

The Pagac Family, Mr. F.'s Saviors



This is a picture of the Pagac family at the beginning of the 1940s. I have this family to thank for the fact that I was saved. Sitting in the bottom row, from right to left, is Mrs. Pagacova. Standing above her is her husband, Mr. Pagac. Sitting on Mrs. Pagac's right is little Lacko, and Mr. Pagac's brother. Standing in the top row from left to right is Tibor Pagac, and the wife of Mr. Pagac's brother.

The Pagac family rented a two and a half room house. The husband and wife, three sons and an 80-year-old granny lived in one and a half rooms and the kitchen. The second, large room belonged to the owner of the house, and was locked. The lady that owned the house was abroad for an extended period. Mr. Pagac was a jack-of-all-trades. He was a driver, a locksmith, he could repair and manufacture machines. Mrs. Pagacova was a very kind woman. She was from Budapest. The oldest of the sons was named Karol, then there was Tibor, and the youngest was Lacko [Ladislav]. They accepted me as their fourth son, with the difference that no one could know, see or hear anything about me. This principle became law, and was strictly adhered to. At that time the youngest, Lacko, was only about 3 years old. His words became unforgettable for me. Instead of airplane he used the word *angidádo*, and his other words were 'tűjn el' [Hungarian: get lost, disappear]. Always, when there was someone nearby, he shouted to me: "Tűjn el!"

At night I slept on a haystack at a nearby farm. During the day I'd be behind some clutter up in the attic, or in the cellar. The stairs to both places were camouflaged. This went on until the first frosts struck. The haystack kept shrinking, until it didn't provide a safe hiding place and a feeling of security. I caught a cold. Calling a doctor was impossible, so they found me some medicine. Despite this, there were complications. I got inflamed joints, and couldn't move. I lay paralyzed in granny's bed, who soon after died. When people were paying their last respects, and during the wake, they moved me up to the attic and covered me with old blankets and sacks. I was there until the last relatives from Bratislava and Hungary left, who also spent the night there. After granny's funeral, they carried me down onto her bed, but the state of my health kept getting worse. They called Mr. B. over, to consult with him what they should do if I died. Through his friends, Mr. B. got a hold of some salves and salicylate [salicylate: salicylic acid, effective primarily against fevers,

and partly against pain - Editor's note], which slowly put me back on my feet.

Outside it was freezing, in the attic and cellar it was cold. Ujo [Uncle] Pagac thought of another hiding place. In his and his wife's bed, between the springs on which the mattress sat and the B.m part of the bed, which stood on planks, he made this drawer. It was made so that I could crawl into it in case of great danger. The smallest munchkin in the family tested it out by yelling "tűjn el", and I then crawled under the bed and into the drawer. The drawer enabled you to lie horizontally in such a way that when someone looked under the bed, he didn't see anyone, and neither could you see anyone when the bedclothes were stripped off. During the day I stayed mainly in the attic, and at night I preferred to make the journey down to the cellar, which was behind a camouflaged door. In those days house searches were a daily matter.