

Szabolcs KissPál:

The Engram Dilemma

/ Interviews

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I.

To be honest, until now, I had little to do with archives. I started to research a bit into my paternal ancestry with external help from historians, not on my own.

So, to be honest, archives as such are not very present in my life. Sometimes I browse Fortepan. I search for things like mills, wheat, and bakers from the 50s... I had an idea to make a small project for our story. Now I've started an album for the kids, and I'm trying to highlight the pictures that are important, to make sure we have them, because in this huge digital tsunami, important things practically disappear and the way you connect to memories changes, because you just endlessly scroll through images. I think I have this problematic relationship with screens, so maybe that's why online archives can't affect me deeply. But a good example is the book I mentioned to you, the one I just found in the Káli Basin, ***Tell Your Son*** on Jewish Traditions in Hungary, with photos by Tamás Féner, which immediately struck me..., with very nice documentary photos, and boom, I took it!

To be honest, I immediately get suspicious about sharing personal family photos in the public sphere - it is very strange to me. Who looks at them and why, and who do I want to share them with at all? - It raises a lot of questions.

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Well, it's funny and typical, to say the least, and it says a lot about the whole thing what came to my mind first: a conversation with my father.

I had known as a child that he was of Jewish descent on his mother's side. But it was never on the agenda in our house, we never had a conversation about it, but I had it in the back of my mind, although I never really thought about it...

And
I was at his house once, here in Szigony Street, about a year before he died, around 2015 - he was in a very shaky state by then and it was hard to catch him with a truly clear mind. But on one of those last occasions, we talked about old stories and things... I ask him one day, when we're sitting in the room; "listen, if your mother was Jewish, and Jewishness is passed down by one's mother, then you must be Jewish, and then I must be half Jewish, right?" That's what I told him!

His answer was: ***Well, I never thought of that.***

Back then, this sentence seemed funny even to me, because it said everything about this whole situation since all his friends were Jewish, as well as his childhood best friend, who I also knew about, because by then he had shown me this particular poem a few years ago, about his best childhood friend who was shot into the Danube with his father in '44 by the Arrow Cross when he was only eleven. They lived on Németsölgyi Road, right where the whole madness started. A documentary was made about it a few years ago... It's a poem to this little friend of his. I calculated once, that he must have written it when he was about sixty, so a lot later than the event, but it says something about him, something about the deep guilt and sadness, the guilt of survivors. The whole poem is saturated with it. Why did they take his friend and not my father...? A good part of his library was

Jewish-themed books, he knew everything about WWII, really everything, everything! His whole psychological orientation... he was a classic Jewish intellectual! And then this sentence comes out of his mouth: "Well, I never thought about that."

Quite a few years later, in January 2021, parallel with a major family drama that happened at our home, I found out that my mother and her brother had a half-brother. When we got in touch, we went straight into the depths of it. He told us that he had found us by finding out that his dad, my maternal grandfather, was Jewish. Nobody in my family knew this, neither my mother nor my uncle, so this knowledge was brought by the new half-brother based on a genetic test which is how we got connected to him.

Then this whole aspect became very prevalent; what is behind this whole question of Jewish origin in my life and my family? So, it is certainly present on my father's side, but also on my mother's side via my grandfather. Thanks to this guy, Peter, I came into contact with historians with whom he had been working for some time, and that's how he found us. I then asked these historians to help me start to dig a little bit and research my paternal side, because all I knew up to that point was that my father was of Jewish descent on his mother's side. And one fine day a letter came, and the historian guy asked if the name Honig means anything to you. I say, nothing in the world... and he sends me a bunch of documents, which make it quite clear that my father was born with the surname Honig, and in '45 or '46, I don't remember exactly, but it is certain that they changed their name after the war.

This hit me very hard then because I didn't know anything about it. Because this name change never came up even once in any conversation. When my father told me about his father, and he told me quite a lot - I even did a long interview with him, I have a fourteen-hour-long raw recording in which he talks a lot about his childhood and his family, but never once did he say that they had changed their name in '45.

And he always said that he hated going to cemeteries, that they were rubbish. Why would you go there? It's pointless. I never met my paternal grandparents because they died long before I was born, but we never went to the cemetery either, because my father would just shrug, so I didn't know where they were.

Spring 2021. Suddenly, I got a phone call from one of my father's closest friends who lives in Berlin. To this day I don't understand how this could happen, but out of the blue, he starts telling me this story, without any specific reason, that your father was Honig, so and so and so... Because I hadn't told him what I've just found out about my father. At the same moment, while I was on the phone with him, my mother called ten times, I called her back and she said: listen, we're standing here next to the Farkasréti cemetery, in the Jewish cemetery, we have found your father's parents' grave! It was unbelievable. And then a couple of weeks later, quite amusingly, I went to the cemetery with a colleague of mine - who is a Muslim, with whom I became very close, and we went looking for it, and together we found the graves of my father's parents, János and Renée, who were both buried in the Jewish cemetery. This was in the morning, the weather was nice, there were big chestnut trees and not many people around. Jewish graves with their Hebrew inscriptions were quite neglected. I had never been to a Jewish cemetery before, I put a small stone on the grave. Then later I went there with the kids, but before that, I went with my partner, but for the first time I had gone alone with my friend. It was powerful to have a Muslim friend come with me to find my Jewish grandparents.

Throughout my childhood, my father had told me that his father was an illegitimate child, the child of an Italian travelling actor and that he had nothing to do with Judaism on his father's side. He told me, rather convolutedly, that his paternal mother was a true Christian woman, but because of the illegitimate child she had to marry a Jewish man in Pécs, but it was her, his paternal grandmother, who was taken from Baranya to Auschwitz. That was the story I always knew. And in comparison, the historian couple found the exact marriage certificates. On paper, all my ancestors there were of Jewish descent. Now, is this the truth or my father's story about the Italian travelling actor, who knows?

I wouldn't dare to say I was very public about it, but it's interesting to note that I think I got closer on an experiential level when my mother's half brother - who also started to go down this path very consciously - took us to an Orthodox synagogue near Nagymező Street. After that, one Friday we went there for a *Shabbat*¹.

This happened last October and it was a very powerful experience! My maternal grandfather was an evangelical pastor, despite his Jewish background or not, which was totally hushed up. As a child, I grew up going to church with him every Easter and Christmas and sometimes during the year. My mum and her sibling grew up this way. So, I was born into this evangelical, somewhat puritanical, Christian family. In comparison, it was a very profound experience in the synagogue to see what happens with Orthodox Jews on all levels. Such as the relationship between men and women, the relationship with the rabbi, and the relationship with singing, dancing, and eating... It was an elemental experience! I felt like, wow, I'm so far away from that, because we don't live like that, I don't have friends like that, because we're not embedded in a community like that, but I felt so much of its power, and I felt for sure that I had something to do with it!

I'm not even saying it was a feeling of home or something like that, but I didn't feel tense, I felt this was so familiar. I understood it. I understood why they were dancing and singing and going around the synagogue, and I understood the relationship with food at the huge table, and the rabbi saying the blessing, but at the end of the table another elder was saying the blessing, and there's a huge bustle and noise and kids running around...

So, there was a force to it all. It was a bit as if my father represented this as a civilian, as a one-man institution. But since he had a totally disconnected relationship with it all he couldn't be like this openly, nor in a liberated pleasurable way... He was like this secretly and in an intellectualized way. It was in his relationship with food, his mentality with human relationships, his depth and his closeness! It came from within him.

We went there on several occasions, but on one occasion there was an invited cantor who led the singing. And it was shocking...! I experienced what it is like when everything important is present in his whole being, his whole personality, the suffering, but not just his, but fifteen ancestors'... it was almost a mystical

1 Saturday - Shabbat in Hebrew - is the biggest and holiest Jewish holiday. Only Yom Kippur is bigger and holier than Shabbat. As the Torah states: Yom Kippur - the Sabbath of Sabbaths - is the holiest and most sacred of all Sabbaths. There is nothing like the sanctity of the Sabbath, for not only is it a day of rest when all work is forbidden, but the Sabbath symbolizes both Creation and Creator in the eyes of the Jewish people, the Creator who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. This is why the Almighty gave the Jewish people the Sabbath, the day of spiritual ascension. The Sabbath is called the "Queen" in Jewish folklore and Kabbalah literature. The Friday night Sabbath prayer is about receiving the "queen".

experience. This archaic thing - you know, the language - it totally energized me, there was such power in it, and also the blessings. The blessing; that's the whole point! It's not pathos - I'm not sure I can find the right words for it - that's not the point. The rabbi says a blessing over here, but over there, at the end of the table, another old man with a big beard, also says the blessing to his small circle afterwards or at the same time. It's a terribly long table, with the rabbi sitting about halfway down the table, and at the other end of the table there was an old man, I don't think he was a rabbi. I think I remember he was the butcher of the community, a *kosher butcher*². We were sitting closer to the old man, and we had a *kippah*³ on each of us, maybe we had brought our own by then... And this plastic, quite disgusting tablecloth, with dips, maybe appetizers... There was a huge bustle, with kids running around, and no one carrying plates, because it's only the Christian waiters who do that. If I remember correctly, by then women and men sat there mixed, and fruit soup was laid out. Challah on the plates, a lot of noise and bustling, and maybe even alcohol... which totally surprised me. It was all very new to me. And then the whisky and the vodka started flowing...

All along the synagogue, lengthwise towards the back, to the left of the entrance the entrance from the street, and then - I don't know what they call it in a synagogue, where the rabbi speaks from..., and then tables all along this stretch from wall to wall forming a long table. I think there was a light, I remember, a sort of yellowish light, lamps... and maybe there were candles. As if there were windows here on this side behind the rabbi. I seem to recall that the men were all in black, black trousers, black jackets, and quite a few in white collared shirts and black vests. The women tended to be in these earthy, darker clothes, dark burgundy, dark green..., but not patterned, sort of plain, simple clothes. I think there were maybe one or two men in hats, there were plastic plates on the plastic-covered table. The cutlery was something strange, sort of yellowish aluminium, not metallic, that's what I remember... In the back, at the entrance, close to where we were sitting, there were two or three bookshelves that had a lot of prayer books, I remember I took one of them and browsed it.

Outside was the hand washing area, where we went for ritual hand washing, and there were some very nice old wooden benches. And in the middle, there was a raised island from where the *cantor*⁴ sang.

For us, it was not evident whether we would be admitted. On the one hand, because officially both of us, me and the newly found half-brother of my mother, are Jewish on our father's side and it is not obvious whether we would be welcome in such an Orthodox community... On the other hand, Peter and his partner are a gay couple, so they entered this Orthodox space as two men with two children.

And in contrast to our apprehension, we were very welcome and nobody made a thing out of our situation. This was surprising to them as well.

2 Meat from a kosher animal does not automatically become kosher. It must undergo a special slaughtering process (shechita) by a specially trained Jewish butcher (shochet). The essence of shechita is that the animal does not suffer during slaughter and that all blood is drained from its body, the consumption of which is strictly forbidden. At the time of slaughter, the shochet cuts the animal's throat with a special sharp knife (chalef), on which there must not be any unevenness nor teeth. The incision cuts simultaneously through the jugular veins, arteries, larynx and oesophagus, leading to a sudden drop in blood pressure in the brain and immediate loss of consciousness. The animal feels no pain as a result of this defeat. In the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'a 23), five halachic rules are laid down which the shochet must observe...

3 Kippah (a Hebrew word meaning 'dome') or also known as a yarmulke (a combination of Aramaic words meaning 'fear of the king'). It is compulsory for men to wear when entering a synagogue.

4 Cantor: a term nowadays used for those who serve as professional shul chibur.

II. Dezső Váli

Rationally speaking, I'm not a world-class artist, but I can have an impact within Hungary. There have been opportunities, so it will remain part of Hungarian culture. My simple explanation of this is that when people in Rio de Janeiro see a picture and think Bartsay..., Szentendre..., what a beautiful picture..., and the next day they will forget it because they have no connection to it. That's.

I have no specific opinion about Jewish archives. The open question is to what extent can they make this information public so that society can use it. One is familiar with many of these images, and well, one is used to seeing horrible or very pitiful photos. But here (in the JPhoto archives) there are some real everyday human faces as well, which is very good.

I am monocultural, so I can look and see only one thing at a time. We were building a room for our kid, (and because of that) I couldn't paint for six months, and I was really scared that I would never be able to paint again. Then I figured it out, and in one afternoon I painted three or four one-meter-tall pictures, just to do something, ...and one of them was a Jewish cemetery that came to my mind! It was a picture of a Jewish cemetery, so to clarify: I had taken pictures of Jewish cemeteries for a book in '82-83, and then we were building in '84, which is also when I painted it. I think in the autumn of '84 and from then on, I liked it so much that for three and a half years that is all I painted, making about a hundred and sixty pictures, half of which I cut up because I didn't think they were good and about eighty remained.

The background to this is that I got involved quite by accident in a government research project in which I was the photographer. It had nothing to do with Jewish cemeteries, but because of our boss's identity problem - because she was Jewish but she had also confirmed, we would stop the government car at the end of every village so she could look at the Jewish cemeteries. And I was a relatively new photographer and if there was something nice in front of me..., it became a photographic archive of two thousand four hundred pieces.

I only viewed it aesthetically. She was walking around - at that moment she became a private person for ten minutes or fifteen minutes, and I had no official business, so I took pictures. She didn't know then, but she was delighted when she saw a few snippets of them later on. She was by the way a very old friend of mine, who curated my first exhibition after I graduated. She was a sociologist and an art historian: Kata S. Nagy.

From the Institute of Popular Culture (in Kornél Square) we used to go out every two months in a big black car for three days to villages, and her job was sociological research; focusing on the culture of "clean rooms" and how that was changing, and between the two villages we stopped at the Jewish cemeteries because she wanted to look at them. And since I'd stop too and since there was film...

I don't know how many cemeteries I looked at, (their condition) was completely varied and diverse. Many have been renovated since then, and some have

completely eroded... I photographed cemeteries and, incidentally, synagogues too when I could, which were usually in a dilapidated state. I strictly dated and numbered everything, so I can tell you in which month was each photo taken: So, the first ones were taken in '74 or '75 - I don't know off the top of my head and it lasted until '84. Then I realized that I was going to make a book out of it. And then in '82-83 when I was already in Romania, and partly as a favour to her, I continued photographing the same things for the book with a big camera. Normally, I photographed with a Leica. We had an exhibition in Romania, and afterwards, they said; Comrades, for three or four days you can use a Mercedes minibus to travel around the country... And with great luck, we didn't choose Transylvania, which they were very happy about, but instead, we chose Suceava in Moldova. And we went there, and one day between two villages I stopped the bus and looked over to the other side, and there was a Jewish cemetery. Between two villages, in an uninhabited area, we stopped the bus on the right side of the road so we could go into the meadow. I went ahead, and I remember that right off the highway was a hillside, full of stones, those stones. I was photographing their silhouette, so it couldn't have been very far away.

When was this exhibition? It couldn't have been winter, all I know is that the sun was high, because the atmosphere turned the photos into such a serious, grand story in an instant. It probably contributed to the photographs - whether it was sunny or not - featuring scenes in such grand landscapes! I have a strong photo of that because we went back and forth, I got myself driven there, and I asked the Balázs Béla Studio for an eight-minute shooting grant because I wanted to shoot Romanian Jewish cemeteries, and I wrote a script in which I was a total outsider and they knew nothing about it, so they would have just laughed at me, but János Kende said he would do it, that he would be my cinematographer, and then "...oh, well, János Kende...!" so then they gave me a grant of 30,000 forints.

In Hungarian (cemeteries) there are poorer and richer cultures, cultures with this and that influence. This is also typical of Romania, as there was, for example, what I think was called the wine route, where for centuries there was trade from the South to Poland. I think I remember it was for trading wine and along this route people were rich. So, there was a field which had a sense of wealth. And for example, I saw cemeteries like that there, and then there were poor ones too...

The Jewish cemeteries are especially beautiful and not so ugly as our Catholic cemeteries, because it was obligatory to be buried with the Chevra Kadisha, who buried everybody, and if the dead were very rich and they wanted to express their love and appreciation, the Chevra Kadisha only allowed the stone to be a little bit thicker, and nothing else. It's beautiful... And that's why it is that way. I loved and enjoyed the forms and culture.

This is a closed unit, which is a cultural asset. I donated all the negatives to the Department of Judaic Studies at the Faculty of Arts, to (Géza) Komoróczy. When it turned out that they did not know what to do with the material, I gave it to the Ethnographic Museum, which was the fun part, because later, when it turned out it would be made into a book, I asked to get the negatives back, but they wouldn't lend them to me. Yes, they have the negatives. The Institute of Ethnography has just come forward, that they've

unexpectedly found some negatives, we're dealing with that now... The Jewish negatives were mine, of course, but how they got them, I don't know. There is a hole in the system.

I archived it in an album, then I took it out once and which worked out. I started to look at my photos again, then I distanced from it very quickly, so now and then people would ask me which cemetery was this one, but there was no such thing... there were no red and orange cemeteries. And since I hardly use any of the motifs, because I don't know them and that wouldn't be so tasteful, I treat them as if they were purely art. And the photos have nothing to do with me since then, only by the way the world administers them.

I had a collector, a wealthy man, a very wealthy man, and I took my Jewish cemetery book to him, its first edition to say it might be worth making a second edition. He said fine, he said let's not talk about it anymore and that I'll get a dedicated copy, then he took the book... I phoned my co-author and Rabbi Tamás Raj, that he must be happy about it and everything must be fine. Two days later, my collector called me back and said this wasn't fine, that we should forget it, that he would make a volume just about me, but that it should contain not only the photos but also the paintings. So, it became a book in its own right, and since it is a closed unit of three and a half years with about eighty paintings, they are now selling them at auctions at such a high price because they think they are better than my other one. Not because of me, nor the subject matter... I think that's valid and understandable, it's fine as it is.

Regarding architecture, I can put it this way, these cemeteries are in micro-interiors which are shockingly powerful. Where there is silence, there is death and there is prayer. These stones are historic, but they live and die too, and they are very beautiful.

III. Hédi

I think it's very interesting to look back at older pictures, and for me, memories are important, but mostly for keeping in touch with family members. I did a genealogy project once, which was a compulsory school project, and I did it with my dad's grandparents, who were... well, my grandfather was a Holocaust survivor, for example. My grandmother was born after him, but only a few years later, so it was very present for them, and they never talked about it like that before, so it was very interesting. They were trying to find old pictures for me or anything from the past. Doing this together was very, very important to me because it allowed us to have a special connection. Then shortly afterwards, my grandfather died, and I felt that project was an incredibly important thing. I have his stories, and if this personal thing hadn't happened, I would not be able to connect with him so well. So, these stories are in the images, which is why I can't just browse them endlessly. Especially since they led a similar lifestyle and the pictures are similar... So, within a certain limit, I like to browse them. The archive is such an old thing in my mind, and in an era when pictures weren't digitized right away, collecting paper pictures, I don't know... It's strange to think that after a while our pictures will be archived, so to speak, and it's strange to look back at videos from my childhood, for example, and videos of my parents and things like that...

But I haven't thought about uploading something personally, it's not the best thing for that... My mum worked at Centropa and she did a lot of interviews with Holocaust survivors. She used to browse a lot and showed me old family photos, and she uploaded a lot of them herself, as she made the connection. So, based on that example, yes, I feel there is potential. It's a very difficult question, especially because we tend to think a lot. It moves me a lot, and it's very important for me, especially because the search for identity is very important for my age, I'm nineteen. So yes, and especially because I feel that my identity is being taken away from me - like, for example, I think that my Hungarian identity is now harder to define because I feel that what the Hungarian people represent now does not match what I represent. This is very difficult to separate from my Hungarian identity. So, I am now focusing on finding myself in something else. Judaism has helped me a lot in this: not on the level of religion, because it is even more difficult for me to connect on a religious level. So, I connect to Judaism more as a community. For example, the Szarvas Camp, which I have attended often, has helped me a lot. It's always a first step, if you meet someone who is curious and turns out to be Jewish, it becomes a kind of thing afterwards, you can bond more easily and then you can move on, but I can always perceive it as a good basis for bonding. There is a synagogue where my family goes, where I used to go on holidays, and where I have been with my brother and sisters. It means a lot more to my brother, and he's much more into it. I try to learn from him by the way. He's very good at never trying to force anything on me, and my parents have always been very open. I feel like my mum found her identity in Judaism when she was in her early twenties. So, it became very important to her, and for my dad too, but I never felt they push me into it. We always celebrated Hanukkah, not Christmas. But, for example, I once

¹ Camp Szarvas is a Jewish children and youth camp that combines community building with individual development.

asked for a Christmas tree for *Hanukkah*², and there was no problem with that, so I got a Christmas tree for Hanukkah. At that time, I felt very upset that I was the only one in the class who didn't do Christmas, and then Hanukkah came and they said if this is what I want, I'll be given this. Why not? So, I was raised to be Jewish like that, if that is a thing. We have a pretty Jewish household. No, we don't eat kosher, but when I was younger, we lit candles every Friday, we baked *Challah*³. My mum taught me how to make a loaf of bread. We went to Szarvas and went to *Talmud*⁴ lessons. I went to Talmud on Fridays when I was younger.

I don't know... We are far from being very traditionally religious. I knew very few people who are Jewish like we are, and I think, this hasn't changed.

Some memories have a beauty to them. So, a very funny story, that is almost always the first thing that comes to mind, is that when I was little, I introduced myself by adding to my name that my Jewish name was Miriam. I always said that and then my brother said, you can't say that, it's not polite, and I just said "Okay", but the next time I'd introduce myself that way again.

I think I was about sixteen or fifteen when it became extra important to me. I realised the importance of identity super precisely when I realised how bad the situation was here. Then I started to see everything differently, I mean, politics and stuff like that... When I felt that everywhere I looked Christian Hungary was emphasised and I don't know..., and then I felt that, well, I can't identify with that, because it's not me. And then it was time to do something else.

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I remember a very specific memory in which I represented the Jewry. It was at school when I was a junior, there was a Christmas celebration and I asked my teacher to let me go out and light a Hanukkiah during the event. They let us and we recited all the Christmas stuff, and then all the grandmothers and everybody was sitting there and they were so happy, and I just went out and lit it, and I didn't listen to anybody and I didn't know what everybody was thinking, and then I went back. It was my performance and I was so happy!

This is one of those memories from 2014, the Christmas celebrations of our school class. Family members were invited, about thirty children, and everyone had, say, two or three guests. There were a lot of people standing there... There were real benches back then, a row of benches welded together with metal. The benches were joined to the tables, their front was shorter and then got taller. It was quite big, because there were three rows of benches, and in the front, there was a long wooden teacher's desk, with the teacher sitting in the middle. In the back, there was a carpeted area with an armchair and cupboards, and there was a play area in the back. It was about two in the afternoon. There

2 This year, the Festival of Lights begins on the evening of December 10 (the 25th of the month of Kislev according to the Jewish calendar) and lasts for 8 days. Hanukkah means consecration and its symbol is the hanukkiah. One candle is lit each day on this nine-pointed candlestick.

3 Challah or hallah is a Jewish culinary pastry, a potato-based braided loaf of bread.

4 The Talmud (תלמוד in Hebrew: "doctrine, study, that has been learned") is the largest and clearly the most important collection of post-biblical Jewish literature, the encyclopaedia of Judaism, the legal and religious foundation, the collection of customary law, the repository of biblical interpretations, the starting point of rabbinic Judaism. The Talmud's primacy over all other religious writings is an indication of its importance.

was a Christmas tree on the table, but it was a little plastic folding one, I remember that. We, children, would stand around it. There was a board on the wall. There was space between the board and the teacher's desk, where we would stand behind the teacher's desk in a half circle.

Yes, the Hanukkiah that I lit was my family's. We had a Hanukkiah, a metal Hanukkiah, that I was allowed to light because I wasn't going to burn anything... I remember when my mom and I bought big gold candles for it that wouldn't fit, so we had to cut the bottoms off and stick them in. I have no idea how many I lit, maybe I lit them all despite what day it was...

Maybe it wasn't even Hanukkah yet.

I don't remember anyone objecting, by the way, only that some liked it because there were several Jewish kids in the class who were familiar with it. My class teacher was very supportive and they liked me very much. I know they were very happy about it; I think...

So, it's a big old building with tall ceilings. It was a rectangular classroom, the door on the right, a little bit further away. And then there was this clown-shaped thing with these tissues, a clown-shaped tissue holder. It was a very tiny doorway and the wall was a normal shape and there was a green cupboard on the wall and it had pictures of class trips and it ran to the edge but it wasn't a very big space and there was a striped board and a dice board and a plain board as well. On the other side there were maybe four or five windows and between them was the alphabet and things like that, otherwise I think it was covered with wood for a while. Everything was greenish, with light turquoise green around it, kind of old, and the iron was this strong green colour. It may have been green linoleum parquet anyway, but it certainly wasn't wood or tiles, ...it was blue tiles! The cabinet with the photos was painted the same green as the benches. However, the cabinets in the back were varnished plain wood cabinets. And the carpet was a very old play mat. And the sofa in the back, it was a real woven brown sofa kind of thing, very socialist.

I think I did this as a solo production. I'm sure my brother was very happy with it, I think. He wasn't happy about the Christmas tree... There are some photos of a similar celebration, but I'm not sure...

A similar memory, which defined my Jewish identity, was a very interesting conversation with a friend of mine in Deák Ferenc Square, in that grassy area. She's half-English, and they'd just moved back from England, it was a couple of years ago, and we sat down and we ended up talking about this question of identity, etc. By the way, she is also Jewish, and English as well, and so these questions were also very relevant to her. We talked about how we felt, what we were comfortable with, what things meant. And yes, regarding Judaism, we both pretty much agreed that it was important for us, and that wasn't because of the religion. But let's just say that for me I think my ultimate statement was that I was my parents' child and that was the most important thing. For me that was the most certain thing and what gave me the most. That was a very good conversation by the way. We were sitting on the grass and I remember being very nervous because I didn't want to sit on the grass at Deák Ferenc Square, but then I sat down

and it was very, very dark, it was a summer evening and we talked a lot. So, we sat there and I think we talked there for several hours.

Now in hindsight, it was a very good place to be because a lot was going on. It was really interesting, like those film scenes where two people sit and then things happen around them in fast motion... Well, it was a little bit like that, because there were a lot of skateboarders there, a lot of noise, a lot of shouting, it was loud, with a lot of skateboarding, and there was a Ferris wheel that was spinning and was very bright... There were a lot of tourists coming and going. There were a lot of people sitting around on the grass, of course, it was summer, they were drinking a lot and things got broken... It was very noisy, and we were both very much in our own world.

We thought that we were Hungarians because we were born here. She was born here and she has lived in Hungary more than in England, and she learnt to speak Hungarian first, not English, while I have no foreign connections.

And then we were thinking about how we don't like to say that we are Hungarians abroad when we are asked where we are from because when we say that we are Hungarian, a lot of people have such a bad reaction. It's a bad feeling because you don't want to be associated with it, and then we kept thinking, okay, but then where do we come from..

We thought it was very unfair that they were taking away our right to happily be Hungarians, but then we came to the conclusion that unfortunately we can't do much about it at the moment, and we'll have to work on it, but then, on Deák Ferenc Square, we didn't think we could solve this problem.

...and where I can find refuge, although is not for the outside world, because if they ask me where I come from, I'll say that I'm Jewish, well... that things don't work that way. I never hide the fact that I'm Jewish, but if I don't feel like it, I don't say it. I usually say it, but only when it comes up. I don't necessarily bring it up. Sometimes I do bring it up, and sometimes I feel like there's a lot of extra stuff that comes with it, or how could I start a conversation, or whatever, whether it's important to add to a story, or I don't know... but there are times I rather don't say. I have had a negative experience about this.

Yeah, but also, she has also had a bad experience too, since in her family, being Jewish is still a very taboo subject. So, it is completely different for her.

I've always worn this necklace, that my great-grandfather gave to me when I was 12 for Bat Mitzvah⁵, so it's been hanging around my neck ever since. And I like it because it's not flashy, some say it's a goat or an animal, a deer, something like that. The only time I was approached was while I was working. An elderly couple came in and I heard them speaking Hebrew, which was quite obvious, and then I helped them and so on and so on... And then the woman asked me, is it a Hai ? And I told her yes, and she said good,

5 Girls are considered by the religion to be of age when they reach the age of twelve according to the Jewish calendar. A thirteen-year-old boy is called bar mitzvah, "son of the commandment", and a twelve-year-old girl is called bat mitzvah, "daughter of the commandment". This means that according to Jewish law she is no longer a minor, but an adult.

that's good, and then they paid and left. But then she came back and asked me if I wasn't afraid to wear it, I said no, because it's not recognizable.

I always like to tell people what it means, that it's life and it's *Hai*... So, I like it because it's not a generic thing, it's not a *Star of David*, say... I don't know if I'd wear a *Star of David*, but I might... I haven't thought about that because I like this.

IV. Judit Faludy

Let's approach it from what I know about the photographs and what my mother, Anikó Gazda, did since I have absolutely no idea how her pictures ended up in the JPhoto archive. Moreover, I don't know precisely what András Lénárt's role regarding the archive is, nor how and on what basis did he incorporate the Gazda material into the archive, so this is not clear to me...

My mother worked at the Institute for Urban Science and Urban Planning. She took it upon herself, or rather it was her task, to visit all the settlements of Hungary, including the farms, therefore all of them... She didn't do this alone but with Vera Muszik, and perhaps Kati Sándy was also her partner at the time. So, the three of them started working on this task. They are the same age - Vera will be 90 this year... Back in the day, they travelled to all these settlements, and in the meantime, my mother was developing several intersections: on the one hand, she started photographing the settlements in a very subjective way, with an architect's eye, but she was mostly taking pictures of what she liked, resulting in rather ethnographic photos. On the other hand, she was very sensitive to sociological themes: she has a lot of photos of minority children, with big black eyes; Roma children... She also started a collection of photos of St. John of Nepomuk statues, which were placed next to bridges and roads, and her fourth subject was synagogues and Jewish-related buildings.

This whole group of work became a two-copy set of developed, enlarged photographic material: one of the sets was later included in the archives of the Institute for Urban Planning, which later became the Lechner Lajos Knowledge Centre, Regional, Architectural, and Information Technology Non-Profit Limited Liability Company, and can be found there today; while the second copy is available at the Gyula Forster National Heritage Conservation and Asset Management Centre. Back when they were made, these new institutions did not even exist...

The OMF - the National Monument Protection Inspectorate might have become the OMVH (National Monument Protection Office, later the Cultural Heritage Protection Office) by then. After my Mum died, they bought the duplicate from me, and to my understanding, the sets of the photographs are held at both institutes, where they can be viewed today. That's how Jutka Ferenc first started working with the specific Jewish, synagogue material. This led to a photo exhibition, for which Jutka had written a text.¹ Ferenc Dávid was still alive at the time,

1 Judit Ferencz: Régi zsinagógák, imaházak, imaszobák. Gazda Anikó fényképei az 1980-as évekből, Beszélő, December 2004, Number 12, Volume 9, Kultúra <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/regi-zsinagogak-imahazak-imaszobak> (last visited: 01.10.2023.)

and they had somehow got in touch, which is very important because the book that was published on synagogues was unfortunately inaccurate in quite a few places, and it was Ferenc Dávid who could have corrected it, however, his work was interrupted by his death.

They worked together with Rudolph Klein on the "Délvidék" material when my mother had grown out of the country borders and wanted to focus the synagogue material on a broader scope of Hungarian areas, which is when Rudi Klein came into the picture. I am very close to him as a person, but I find his work less accurate. Ferenc Dávid confirmed my opinion that he was not precise enough, so Rudi could not supplement the research properly, and he categorized synagogues in a completely different way from my mother.

And then a lot of other synagogue books have grown out of this since then, which either refer to my mother or don't... And then we should mention Anna Gábor, who works at the Jewish Museum, who is an ethnographer, and she said that she gave my mother quite a lot of information, including, for example, perhaps in Tokay - or I don't know exactly where perhaps in Mád - Anna said there is a constellation of a synagogue and a *rabbi's house*² together. I think Anna Gábor brought this to her attention, and my mum just took a picture of it, but nowadays regarding this topic, they refer to my mother most of the time. The material that was found at Ferenc Jutka specifically focuses on the synagogues, that's all I know about them, and I have no idea how other material came into the picture as well... I have a lot of photos, which are on the one hand photos from our trips abroad, and on the other hand, are social documentary photographs, which I really like! A colleague of mine at the Institute of Art History has just started scanning them in, so I have them on CD, but I simply haven't had the strength to start to compare the contents of the CDs with the rolls of film.

My mum collected a lot of data, yes, but those files are all in Forster and Lechner, and the ones I have are only 'by-products', so they're in the "work in progress" category, and as well as all the pictures of Paris where we went together...

She didn't enlarge her own photos, as her colleagues in the VÁTI (Institute for Urban Planning) did, so they were enlarged officially with doubles.

I was more involved when my mother would put all the photos on the floor in the big room, and then we would go around with our paper notes saying, "Okay, I was here..., I photographed this street from here..., this is this frame...", and then we would write this down, both on the slide films - because she also did a lot of slides - and onto the developed positives, which then went into the archive...

A text was published in Balkon when Zsuzsa Toronyi and her family organized a conference where they referred a lot to the Gazda material, and I wrote the conference report,³ enabling me to also talk about my mother...

2 rabbi's house: not only did it serve as the residence of the current rabbi but it was also the seat of the yeshiva; the study of Jewish religion.

3 Judit Faludy: Látszólagos láthatatlanság, konferencia-beszámoló, Balkon, July 2012, p. 27-28.

To be honest, I think there was a lot of resentment because she wasn't necessarily good at knowing how to refer to whom..., this obviously should be amended somehow...

Maybe it would be worthwhile to contact Vera Muszik, as she also lives in the district and could contribute to the documentation of my mother's life's work. Because I don't quite understand why the synagogues series has become so central in this material. I know that back then Sándor Scheiber led a huge circle in the rabbinical school but my Mama was not a Scheiberian, she didn't attend his lectures... She was very close to Rabbi Schweitzer, and later I became very close to him as well, but you couldn't help being close to him, he was so very nice! I don't know when was the point in time when this general Hungarian urbanist, architecture-centred approach crystallized into Jewishness..., this is a terribly important question, and I think it was very cool back in the 1980s.

In '89, the book was published and edited by the Komoróczy family, which was then digitised by them and is available on their website.⁴ There I think she got a lot of help from Géza Komoróczy himself and all the photographers she worked with: Ági Haiman and Ági H. Takács. They took the photographs and made a condensed version which, I think, helped my mother a lot in developing her architectural frame of mind.

Two things should be added to this photographic approach, which was very important for my mother. One is that we both grew up on Lucien Hervé's photography books - she gave them to me, I grew up on them, and they were very important to her as well: to capture the form of the building from the right angle. So, I think that's what she was also looking for in documentary photography... The other things that I also inherited from her that must have been important were fonts and typefaces. She loved the whole Kner scene... These visual questions are very dominant in her pictures, she was an artist after all; my mother was an architect.

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I think I was always brought up that way, which I knew since childhood... it was even nice sometimes that we held every celebration twice. We would have Christmas, but before that, we had a little Hanukkah,⁵ preferably with family, with lots of candle lighting, lots of singing... I'm the child of divorced parents, so Christmas afternoon was spent at home with my mum and my grandmother, whom I lived with, and in the evening, I would go over to my father's. And it was always a regular thing, for a very long time, that we would go to midnight mass in the Basilica at Christmas.

This was quite normal for me, and then in the late eighties somehow, I don't remember exactly how, but I got involved in the Bethlen Square community of **Zionists**⁶, and since we have just talked about the interviews of **Feri Erős**,⁷

4 Anikó Gazda: Zsinagógák és zsidó közösségek Magyarországon. Térképek, rajzok, adatok, Az MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport kiadványai, Center of Jewish Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, HUNGARIA JUDAICA, Editor: Géza Komoróczy, Budapest, 1991 https://kisebbssegkutato.tk.hu/uploads/files/olvasoszoba/hungaricajudaica/Zsinagogak_es_zsido_kozossegek.pdf

5 Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is the most well-known Jewish holiday among non-Jews. It commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks, the cleansing and rededication of the Jerusalem shrine, and the miracle of the lamp burning for eight days.

6 Zionist: Jewish national movement, which aims to establish or restore a Jewish state in the territory of historic Israel and to defend Jewish interests in other countries of the world.

7 Medvetánc, 1985/2-3. „Hogyan jöttem rá, hogy zsidó vagyok?” Family history interviews made by Ferenc Erős - András Kovács - Katalin Lévai. Ferenc Erős- András Kovács- Katalin Lévai with the “second generation” after the Holocaust.

you should know that the community was organized by Tibor Engländer, who was a psychologist... I was in his community, and I still have quite a few friends from there, though now they are more just like Facebook acquaintances, but we know who's who.

And I think my dad took that quite badly... He was very sensitive to historical things, and he thought that this period around the Political Change in '89 was very dangerous, he perceived it to be dangerous that I was going to Bethlen Square every Friday, and he thought that it wouldn't lead to much good... I grew up with my mother, and I had an on-and-off relationship with my father, and around then something broke, which led to us not speaking for years... And it was part of my rebellion, that I said: well, from now on no more Christian holidays, from now on I'll only participate in Jewish holidays, I'll only go to Jewish communities, and I'll break with Christianity! Of course, there was no huge break, it was part of my rebellion, I guess...

I was always brought up to be different, so, it was familiar when I stood out. I'd think: fine, I stand out because I'm Jewish! Then I won't do things like the others!

It's more of a protest, so my experiences, which came from my anti-Semitic form teachers, are much stronger. For example, in the last years of primary school, I had a class teacher, who was a history teacher, who hated me terribly, and who obviously was anti-Semitic. I can't quote him now because I've deliberately forgotten... but again, I had this defiance, which was stronger! I took it into my head that I will be different, and if he said that was something bad, I would still be that regardless!

Then I got a great class teacher in high school. I don't know how anti-Semitic was she but we didn't like each other very much, and then sometime around fourth grade I had a special carnival experience because she dressed up as an SS soldier. My teacher was a woman by the way and this happened in 1987. It was without any precedent, and I have no idea where it came from or how she got the idea in the first place, because she just hated me as I was, and I wasn't the only one in this situation... So, I don't know where she got the idea but I totally froze then and don't remember anything else afterwards, except wondering why...? I don't remember anything else, no pictures, no sound, no more details about the carnival, nothing! I think it happened in the gym or the canteen or something. We attended the Bakar-Madas building, and its gym is on the ground floor room somewhere. So, this probably happened in the classroom before we went out, or something like that...

I remember that I totally froze there and then. I don't remember sharing this with the rest of my classmates or talking about it at all. I was in a frozen state.

She was in a black leather outfit and I even remember her drawing a swastika on her arm. How did she think of this and why...? And she was a very thin woman, still a respected French teacher, and I don't know... she just hated us, a few girls, for which there was no basis, and nothing was said about this. She hated some of us... And since then, we've met at reunions and we talk as if nothing happened.

I had another experience like that in that class. When I used to go to Bethlen Square - that was still during high school, I used to wear a little tiny Israeli... you know, there's this bluish-green stone, Eilat stone... there's an official name for it.. it's blue and green. So, I got one of those from my grandmother, and a tiny little Star of David - half a centimetre wide - and somehow, I just went to school with it, and somehow, it's connected to the lesson of our dear geography teacher...

The story was that I went in with this chain, and a friend of mine walked past me, who would sit at the desk behind me, she suddenly came up to me and told me to hide this chain. Another girl from class - with whom I was not and am not and will never be on good terms - somehow, made this viscerally dismissive, totally anti-Semitic comment, that I don't remember precisely... Somehow this chain, these two girls and my geography lessons are connected, but how, I don't know...

Identity is very important to me, by the way. I've considered it important since the eighties.

I am now starting to find it in my research topic as well. I started studying at ELTE in 2013, still under its maiden name, at the Master's programme in Intercultural Psychology and Pedagogy. I got this degree in three semesters, and it's very important that since then the course has been renamed Social Inclusion, and this whole gender story has affected this course because we had quite a lot of gender courses... But we also had a lot of minority courses: Sociology with Endre Sík, Jewish Culture and Judaism, and Holocaust Studies with Mónika Kovács... and these really reinforced my identity, which had become particularly important by then.

I've been using and working with what I learned during my studies ever since, which in fact, I had started because of this collection because I thought that it was very exciting that the Psychiatric Art Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was in some way dealing with minorities and minority issues. And there I found this tiny intersection; the common interface between Jewishness and the way of thinking about psychiatric patients.

So, now this is even more relevant and strong!

An acquaintance of mine sent me some details from an archive that was related to his family, so I read them because of a specific recommendation or a specific, personal connection, but I don't normally come into contact with archives either personally or professionally. In connection with an article, someone might send me something interesting, and then we'd look it up in one of the more famous or canonised archives, but I don't browse them in-depth just by myself. We don't have a family archive, at least not one that I would call a family archive. But there is a box with a lot of photos, although they mostly cover my own life and a little bit before I was born.

There are also separate photographs of various times, of relatives I either know or don't, and of life situations. I think these were specifically Jewish-themed archives, the ones I mentioned before, were sent by an acquaintance because they had found a relative, or a branch of their family tree, or a fragment of a story... It wasn't necessarily a visual document, but a text - they had discovered a story related to their family life. But otherwise, I don't look at image-based archives specifically, I much more often read stories individually that might have pictures rather than browse image-based archives.

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I have some first memories in which I found out that I was Jewish. It was not explicitly hidden in my family, so it must have been said many times in connection with various things, that I have a Jewish family or Jewish ancestry..., but what it means gets very rarely brought up in an explicit pedagogical situation in a family with a small child, and since I didn't grow up in a religious or traditional family, there were not many situations in which I would have come into contact with this. I don't remember a situation in which someone communicated this to me, by my family or by someone else calling me that, so I don't have a specific first experience. But somehow when you asked this question and said that you would ask this question to people and that this had been asked before in another research, I automatically thought of this memory. So that's kind of why I connect it to that because that is what I remember. And of course, it's an interesting question, when do people first learn that they are Jewish, and when do they first come into direct contact with the Holocaust? This, for example, overlaps for me.

One of the things I remember is a story when we had a slightly more distant elderly relative from my grandparents' generation, who wasn't a grandparent of mine but a collateral relative. I think I was probably a toddler at the time, attending nursery. What I remember is this lady and seeing that she had a number tattooed on her arm. And somehow in hindsight, I remember, that I could somehow connect it to something secret or something shameful... something loaded. I remember that it was very hard not to look at. I somehow knew that I was not allowed to ask about it there and then in that family situation. I don't know if I asked later on, I don't remember if I dared to ask about it

afterwards or whether I buried in my mind that I had seen something, like when you know as a child that you see something that you shouldn't have seen because it's not child-friendly. So somehow in my mind, it was connected to the fact that it was something that was in our family and not in other families. But whether it was specifically connected in my mind to the notion of Jewishness at that point - I don't think so, but it could also be that I just somehow felt that it was something that distinguished my family from other families. Now, in hindsight, as an adult, I think that it probably got categorized along with other experiences like this, so I was able to classify it: that it was a type of thing that is not present everywhere, but is in our family...

This must have been in the early nineties, around ninety-two or ninety-three, based on my age, and I think it happened in our apartment. I'm sure it was in our flat, but I can't remember who was this lady relative who had to come to visit...

I was in the room that was used as both my parent's room and the living room. I remember that there was an armchair to the right of the door and this lady was sitting in it... I still have these armchairs, the armrest of the armchair is brown, it's made of wood, I don't remember what the cover was like then..., maybe it was brown. I think I was playing on the floor. More adults were sitting in the armchairs. This lady was sitting to my right, and I was playing or sitting on the floor or had just come in..., but in any case, this arm was about at my head height when I saw it. It's a spacious place generally, but it was quite crowded because of all the old heirloom furniture. There was a bed that was covered, there were four armchairs, one large reading armchair, and three other armchairs that had armrests. There was a desk with a chair, and my mom had all her stuff on it, and there was a wall nearly entirely covered by a bookcase. There was a cabinet and a TV, and in between the two was a coffee table. So, there was a bed, and armchairs and in the middle was a small coffee table.

Based on the rhythm of the family and how old I was, I can only imagine that it must have happened between siesta and dinner.

What is most connected with this memory is the pattern of the parquet floor and the feeling of the wood of the armrest, and that I'm somehow quite low down in the apartment - due to my size. That's what I remember most, the pattern of the parquet floor and the rhythm of its pieces next to each other...

I'm sure there were adults there. I think my two parents were there, and I guess my grandmother was too, but I'm not sure... So, anyway, I think there were three or four adults, and I remember that I was the only child there.

I think she had grey hair by then, so I remember, and that she had a strong build and she was generally a warm, strong lady, in every phase of life, who looked very old to me as a child, and as an adult, I always thought she looked very good for her age, so she's been in my mind for decades as a constant, unchanging old lady. I think she must have been in her 60s at the time.

What that made me aware of, and how it ultimately got connected to the question of Jewishness, I'm not sure, but I do know that there was a sense of shame or embarrassment associated with it... So there was this feeling that I shouldn't be looking at it, or that I shouldn't have seen this, but I

don't know if it was some kind of prior knowledge that I had or whether I had guessed it based on others' behaviour... if she had pulled her clothing down to cover it... so I don't know if it was a result of the situation, but I had this feeling that I'm very curious, while I knew that I shouldn't look and ask questions.

That feeling is somehow connected to the fact that yes, I know about it for some reason, that it's a bit of a taboo, and somehow, I remember it in the same way as when one of my kindergarten classmates secretly told another kindergarten classmates that they know that this student was Gypsy. And I remember the same feeling that I know something is wrong with this situation, how we're talking about this, but I don't know exactly why... So, it's in the same category of memories, this experience of someone's exposure regarding their origins.

Central to my memories of my childhood is the house we lived in, a block of flats. Our downstairs neighbours regularly bullied us children for being too loud at home. She would often make these comments that had strong anti-Semitic overtones. One of these occasions happened on the stairs. She knocked on the ceiling or the radiator, as neighbours used to do to indicate that there was a problem... And then somehow on the stairs... I don't know if we were going out or where we were going. I was with one of my brothers, and then this particular lady went past us in the stairwell and shouted something like, ***-Something should have been done to you somewhere...***

Back then I didn't understand what she said about where. I don't remember, because for some reason my brain blocks out what should have been done to us there, but I remember that afterwards I asked what that word was and it was Auschwitz. I remember that they explained to me what it meant and what had happened there... I don't remember what the exact explanation was, but I remember that we played ball. So, somehow, I remember that afterwards, I was very attentive about how we played ball, because I felt that that was intended to be a very big scare for us... The person who was with me then was an older child, my brother, and he understood. I don't remember what happened if we told our parents, but somehow, I remember my mum explaining to me what it meant.

It was a four-storey apartment building, a bit Bauhaus-like. Well, one that wasn't renovated. This also happened in the early 90s, when there were still bullet holes on the outside of the building, as it hadn't been renovated inside or outside. And this staircase had this mosaic pattern around the hallway. So, there was a staircase, an oval-shaped corridor with a hallway and apartments in a circle, about six or seven. There was a part of the staircase where there were no apartments, and instead of an apartment, there was the elevator door, which was a wooden door. Back then, the elevator still worked with keys and the elevator door covered an entire wall.

I remember we were standing between the door of our flat and the stairs, but I couldn't see her, I just remember the sound. I couldn't see her, but she was somewhere between the two floors...

It was light outside, so it must have been afternoon and our parents must have just run down, I don't know, probably to the shop. It's mostly light, and this staircase was kind of greyish, there were stones and steps, and

this brown elevator door. This stone was quite light and it had black patterns on it, black checkered patterns. There was a window in the staircase that opened onto an inner garden, so there was natural light coming in from there.

So, that's all about the second memory of the neighbour with whom we were regularly at war. I'm sure this is how it happened. Regarding the other one, I was unsure at one point whether the lady who had the number on her was a relative of ours or if she was someone else, we would rarely meet with.

And regarding which one was first, I'm not sure, as both of them were quite early experiences, connected to quite a lot of constructs from similar experiences. So, the reason why I have such a hard time knowing specifics is that I don't know which scenario happened in that particular situation.

VI. Zsuzsa Flohr

I don't really use pictures; I use documents in my practice. So only if there is a photo of a document, I'd use that or photo archives... I don't really remember using photo archives looking only for photos of people that are not related to a news story or a historical event. Mainly because my research meant that I had to go to a lot of archives abroad and in the county, and I usually look at microfilms, which are also images, I guess, and digitised material often have photographs as well.

For example, I looked through a lot of photos when I researched my grandfather: what kind of pictures I can find of Bor? What was great is that Tamás Csapody has a couple of books on this, and I talked to him a lot about the fact that there are a lot of photos on the internet that say Bor but weren't actually taken there. We were talking about how long it took him to find out where they were taken, and he said that the best photos of Bor were not usually taken there. Because they get mixed up in the archives, and someone who writes an error once often gets referenced, and that's it, it spreads. Particularly with the Holocaust, there are these very emblematic photos that have completely lost their original meaning and function like a Spielberg film. A lot of times I would start to redraw a picture I'd found of Bor, or write down what I saw in the picture, and then question it..

One very rarely has the opportunity to actually go to an archive, because there is Covid and one has kids and everything, so you have to rely on the internet for a lot of things, and there are these big archives, like *Yad Vashem*'s¹ websites, where you can find and search for a lot of things. Documents, image documents, text, and so on. But in between, you still find things. What you find is not always precisely referenced... This gets corrected and there is no intentionality in it, but several sources are compared and referenced in given cases, and a lot of things get connected. So, it's not intentional, whereas when

¹ Established in 1953, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center is located in a multi-acre complex on "Har HaZikaron" (the Hill of Remembrance) in Jerusalem.

you distort something with, say, artificial intelligence, that is intentional, while with the archives you only have accidents and human error.

For example, when I was looking for my grandfather's sibling, I found all kinds of entries about Edith Flohr, and then they told me at the Holocaust Research Center in Washington, D.C., that because she was a Jew in the countryside, there were all kinds of birth date errors and typos in her name because she was killed so terribly quickly, that's how she was documented... Then it turned out that in my family there are two Flohr Edits, one was my grandfather's sister, and the other was the wife of my grandfather's brother, who took the name Flohr. I found this out completely by accident, on my own, after years and years of paperwork, research and archiving. This was the truth, it was proven to be the truth, and that's the reason why there were all sorts of different birth dates.

I don't have any family pictures of my own, so much so that it's quite despairing. On my father's side, the family was destroyed, as was the majority of the cousins in his father's generation, that is in my grandfather's generation. I think my father told me that their house burned down once and that everything was gone, but there is one photograph of my great-grandmother. That's it. That's all. There is nothing written on it to say it is her. My dad says it's her, that's all. So, this is where we stand..

Now how do we accept it for what it is...

But there is nothing in my family. There is nothing to show, neither in my mother's household nor in my own. I can show you one or two candles and this ring that my mother gave me when I was thirty-four. This survived the war here on the quay in Újpest. Everything else was obviously looted and taken away by the neighbours, only this survived. Well, such things happen!

And the archive that I put together from other archives, articles and school books, as well as things I found researching at Hungarica... Where my grandparents went to school and where were they born - even that wasn't clear. I searched by hunting down my great-grandfather's newspaper advertisements, and then there was an address, and then I looked up the address, and there I found something. Then I looked for which schools were in the area, then how many children out of the four survived, where they could have gone to school, then I found the yearbooks... I spent years of my life doing that!

Whereas in other normal places, it's already there, or at least you have the report cards, or people know about it, or it's written down, or there still are some diaries left. It's amazing what information non-Jewish families in this country have at home! No one cares, because when it's there, why would you pay attention to it? So, it's astonishing what archives have survived elsewhere!

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My mother used to take me to all sorts of *Passover Seders*² and this and that when I was a little kid. But I don't remember, or I didn't know what it was, I just remember the smells and the waxed linen tablecloths and how

2 The Hebrew word seder means order, and the night of Passover is called the night of order. It is also called the night of guarding or keeping. "It is a night set apart for the honour of the Lord, when he brought the people out of Egypt; a night set apart for the honour of the Lord before all the children of Israel, generation after generation."

it was such a slow evening, you would eat slowly ...so I suppose it must have been a Seder feast.

I was nine years old when we lived in the castle district. We grew up there in a studio apartment, and my sister wanted to go to St. Matthias Church with her classmates, because everyone in the class went there, as it was a pretty uniformly Christian community. Mum wouldn't let her, and then it turned into an argument. Judit was about twelve years old.. and she wanted to go to St. Matthias Church, and my mother said, "Don't go, you can't go", "...but why not?" And then suddenly my mother didn't know what to say and said to her: "Because you are Jewish, my child!" And then I asked my mother: "What is Jewish, what does it mean that my sister is Jewish?" Then she told me that I was one too, that we all were, and that I shouldn't tell anyone. I was nine years old then and I just went to school the next day and told the others that I found out at home that I was Jewish. I went to class, and there were three or four of them around me, my friends, supposedly. I told them all about what had happened yesterday afternoon. Well... they moved away a bit disgusted.

In hindsight, I understand but at the time it was just weird. So, what happened was I told them about it, and then they started calling me a stupid Jew. I felt that it wasn't so nice to be called a stupid Jew, a dirty, stinky Jew. This was what they heard at home, obviously, so this is what they thought of Jews. That's all.

And then from then on, I was subject to hilarious anti-Semitic banter from teachers and students, or at least I think my teachers knew! Now, as an adult, I can identify that those were anti-Semitic remarks, but as a child, I couldn't understand why Ms and Mr XY hated me so much. So, ...it was great. You have so many weird feelings as a kid and the bullying.. I hated being a kid so much actually. I hated it! I hated being at nursery, I hated every part of it. I hated the whole phase of it, I think... Maybe not being a very small child, but I didn't like that vulnerable state.

It's very difficult to carve a positive Jewish identity out of conversations like that that took place in front of a bathroom.

There's a narrow hallway, from which a door opens to a tiny bathroom, and from there another door to a tiny kitchen. Going forward a little bit, there's a kind of fold-down or pull-down ladder up to the photo lab, and next to that is the front door and my parents' so-called main room.

This is a loft apartment, so light came in from the kids' room. The bathroom had skylights; light came in from there as well. The kitchen had windows to the courtyard, as much light came in as it does here on the seventh floor, so when the doors were open, it wasn't so dark. A kind of beige, brown square tiles were on the doors and there was a hallway cupboard on the right, white, rounded, Bauhaus style, quite a nice hallway cupboard... And then behind it on the left is the front door, on the other side was a glass door with a brown wooden framed door, and then at the end there was a mirror door - no, it wasn't a mirror one back then. Now there is a mirrored door but before that, there was a dark brown double-winged door.

My mother, my sister and me... I was nine, and my mother was forty-four, she should have had more sense at forty-four... anyway! I heard them talking about something, and I came out of either our room or the bathroom, and I heard; "Because you're Jewish." And then I asked what that was because I suppose I didn't know that expression then.

These anti-Semitic things came up, and I'm not sure whether I told my family or not. I don't remember. I started to understand it by the time I finished fifth grade when I was twelve and then I started attending *Lauder*³ in sixth grade. Maybe I was ten then, not nine...? Somehow, I remember nine, but maybe I was a year older...

So, my life at school changed from then on, everything was so foreign, so I didn't feel at home at all! It was the same in kindergarten, which was two houses down the road or maybe five houses, right...?

So, it was foreign. And then a few years later I left it and went to *Lauder*.

We're talking about sixty-four square metres, so it's not a big house. There was a hallway in front of the bathroom, there was a hallway between the kitchen and the bathroom, of which, by the way, I have photos if you're interested. Andi and I photographed places a couple of years ago, and then we photographed this place too and put it in my project.

I think it was around this time two years ago when I had this little exhibition at *Massolit*. It was a project that I was working on in a research diary, on the one hand, about how I found out that I was Jewish, and on the other hand, I was interviewing a friend of mine, and we were talking about how his gipsy identity was formed. How he experiences it, how he has come to know it, and how society has made it known to him - it's always a double thing. It's one thing when I know or he knows or that he always knew, and it's another thing when you go into a community... And then *Zsolt* told me about how he had completely unconsciously hidden his own identity as a small child. I also tried to cover it up later, either unconsciously or sometimes consciously, etc., etc., etc... So, that's what this research diary was made up of. There were four interviews; video and audio ones, since there were some that didn't have video footage. There was some visual documentation of *Zsolt's* life, and my whole narrative and his narrative were put together in this research diary. I think that was it. I want to work on this during my post-doctoral studies, by the way. I want to deal with the different traditions of experiencing and telling stories about the Holocaust.

Because I'm very interested in how your own identity is formed. You get to know somebody else's a little bit, somebody else's coping strategies, somebody else's trauma history or something completely different... It doesn't have to be about the Holocaust.

Since everything shapes you. You read a book and you're a different person than the previous day, right?