankó’s list of notables. Our additions are marked with \*.

Ernö Bólyai (Bettelheim): lawyer, political activist, translator  
Jakab Erényi: journalist

Ignác Friedlieber: Rabbi, author of religious books  
Mór Füredi: legal reporter  
Sándor Knopfler: teacher at Kaestenbaum School, author of textbooks  
Alfred Kormos (Klein): president of Apollo Printing Co.  
Mátyás Kronovitz, union organizer  
Árpád Latabár, actor  
Ernö Mezei, journalist,  
Bernát Singer, Rabbi  
Miklós Szépkuti, writer  
Mozes Teitelbaum, “The Miracle Rabbi”  
Arnold Vér: journalist, translator  
Herman Weisz: doctor  
Mor Weisz: Rabbi  
Salamon Reichard: lawyer, mayor of Sátoraljaujhely\*  
Piroska Reichard: poet\*  
József Reichard and Nándor Zinner: orthopedic surgeons\*  
Zsigmond Reichard: judge\*