

Two Friends

By Sophy Churches

My parents were Jewish. It was a great disadvantage to be Jewish during WWII in Central Europe.

My father was hiding after he escaped from forced labor, which was just one step away from being tossed into a concentration camp or thrown in the army heading for the Russian front, which was a sure death warrant.

He arrived home from the forced labor camp via forest paths eating berries and leaves only. He knew where my mother was hiding, then he had to leave that place soon, as everywhere there were gendarmes whose job was to surround Jewish people. His high school friend was Franz F. who was in the Nazi headquarters. Yes, a lot of Hungarians joined the Nazis. My father contacted Franz via somebody else and requested help from him. In a few days a list of eminent Hungarian Jews' names, who were not allowed to be captured by the Nazis, was published in the newspapers. My parents' name was on that list, as well as the grandparents on both sides. Even I was on the list. However, my father did not really trust the newspapers and went into further hiding. My mother was lucky enough to get into a ghetto of Jewish women with small babies under the supervision of the Swiss Red Cross. There is still a marble memorial sign on that house, where these women with their children survived.

The next friendship saved my father from the Communist dictatorship's prison tortures. Everyone's mail that was sent abroad was censored by the regime. They opened and read the letters; if they just contained family news, they let them be forwarded, but if there was any political reference or criticism, home search and arrest with detainment followed, often prison was added. Thus my father was detained for the reason of collaborating with Franz F., describing the horrors of the communist regime in the 1950's. Franz F. was in prison after the war as a war criminal. He was freed during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and immediately escaped to Switzerland.

My father, Laszlo Urbach, was a famous sportsman, winning many races, including the European championship in motorcycling. Thus he made lots of friends, especially because he manufactured and sold the motorcycles that he raced with. Amongst his friends was Albert Szentgyorgyi who invented Vitamin C from the extraction of Hungarian peppers. He was hailed all over the world and he lived in the USA after the war. It came to his attention that my father was in prison. It took him one telephone call from the USA to the head of the Hungarian Communist Party who was the leader of the country to say, "Free Urbach because he is my friend." Father came home much slimmed down but unharmed by the infamous communist prison tortures. It is good to have influential friends.

My father died much later from a heart attack on a street in Budapest, as he was trying to collect his passport and travel papers to visit his high school friend, Franz F. in Switzerland.