

Good morning, today we are discussing the life of one of the famous Hungarian Jewish women, Mariann Szamosi and her contributions in society. The information is sourced from the Centropa Archives. There are six sections of the biography narrated by 3 people, Lexi, Aliz and Naemi, from Garayi Janos Iskola in Hungary.

Please sit back and enjoy.

The Biography of a Hungarian Jewish woman from the Centropa archives and HerStories project

Background information

Name: Mariann Szamosi

City of interview: Budapest

Country of birth: Hungary

Interviewer: Klara Laszlo

Date of the Interview: February 2004

Mariann Szamosi paternal side is the Rosenfeld side. Her grandfather was Miksa Rosenfeld, her father's father. The family was from Nagykoros, her grandfather was the founder and later the director of a fruit and vegetable distributor. She didn't know him personally, because he died in 1928, just before she was born.

From her maternal side is her great-grandfather, was a schoolmaster known as Jozsef Schon, who is in the Jewish Lexicon ['Magyar Zsidó Lexikon', Pallas Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság, Budapest, 1929], and was a textbook author and pedagogue in his time. She knows that he was a very good man, and that he lost his wife young. He had two daughters, one was her grandmother, Hermina, the other was her aunt Szera. Her relatives played a very important role in my life. Especially, a long time ago in my childhood, but primarily when she lost her parents in the Holocaust, and was left an orphan. They loved her as her mother had loved her.

Her grandfather, Mano Sebestyén married her grandmother, Hermina Schon, and she became Mrs. Hermina Sebestyén. She didn't know when my grandfather was born, she only knows that he died in 1933, when she was five. He was probably born in Homonna - in Slovakia - but she was not sure of that. Her grandmother, Hermina Schon, was born in Veszprem in 1870. She didn't know how they met. Their marriage probably took place in Budapest at the end of the 1800s, because their first child Erno was born in 1895.

What are her contributions and achievements as a Jewish woman throughout history?

During the war, she and her grandmother and mother played a big role in supporting her family. When the Horthy Proclamation came out, the Arrow Cross government takeover, then everybody got scared, and her mom said they couldn't stay there any longer. Then she thought of the old man, Tomasek, the miner, and she went over to Vertesszolos, and then came the family. He was the third person to hide them, but the first who didn't know they were Jews. It's possible he knew, but he took them in, anyway. They stayed there until December 13th. Her father couldn't do much there either, but the two women, grandma and mother again, and her, just started knitting. They knitted socks, and warm gloves. And they lived from that. She remembered, one December day, probably the 13th, there was a sudden deluge of Arrow Cross, saying they were looking for Sandor Acs who goes by the name of Ferenc Veres, and Mrs. Sandor Acs, who goes by Mrs. Ferenc Veres, and Mariann Acs, who goes by Ilonka Veres. From that they knew they had come out because someone had turned them in. Their suspicion is that that certain Mrs. Zoltan Kiss, who lived in the house, had a brother who was Arrow Cross. They found them from his report. The problem had been that Mrs. Kiss knew where they were. Sometime somebody, either Ilonka or Bela, had told her. One of them could have accidentally given themselves away, and that's how Mrs. Kiss's brother moved into their flat. He probably wanted to make off with the whole thing, so he reported them.

During the war, at the camps and in Auschwitz, she created bonds with different woman, both Jews and Christians. When the Germans came, we started thinking about survival. My mother was a pretty smart woman, and she decided we won't go into the yellow star house. They took the furniture and belongings to the delegated place, her girlfriends house, if I recall, on Zoltan street. We went deep underground, instead. My mother had a Christian girlfriend named Mrs. Aniko Vertes. She offered to hide us. So when it was time to move to the star houses, it just looked like the four of us went there, we really went to 1 Hogyes Endre street, to Aunt Aniko's apartment. It was a groundfloor apartment, and she supported all of us. Cooked for us, shopped. We lived with the rollblinds down, and when the Americans carpetbombed, it was horribly frightening. Nevertheless, we didn't dare go down into the shelter. There was another person who had a significant role in our lives. He was a Christian boy named Bela Molnar who was a lot older than I was. He tried to help me when we had to move out of Ulloí Street, by moving into our apartment with my girlfriend Ilonka, to save the apartment.

How was she influential throughout history of your country or town?

Even though she was not a religious person, but a politician, she still made meaningful and everlasting with both Jewish and Christians. The family wasn't religious. Except that grandma did light candles on Friday, and we fasted on Yom Kippur. That was all. There was some kind of esoteric faith within our family. My parents didn't go to temple. I went to religion class - since it was compulsory - at school. But we never got deeply involved. Our family had an enlightened, liberal view of the world. But naturally, we had feelings towards things Jewish. My grandmother had two siblings in Israel.

What is her involvement in social justice movements of Hungary?

Her role is visible when she was contributing to the economic system of the time by including women and men in the job system. She did everything in her power to make sure that families survived and had food on the table by restoring their publishing jobs.

How she has contributed to advocacy, civil rights, and humanitarian causes?

The interviewer describes her as a person who invested all her efforts to improve other people's lives. Mariann goes to her job, a responsible position as Managing Director at the Cicero book publisher in Ujlipotvaros (Budapest, 13th district). Humanism and care pervade her relationship with her co-workers.

What was her role in the various fields such as science, literature, politics, and the arts.

In 1991, she and Margit Siklos the head of the Gondolat Publishing house started the Cicero Publishing House. Their main profile was Publishing children's books. But aside from that, they published informational books. Primarily hobby books for people in villages - things to do with various produce and fruits. They also put out classic literature, for example, Hasek's 'Svejk'. They had a schoolbook line they called 'Sulikonnyvtar'[school library], in which they could put classic Hungarian literature, required reading for schools. Aron Tamasi's 'Abel', and KalmanMikszath's 'The Speaking Robe'. After eight years of survival, the publishing house hit hard times. Their distribution dropped. Since she had a lot of good contacts, for example, Tamas Foldes from Gondolat Publishing, who had become the head of Talentum Press, they chose him. They fused the companies. The most important thing was to keep everybody employed. He put their catalogue on consignment, into his warehouse, and since then he was distributing to them. By 2004, he owned sixty percent. They didn't go under. She was still working, at the age of seventy-six.