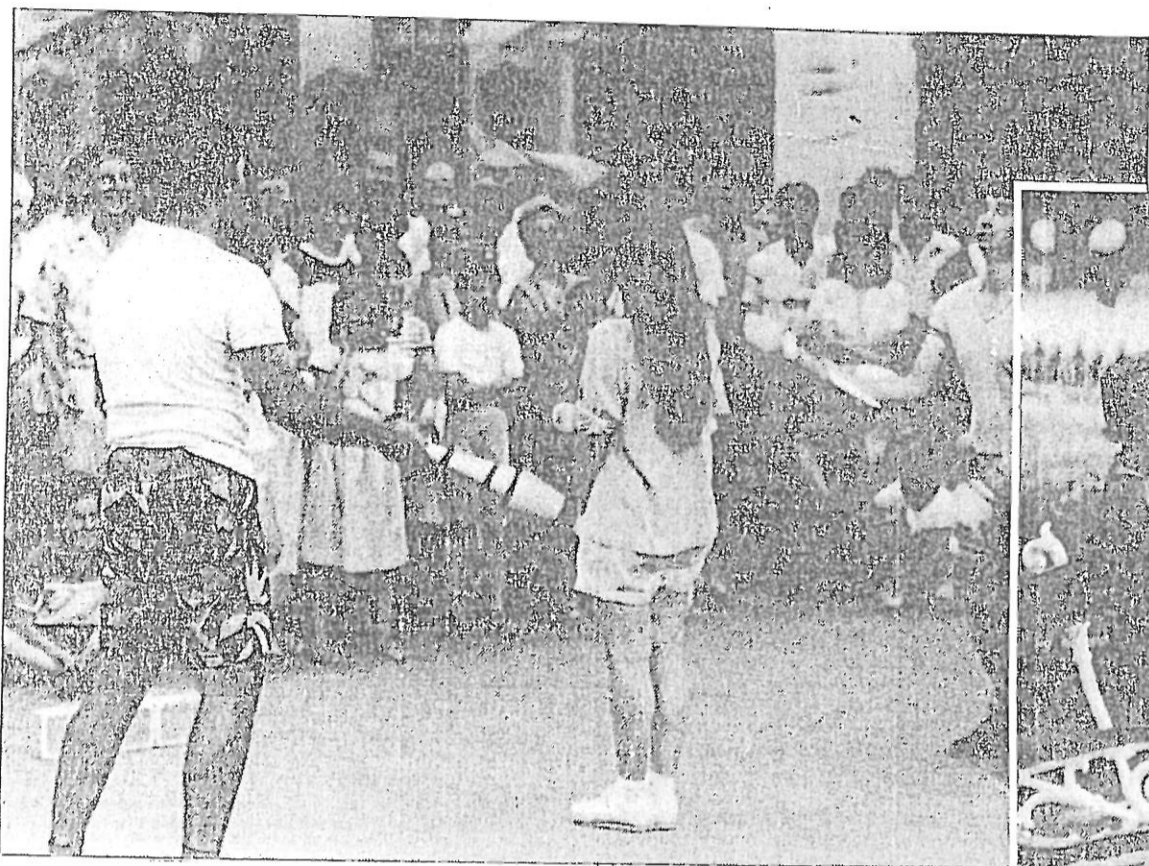


FOCUS



Street performers in Budapest (above); senior citizens enjoy one of the city's many small parks (right).

Photos by Rikki Lewin

The Ambivalence of Hungarian Jews

By Yossi Klein Halevi
Special to the WJW

BUDAPEST — This past June, Tamas and Kati Beck opened Eastern Europe's first felafole store. Called simply Felafole, it is located on a small side-street in downtown Budapest. Its sign uses a Hebrew motif, but subtly: the Latin letters are curved at the edges, to resemble Hebrew script.

Other than the sign itself, there is nothing on the walls of the tiny shop to indicate that this is a Jewish place. "The man who designed our logo wanted to put a Star of David on it," said Tamas. "But I thought it was best to leave it out. This is, after all, Budapest."

I met with Tamas and Kati late one night in their store. They had just closed and were preparing salads for the next day. Often they finish work around midnight. Tamas is a lean man with a short greying beard. Though exhausted, he was pleased to talk, especially with a visitor from Israel. He speaks quickly and intensely, waving his cigarette in the air. Yet he puts one at ease with his friendliness.

I had expected Tamas to be optimistic about the Jewish future in Hungary. He had, after all, just opened a Jewish store; he was trusting himself to the placidity of Budapest's streets. But Tamas was not

optimistic.

"It's really good to hear speeches by government leaders about the Holocaust and Israel," he said. "But it is getting better only at the top. I don't trust the Hungarians."

Tamas wears a Star of David clearly visible around his neck. I asked him if he met any difficulties because of his Jewish assertiveness.

"Me personally, not at all. My neighbors all know I'm Jewish, but there are no problems. And my friends are either Jews or just nice people."

Kati is not Jewish. She has straight blond hair, a strong chin and a shy smile. She is quiet but watchful: one senses that she misses nothing. I asked her what she thought about Tamas' views on Hungarian anti-Semitism, and she said, almost inaudibly, "I think the problem is exaggerated."

I asked Kati if she had been exposed to anti-Semitism while growing up. She said, "I never heard anything about Jews at all. Not good, not bad. We lived in a house that had once been owned by Jews who moved to Israel. There was a Jewish neighbor whom everyone knew did well in business. But it wasn't spoken about maliciously, it was just a fact."

The first time Kati heard an anti-Semitic remark was after she had graduated from

university and was working as a civil engineer.

"I was absolutely shocked," she said. "I asked myself, 'Is this an issue in Hungary?'" Tamas introduced Kati to Jewish history. She learned how the Jews kept intact over thousands of years, and then returned to their land from a vast dispersion. Kati was drawn to Tamas' passion for that history; she too wanted

Hungarian Jews still hide among non-Jews

to identify with the Jews.

Four years ago, Tamas and Kati visited Israel. Kati fell in love with the country. "I wanted to leave immediately and return to Hungary — to pack up and make aliyah," she said, using the Hebrew term for immigration to Israel. "It is so beautiful. Israelis are so proud of their country."

Then Kati said, "I want to become a Jew. Not so much for religious reasons — though I like the traditions — but to be a part of a people that could make such a wonderful country."

Tamas listened to Kati with the satisfied smile of a man whose long-cherished plan was about to be fulfilled. He said, "I want to have a traditional home. I'd like to be a practicing Jew. In Israel I wore a yarmulka all the time; it was fantastic. But here it's impossible. If I tried to wear a yarmulka on the street everyone would stare at me. Jews can't feel at home in Hungary; I don't know if we ever will. I think a time will come when we will have to run away."

I said, "If you are so concerned about anti-Semitism, why have you just opened a Jewish store? Aren't you afraid to declare yourself so publicly?"

"I'm a bit idealistic: I want to contribute to the Jewish culture in this city," he admitted. "I want a place where young Jews can feel Jewish without self-consciousness. Besides, it doesn't do any good to hide. If the anti-Semites want to kill Jews, they'll know exactly where to find you."

"One day, during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, my uncle saw graffiti on the wall which said, 'Don't worry Itzik, next time you won't have to go to Auschwitz.' The meaning was: Don't worry Jew, we'll finish you off right here in Budapest. That same day my uncle packed his bags and moved to Israel. I expect that one of these days I'll also see

that kind of slogan on the wall. And that's when I'll know that I have to leave."

It should be a time of hope for Hungarian Jewry. After more than forty years of enforced silence under Communism, Jewish culture is reasserting its public place in Budapest.

Every week a new Jewish book seems to appear in the city's bookstores and on outdoor book stands. Budapest University now has a thriving Jewish studies department; a new Jewish elementary school with an enrollment of over five hundred opened in September. Perhaps 10 percent of the members of parliament are Jewish; one of them is a rabbi who wears a yarmulka to parliamentary sessions.

And yet Hungarian Jews are more anxious than hopeful. Some worry merely of the future: that an economic collapse will create a dangerous resentment against Jews, who are heavily represented in the media, the arts and other professions.

But some Jews already feel threatened. Jewish anxiety was intensified by last year's election campaign, when posters for the liberal Free Democrats — Hungary's largest opposition party — were marked with anti-Semitic graffiti. At the same time, what appears to have been an organized whispering campaign tried to link the

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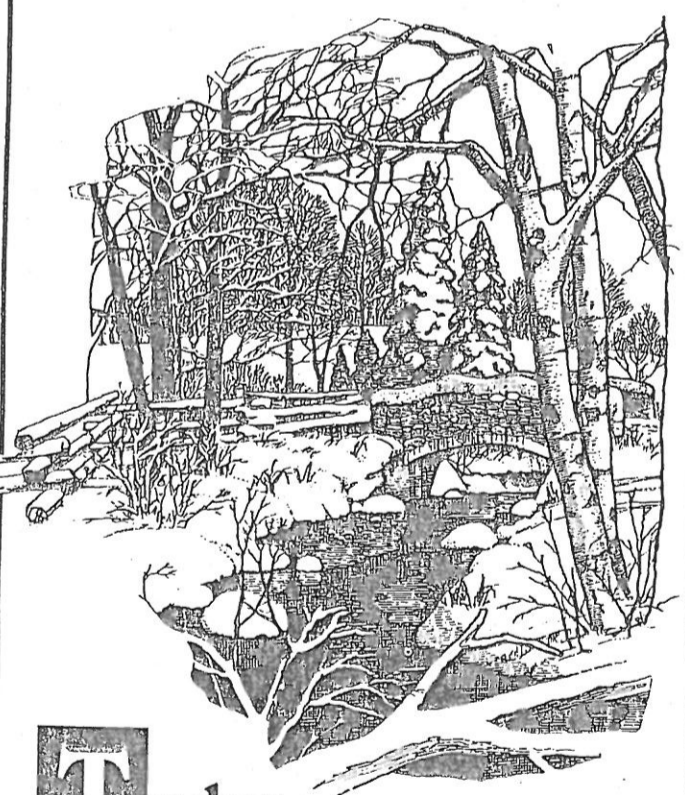
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From previous page
Free Democrats with Jews and Communists.

The unease of Hungarian Jews, however, is not only the result of external hostility but of inner insecurity, a confusion about their place in this society.

That uncertainty is an inheritance from the past. Before the Holocaust, few Jewish communities in Europe were as assimilated as Hungarian Jewry. Jews were among the most vocal patriots — more Hungarian, some Jews today say cynically, than the Hungarians themselves. When the Hungarian fascist government passed anti-Semitic laws in the 1930s, Jews were stunned; but even then, they continued trying to prove their loyalty.

Every Friday night in the Rabbinical Seminary — a grey run-down building in central Budapest — young Jews gather to make kiddush together and socialize. One Friday evening an elderly professor addressed the crowd. His theme was the assimilationist delusions of Hungarian Jewry.

"Before the war," he said, "Jews to the west of Hungary — in France and England and Holland — considered themselves Frenchmen and Englishmen and Dutchmen. And the non-Jews of those countries agreed: they were equal citizens. Jews to the east of Hungary — in Poland and Russia — considered themselves Jews. And the non-Jews of those countries also agreed: they were Jews."

In Hungary the Jews considered themselves Hungarians, and the Hungarians considered them Jews. After the Holocaust, Communism offered the Jews another chance at assimilation. Where once Jews had tried to prove themselves Hungarian nationalists, many now became Hungarian internationalists. They were rewarded with full equality.

Unlike elsewhere in Eastern Europe, there were no anti-Semitic purges in the Hungarian Communist Party, no campaign in the press against a Zionist fifth column trying to subvert the country from within. Finally, assimilation seemed to be working.

But now that approach, too, has collapsed. With the end of Communism, Jews must find a new way of adapting to a new — and as yet unformed — Hungary. Though most Jews remain highly assimilated, a growing minority are becoming Jewishly assertive.

Many of these Jews, however, seem more concerned with anti-Semitism than with creating a positive cultural or religious identity. When I tried to speak with young people at one Jewish club about their Jewish identity, most of them replied with critiques of Hungarian anti-Semitism. Nowhere else as in Budapest have I met Jews for whom being Jewish is at once so irrelevant to their daily reality and so central to their inner life.

At times it seemed to me that their fears of anti-Semitism were exaggerated. I wondered whether young Jews were, perhaps unknowingly, trying to compensate for the failed attempts at assimilation in the past with a constant wariness about their place here. Whatever case, this much is certain: Jewish renewal cannot permanently coexist with Jewish insecurity. Sooner or later, one of them will have to yield.

When Gabor Barta completes his university studies, he plans to leave Hungary. Not because of fear, but self-respect.

Gabor realizes that his psychological life here is untenable: his constant speculation about which of his acquaintances knows or cares if he is a Jew, about whether passengers on the train will notice the shape of his nose, about which political leader or newspaper columnist will remark that can be interpreted as hostile to Jews.

"Hungarian Jews hear half a word and right away they think anti-Semitism," laughing, as if talking about someone else's insecurities.

On the walls of his room in his parents' apartment, Gabor has hung posters of his two dream countries, Australia and Israel. There is a poster of a koala bear, another of the Sydney harbor. On an opposite wall hangs a Hebrew poster for the Israeli lottery; draped across the ceiling is a string of small black and yellow flags, imprinted with the name of a Jerusalem supermarket. Until an Israeli visitor explained them to him, Gabor had no idea what his Israeli posters said, because he cannot read Hebrew. "I just like looking at the letters," he says.

At first glance there would not seem to be two more disparate places than Australia and Israel. One is vast and insulated, the other a tiny country crammed with the problems of the world.

For Gabor, though, the two countries are intimately linked, not just because he has visited both but because they offer the same promise: relief from his obsession with anti-Semitism. In Israel and in Australia Gabor felt himself simply a person, rather than a Jew among real or imagined enemies.

"In Australia I wore the 'chai' on my necklace openly. People asked me what it was. I said it is a Hebrew word meaning 'life.' 'Are you a Jew?' they asked me. At first I was surprised by the question. In Hungary no one would say to you the word 'Jew;' it's considered very impolite.

"If a Hungarian would ask me what the 'chai' means I would have to think many times how to say it in just the 'right' way. Do I say that it is Hebrew letters? Do I admit that I am a Jew? But in Australia it was all perfectly normal. Amazing, really."

Gabor, 21, is an electrical engineering student. His parents are both chemical engineers. He is, as one of his favorite

phrases goes, "a typical Hungarian Jew" — by Hungarian standards middle class, which means a small apartment in a decent building in Budapest, university education, occasional trips abroad.

Gabor is tall and handsome, thin but sturdy. Curly black hair sits high on his head. There is the hint of a mustache beneath his hawk nose — what Gabor calls "my Jewish nose." He is dressed Western style: t-shirt, jeans, running shoes. He laughs often, even when speaking of his Jewish bitterness, and his stories about anti-Semitism often turn into jokes. He is thoughtful, soft-spoken, in tact. He seems far less wounded than he believes himself to be.

Gabor discovered he was a Jew at the age of 13 — his equivalent of a bar mitzvah. An anonymous letter had circulated among the tenants of Gabor's building accusing the woman superintendent of being, among other things, a Jew-lover. The woman went door-to-door with a petition attesting to her good character, and Gabor's parents were among those who signed.

When the woman left their apartment, Gabor asked his parents what she had wanted, and they told him. "Are you Jew-lovers?" Gabor asked.

"We are not Jew-lovers," his father said to him. "We are Jews."

"I'll never forget that moment," Gabor said to me. "I stared at my father as if he were a stranger. It lasted just an instant, but suddenly nothing was the same in my life. I thought to myself, 'Oh my God, am I among Jews?' It didn't occur to me then that if my parents were Jews I might also be a Jew."

"In school I had heard anti-semitic remarks, but not against me; I didn't think this business had anything to do with me at all. I used to tell my classmates not to say those things because didn't they know that this or that friend of ours was a Jew. But I didn't know what it meant to be a Jew. I only knew it wasn't good — it wasn't kosher."

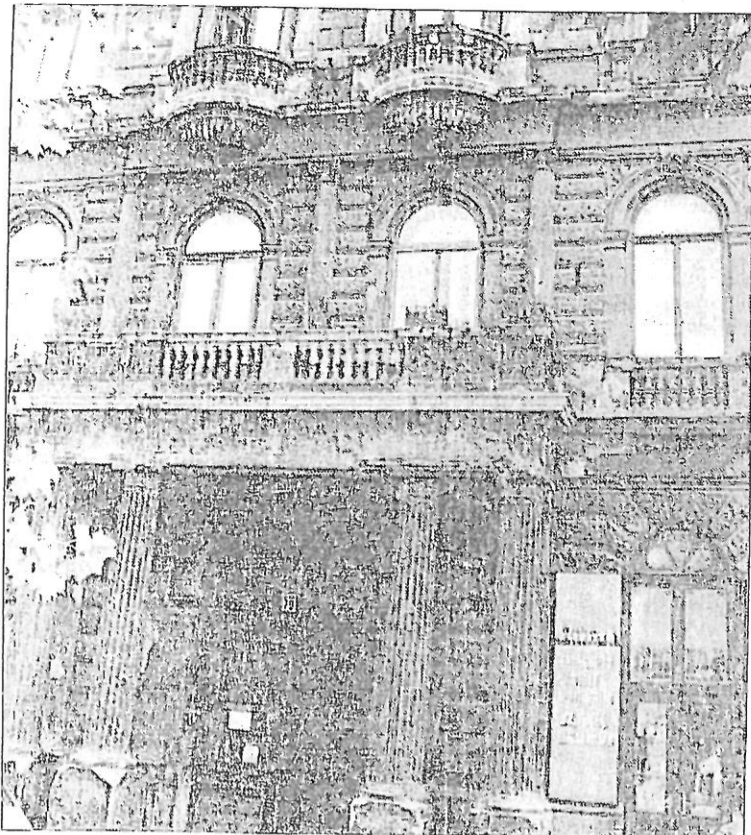
Gabor laughed at his joke, his mouth open wide. He looks at me eagerly, wanting me to laugh too.

Gabor's parents told him to forget that he was a Jew. "If anyone asks you your religion," they said, "just say you are an atheist," Gabor said. "It was a typical Hungarian Jewish reaction. They said to me being Jewish was no problem at all. But if it was no problem, why did I have to hide it?"

Gabor soon realized that people around him had already suspected he was a Jew: the shape of his nose betrayed him. "I felt so stupid. Even before I realized I was a Jew, other people knew. They knew me better than I knew myself."

Gabor began reading Jewish books. It was the early '80s, the beginning of liberalization in Hungary, and a few Jewish books had been published. Most of those were

Please turn the page



Street scene in Budapest's former ghetto.

Photo by Rikki Lewin

From previous page about the Holocaust. Gabor realized that he was the child of survivors.

At Gabor's insistence, his parents finally told him how they had survived the war: his father with false papers identifying him as Christian, his mother in a safe house under the protection of the Swedish diplomat and rescuer of Jews, Raoul Wallenberg. But even today, after constant probing, Gabor still feels he knows too little about his parents' experiences during the war. It is as if, having been denied the most basic knowledge of his family as a child, there is a part of him that can never be made whole.

Gabor read an account of the Eichmann Trial, written by its Israeli prosecutor. "That was the most important book of my life," he says. It explained to me how the Holocaust happened. I was shocked about how the Jews accepted everything, beginning with the first racial laws. A typical Jewish reaction: 'don't make an issue.' That's exactly how most Hungarian Jews live today."

Gabor offers his mother as an example of a typical Hungarian Jew.

"My mother has a very good friend, not Jewish, who doesn't know that my mother is a Jew. She just has never mentioned it. 'It's not important,' my mother said to me, 'we can talk about other things.' Alright, it's not important."

"So one day last year my mother asked me for a photograph of myself. I gave her a picture of me taken in Jerusalem, wearing a yarmulka. She said to me, 'Give me a different picture.' I said, 'You know you have that good friend who doesn't know you're a Jew. She showed you a picture of her child's confirmation. But would you dare show her this picture of me?' She admitted that she wouldn't."

Gabor decided that he would not be like his mother, or like the Hungarian Jews before the Holocaust who be-

lieved nothing could happen to them because they were good Hungarians. But even now it is sometimes difficult for him to be straightforward about his Jewish identity.

"I still have friends — not my closest friends, but friends — who don't know I'm a Jew. Always when I meet someone I wonder, 'Do they think I am or not? Should I tell them? When should I tell them? What will they think when I tell them? As soon as you tell someone you're a Jew it changes the way he thinks about you, even if only a little.'"

Despite Gabor's pre-occupation with anti-Semitism, he himself has encountered surprisingly little hostility. When I asked him about his classmates at university, he says that out of a class of 23, perhaps two or three don't like Jews.

"That doesn't sound very serious," I said.

He admitted that young people, especially university students, are far less anti-Semitic than their parents. "My classmates hate Gypsies more than Jews. They make jokes about Gypsies all the time. I defend the Gypsies. Someone once asked me, 'What are you, a Gypsy?' I said, 'Why not, it wouldn't matter.' " Gabor laughed. "Although to be both a Gypsy and a Jew would not be so easy here."

The most traumatic anti-Semitic incident happened to Gabor when he was in high school. He was rushing on his way home to catch a broadcast of the Hungarian soccer team competing in an international match. "was so excited. I wanted to see the Hungarian team — my team — win."

As he approached his building he passed two drunkards. One of them said loudly to the other, "What do you say, should I cut the throat of this Jew-boy?" Gabor ran home, weeping; part of him has never recovered.

"I saw the game but it meant nothing to me. A few days later was March 15,

Hungarian independence day.

For the first time on independence day I didn't wear the national colors."

It is at first hard to understand why the soccer incident should have been so traumatic for Gabor, provoking his emotional break with Hungary. A drunkard made an anti-Semitic threat; nothing more serious happened. But it was the context that is significant. Gabor was rushing happily home to see his team, to revel in Hungarianness; and just then he was told that he was not a Hungarian at all but a Jew.

In that experience is at least a partial explanation of Hungarian Jewish sensitivity. Precisely because Hungarian Jews have tried so hard to assimilate, any sign of rejection is unbearable to them. Any act of anti-Semitism, however minor, becomes a reminder of all the assimilationist illusions of the past, and the indignity of having had those illusions broken once before.

On the kitchen wall of his parents' apartment Gabor has taped a personal ad from the newspaper. It reads, "Sixty-year-old woman from old Catholic family would like to meet an Israelite man."

"Israelite," explained Gabor, "is the polite Hungarian way to say the embarrassing word 'Jew.'"

Gabor said he displays the ad because he finds it funny. I suggested that perhaps he likes the ad for another reason: it promises normalcy between Christians and Jews.

He said, "Maybe you are right. Day by day things are developing a bit. In the past when I heard the word 'Jew,' my heart would beat more quickly. Now it still beats, but not so hard. In Hungary, that's progress."

Gabor's sister, Agi, works as a chemical engineer in one of Hungary's giant pharmaceutical factories. Agi, 24, is older than Gabor by three years. They resemble each other: tall, wide-eyed, long noses, strong handsome faces. But Agi is less intense than Gabor; she pauses often while offering her opinions, as if unsure about how true they are, or perhaps simply reluctant to impose them on others.

Agi discovered she was a Jew at the age of 16, as a counsellor in a summer camp. "One night a few counsellors were sitting around, arguing about I don't remember what," she said. "There were three of us with one opinion, three with another opinion. One of the counsellors on the 'other' side said to us, 'You always stick together.' She meant it as a joke, not in a nasty way. But I had no idea what she was talking about."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "All three of you are Jewish," she said. "No," I said, "I'm not a Jew." "Oh Agi, don't be stupid."

They told her to ask her parents, and she did. Agi's reaction to discovering her Jewishness was the opposite of Gabor's: she refused to deal with it. At that time

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From previous page
Jewish books began appearing in the house, procured by Gabor and also by her parents, who were becoming interested in Jewish history. Agi said to them, "Please hide these books; I don't even want to look at them. I'm fed up with the whole thing."

A few years later, Agi began to change.

"I don't know why. Nothing happened; I didn't experience any anti-Semitism. But slowly I began to feel more Jewish."

As Agi became drawn to Jewish identity, she discovered that Jews formed a hidden pattern in her life. There was, for example, the summer camp she and Gabor attended as children. Unlike most camps in Hungary at the time, it was entirely independent of the Communist Party. The camp was founded by a former nun — "a half-Jew," Agi said, with the Hungarian Jewish precision for ethnic detail. Each bunk was organized as a parliament, to teach the children the democratic values they could not learn in school.

"It was an amazing place," Agi said. "To this day those who went to that camp organize trips together. We're all very close, like a large family."

"Recently I realized that 98 percent of us were Jews — at least. We didn't know it at the time; we were children, we didn't talk about such things. The woman who founded the camp had no intention of gathering Jews together; she had no Jewish interest at all."

I asked Agi why she thinks the camp attracted mostly Jews.

It was a very expensive camp," she said. "Maybe Jewish parents felt it was worthwhile for their children, and they were willing to sacrifice. Other parents spent the summer at the seashore. It was not because Jews are rich: no. Look at this apartment; do we seem rich?"

Agi, like Gabor, lives in her parents' apartment. It is definitely not an apartment of rich people: the rooms are small, the furniture and carpets fading. But what strikes me is Agi's defensiveness: speaking to me, a fellow Jew, she still feels the need to prove that not all Jews are wealthy. It is as if she lived with an invisible anti-Semitic presence, monitoring her private conversations.

"My father once said to me that he wasn't a Jew, but he was made to become a Jew by others," she said. She quotes her father approvingly, as if his words explain her own situation. But Hungarian society hasn't forced Agi to become a Jew. Agi has encountered almost no anti-Semitism, at most a few remarks, by her own admission hardly scarring. And yet, like Gabor, she has become obsessed with the divide that separates Jews and non-Jews.

She said, "These days, when I meet someone, or even just look at someone in the Metro, almost the first question in my mind is, 'Is he Jewish?' Every day, all the time. I don't like thinking this way. But I don't know

how to stop it.

"Sometimes I wonder that if I'm so concerned about who is Jewish and who is not Jewish, then everyone else in Hungary must be thinking this way too. But I doubt it. I think we Jews exaggerate the situation. At work I have a Jewish boss. He is always telling me, 'You can go to that person, he'll help you, he's a Jew.' Or else, 'He's not a Jew, be careful.'

"When Jews get together, after three or four sentences we are already talking about Jewish problems. In one way I like it, because who else can I speak to about these things? But Jews can go on about their problems for hours; it's too much."

Agi knows little about Judaism. A poster of the Hebrew alphabet hangs in her room, but she cannot identify all the letters. She has heard of Purim and Chanukah, but isn't sure what they're about. "Jewish culture interests me, but I don't want to study it very deeply. It will mean I will feel more Jewish, and that is not good here. Not because of other people: I'm not worried about anti-Semitism, but about my own reaction. I don't want to create more complexes in myself."

I asked Agi what Jewish books she has read; all the books she names are about the Holocaust. She points to a book on a small table beside us: It is about Jewish children during the war. "This is the latest one," she said without irony. Auschwitz and the length of one's nose: a Hungarian Jewish identity.

"Agi," I said to her, "it seems to me that you should either forget this Jewish obsession and assimilate completely, or else try to develop a positive Jewish identity. I don't see any other way to find peace of mind."

Agi said nothing. Later, I apologized for my tactlessness. "No," she said, "you gave me good advice. It's just very hard to do." One afternoon I went with Gabor to Felafel. Though we were in a Jewish restaurant, and though we spoke together in English, Gabor instinctively lowered his voice whenever he said the word "Jew."

Standing beside us at the counter was a young man. He seemed to be examining the faces of everyone in the restaurant. He reached into his shirt and retrieved a mezuzah, hanging on a long gold chain, and placed it demonstratively over his shirt. It was as though he had to first determine that the faces around him were really Jewish before exposing himself as a Jew.

"Did you see that?" I asked Gabor. Of course he had seen it: a Hungarian Jew doesn't miss that kind of thing.

Gabor said, "It is typical for Hungarian Jews: you hide among non-Jews, but you want to be a Jew among Jews."

PEOPLE

The world said 'no' to Jan Karski's Holocaust message

ADL to honor Georgetown Univ. professor for his role in trying to tell of impending extermination of the Jews

By Judith Sloan Deutsch
WJW Features Editor

When leaders of the Jewish underground heard of the young member of the Polish underground—a trained diplomat with a remarkable memory for transmitting accurate verbal messages—they appealed to him for help.

The Polish Catholic—a courier between the Polish government-in-exile and the anti-Nazi underground in Poland from 1939 to 1943—agreed to "see with my own eyes" how the Nazis were exterminating the Jews. Only then, the heads of the Jewish underground told him, would he be capable of convincing others of the desperate need to save the Jews of Europe.

Since then, it has been impossible to describe what he saw in September 1942, when the Jewish resistance leaders smuggled him into the Warsaw Ghetto and the Belzec concentration camp.

Karski didn't think much about the danger. With four secret courier missions under his belt, he had eluded the Nazis, criss-crossing Europe with false identification papers. He escaped Soviet capture in 1939. When the Gestapo arrested him in 1940, they tortured him so badly—they knocked out his teeth and broke his ribs—he slit his wrists in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. Most important, he needed to protect the secrets he carried.

"I was too busy being a human tape recorder, and too tired to be afraid, since death in those days was a way of life for those who got involved in the underground," he says, pausing to light a Lark cigarette.

The smoke settles like a cloud over his dog, "Corky," a miniature mixed-breed curled up in the next chair. Karski shakes his head, mocking himself. How foolish he had been to think his clandestine experiences would be enough to prepare him for the Nazi atrocities he was to see.

Disguised as an Estonian guard and carrying forged papers, the 28-year-old Karski entered Belzec concentration camp. When he did, he became, in many ways, as much a victim as the pitiable Jews, whose torture, and death, he witnessed. Like them, he would be a prisoner for life, of horrors that haunt the mind, that threaten sanity.

In his writings, Karski has reported seeing an entire Jewish convoy liquidated in front of him. But this day he refuses to call up such searing memories.

"I...saw...terrible...things," he says, slowly, his eyes welling up. "But I will not speak about



Jan Karski is a semi-retired professor of foreign affairs at Georgetown Univ.

what I saw. It is useless to speak about it. Yes, I can inform you...But... (now a whisper)...you will be unable to understand."

Karski, the witness, bears a heavy burden. "Once people learn about me, they say, 'tell me what you saw, how you felt, again...and again...and again,' he says.

But this burden is small, compared to that of four decades ago, when two leaders of the Jewish underground entrusted him with their desperate message to the world. He recalls their words:

Jews are dying. Hitler has decided on the total extermination of the Jews. The Jewish masses don't realize it yet. We are totally helpless. We cannot count on the Polish people or the Polish underground. They can save individuals, but they cannot stop the extermination. Only powerful Allied leaders can help us.

"They were in total despair," says Karski, peering out the window, too distracted by memory to face his questioner.

Karski recounts his effort to launch a campaign to arouse world opinion and the allied powers in order to halt Nazi atrocities. He made the rounds of prominent Englishmen, the United Nations War Crimes Commission, the Allied press, members of Parliament, as well as an array of literary and intellectual groups.

He reported to the U.S. State Department and to a Jewish member of the Justice Department, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. He spoke to Catholic circles—and Jewish circles through Rabbi Stephen Wise and other Jewish intellectuals and leaders. Finally, he gave the most important interview, to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Beyond a remarkable, high hedge of Italian cypress that walls in the circular driveway from traffic, Karski lives in a tidy Bethesda cot-

tage. Six-foot tall and silver-haired, the 76-year-old stubs out another cigarette and heads off to answer the phone with a jaunty step. He is aristocratic in striped shirt, blue blazer and gray slacks, a white handkerchief neatly folded at his breast pocket. His hands are thick-knuckled and over-large for his wiry frame. Yet, with a courtly wave, they lead a guest toward her seat.

His eyes, blue and piercing, compel a listener not to interrupt his perfectly enunciated English—though *Pro-FESS-ore KAHR-sky* retains the accent of his native Polish.

He still looks the part of the indefatigable messenger, who gave eyewitness accounts of the destruction of the Jews, delivered 200 speeches and wrote almost as many articles for the popular press. In 1943, he was coauthor, with Alexi Tolstoy and Thomas Mann, of *Terror in Europe: The Fate of the Jews*, published by the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror (ironically, a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection). To no avail.

"I have a feeling that the Jews had bad luck with me," he says. "They charged me with this terrible mission. It was an accident. I was on hand. For the enormity of my Jewish mission, I was too insignificant to make an impression."

But the young man who risked his life to help a doomed people is a hero to a Jewish community eager to show its gratitude.

"It's nonsense and it embarrasses me," says Karski, a semi-retired professor of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

But the wall in his study is covered with awards and accolades—from Hadassah, Americans for a Safe Israel, the Holocaust Memorial Committee of New York.

This week, Karski will be the recipient of the Anti-Defamation League's Pius XI Award, for his "heroism" during World War II and his contributions to increasing understanding of the Holocaust. A first for the League, the award is named in honor of Pope Pius XI whose famous Encyclical condemned Nazi doctrines during the war. While anti-Semitism is on the rise here and in Eastern Europe, Jewish and Christian leaders alike urgently embrace the aging Jan Karski, a symbol whose work is

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The public is invited to attend an award presentation for Karski at 8 p.m. on Nov. 28 at Washington Hebrew Congregation, Macomb St., and Massachusetts Ave., NW. The Anti-Defamation League will present him with their first Pius XI Award in recognition of his heroism during WWII and his contribution to increasing understanding of the Holocaust.