

With Grandma In The Park



This photo was taken at the end of 1938 or beginning of 1939 at the park in Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava. The smallest one in the picture is my little brother Siegfried, then I, Henrich, and then our grandmother, Jolana Schwartz.

I was born, as my parents' first child, in 1928. They named me Henrich, or informally Harry. Several years later, on 28th February 1935, my brother, Siegfried, was born. My brother and I got along very well. He was an agreeable kid. But we didn't get to enjoy very much fun and games outside, because the anti-Jewish laws [5] began coming out, so we mostly stayed inside.

Grandma Jolana used to watch over us a lot. Actually, she watched over all her grandchildren. We'd walk with her to the park in Hviezdoslav Square, to the Janek Kral Orchard. We'd take a ferry across the Danube, and there was this huge park there, where we'd play. Besides this, we also used to go for walks with her around Bratislava. We used to go out into the country with our parents. In those days vacations weren't much in fashion. Mostly we'd go out into the countryside around Bratislava. In the summer my parents would send me to rest homes. These were pensions that took children on recommendation. There we'd play games together and walk around in the vicinity.

I started attending people's school [6] in 1935. The school building stood at Zochova Street No. 3. I went there until Grade 5. Then the year 1940 came, and they nationalized the school. I was supposed to go to council school, and here's where the first jolt and turning point in our lives came. Jews weren't desired students in state schools, even though from a religious standpoint our family our family was quite far removed from Judaism. Our family was modern; we didn't feel anything

major towards religion. Everyone could feel that something dangerous was approaching, and that it was very close. The period of baptisms arrived. With a certificate from the parish office, I was accepted at the First State Council School at 3 Zochova Street. At the same school where I'd already been for five years. I also had godparents, who were supposed to protect us. But it didn't help very much, because we were still obliged to wear a yellow star [7]. I dealt with this problem in such a way, that instead of a permanently sewed-on star, I had it on snaps. In case of danger, I could remove it, and show my ID, that I'm a student from a state school. Unpleasant, especially for me, were morning prayers, catechism and defense classes, where we'd march around singing: Friends Stand on Guard!, We're Native Slovaks and similar things. Already at that time things were coalescing towards the People's regime [8]. Apprehension settled upon us when our teachers began appearing in uniforms of the Hlinka Guard [9] or those of officers of the Hlinka Youth [Hlinka Youth: The Hlinka Guard [9] founded youth groups and helped organize their activities. These groups were named Hlinka Youth - Editor's note]. In the morning we'd greet each other at the school with the People's greeting, On Guard! Can you imagine how a person felt when he went to school?

During that time, I personally lived in constant fear, because at this school they had severe corporal punishment. For example, we had this teacher that was named Macko. He was from Liptovsky Mikulas. He had a hand like a lumberjack, when he gave someone a slap, it spun him around like a top. His slaps were a common thing. Another teacher had a switch, another a ruler. They'd either beat us with that, or their hands. Another would yank our hair. We were physically punished for every stupid little thing. For example when we threw a sponge, basically for everything... I have a slap from Macko engraved in my memory. After that I tried to avoid being punished in any way I could. I was on my best behavior.