

Janos Gottlieb As A Baby



The photo was taken in Nagybanya, in March 1930, when I was one year and two months old. I presume it was my father [Laszlo Gottlieb] who took it.

I was born in 1929 in Nagybanya. From the age of three I lived at my paternal grandparents.

My grandparents lived in a village somewhere near Nagybanya for a while, I was with them there too, then in Nagybanya.

But when I was five years old, my father took me with him, he rented a quite nice apartment, in a nice part, let's say, of Nagybanya, in a villa.

The owner was a woman from Kolozsvar, a widow, her family name was Herczeg.

The rent was quite high, but it was in the outskirts, the air was fine there.

My father always feared that I got tuberculosis or something like that. This was when I was five.

We had somebody who did the housekeeping; my father had a good salary, in those times this didn't mean a problem.

Later it was my step-mother who did the housekeeping. Well, it wasn't her who actually worked, but she gave out the tasks for everybody.

It wasn't her who did the cooking, we had a cook. This wasn't a problem.

In fact I didn't get any particular Jewish education, I received a rather Hungarian education at home as well.

I didn't learn to speak Hebrew, I don't speak at all. Unfortunately.

It's a good thing to know one more language, but that was it. A visiting teacher taught me to read in Hebrew, but I never understood what I was reading.

He used to come to us when I was around eight years old until I became twelve, for three or four years, but only once in a week.

I can tell only a few things about the Jewish community's life in Nagybanya before World War II.

I only know about one big synagogue in Nagybanya, the others weren't synagogues, but rather prayer houses.

My father rarely attended the synagogue, on such occasions he took me with him, but only on high days: to observe Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur or Pesach. Two or three times a year. And that was all.

I'll disclose it now: once in my life I did observe a holiday. When I turned thirteen years old, my father asked me if I wanted to become a bar mitzvah.

I didn't want to, so I didn't become. But in the same year, at the time of the great fast, on Yom Kippur I fasted.

I promised to my paternal grandmother whom I loved very much that I would fast.

And I tell you that I really fasted. Because it would have had no reason at all to tell her that I was fasting, when I didn't.

Either I fasted, either I didn't. And I did. Once in my lifetime. Grandma was very happy.

I did this for her. And I also tried out whether I was able to fast or not. I could observe great fasting.

Oh, my poor grandma told me things like: 'When you'll grow up, you'll have a nice Jewish wife.'

To this I always answered: 'I will marry a woman I would love.'

No matter if she's Jewish or not...' And that's what happened. That's it.