

MRS. JUDY FETTMAN WAS INTERVIEWED BY CHAYA
FEIGY GROSSMAN FOR HAMODIA, AND BY N'SHEI
CHABAD NEWSLETTER STAFF

SHE KISSED US EVERY DAY

Mrs. Judy Fettman of Brooklyn, NY, a survivor of the Holocaust, was born in horrific times, surrounded by fear and hunger and death. And yet, she had two parents who had shalom bayis and she feels her childhood was, overall, happy and secure; Mrs. Fettman does not speak of her childhood with words like "trauma" and "emotional neglect," and she concludes the interview with what she considers an important message.

Thank you for this interview, and would you please introduce yourself to us?

My name is Judy Fettman nee Hertz. I was born in 1941 in Budapest, Hungary, to Yitzchok and Magda Hertz. I was the oldest of four children. We were two girls and two boys.

My father worked for the *chevra kadisha* all his life.

My mother was an only child, born to her parents after 20 years of marriage. As you can imagine, she was quite spoiled. My parents were married in 1940. The Hertz extended family all came down from Nyerbator to Budapest to take part in my parents' wedding.

When did the war begin affecting those living in Budapest?

On my mother's way home from the hospital after giving birth to me, air-raids sounded, and bombs began to fall over Budapest. In 1944, when I was just three years old, my father was taken away to the Mauthausen labor camp in Austria. My mother, a young woman in her early twenties, was left alone with two young children, to fend for herself.

Budapest was the last part of Hungary where the Jews were rounded up. In December of 1944, the Nazi-allied Hungarian government soldiers, called the Arrow Cross, rounded up all the Jews in Budapest and made them stand in line at the Danube River. They systematically began shooting them into the water, sometimes tying groups of three people together and using one bullet, so that they all fell into the water together and drowned. Until this day, there is a monument of sculpted metal shoes along the Danube River, memorializing the atrocities that took place there, as the Jews were instructed to remove their shoes, since shoes were a valuable commodity during the war.

How did your mother escape being taken to the concentration camp?

My mother was standing on line to be killed at the Danube River, with me (age three) and my sister Rivkah (age 18 months). My sister began walking at the age of one, but because of the scarcity of food and proper nutrition, my sister stopped walking, and so my mother was carrying her and holding me by the hand. Somehow, under the guard of the armed Arrow

Cross soldiers, my mother found an opportunity to get out of the line and began running with us through the streets of Budapest, while frantically removing the yellow star from her jacket.

Did she have any plan where to go, where to hide?

My mother had heard about the "Safe Houses" that had been set up by the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest. These Safe Houses were neutral territory and not under the control of the Hungarian government.

My mother's plan was to make it to the Safe House located in the orphanage known as Domankush. At some point, on the way there, she met a Hungarian boy and asked him if she could pay him to help her carry the few packages she had. The boy, realizing that she must be Jewish, said to her, "I know who you are. I see that you've torn off your yellow star. I'm going to report you to the authorities." Frightened, my mother began pounding on the door of the house right in front of her. A strange man opened the door, let her come inside, handed the boy some money and told him to leave my mother alone.

Following this narrow escape, *b'chasdei Hashem*, my mother was able to make it to the Safe House. We stayed there for the next few months.

During our time in the Safe House, my mother's job was to go out each day and draw water from the well. This was quite risky as the Gestapo headquarters were directly across from the Safe House. Each day when she left to bring water, she kissed us, not knowing if she would make it back safely or see us again.

Twenty-thousand people were murdered (shot, drowned, or both) at the Danube River. I don't know of any survivors other than my mother and my sister and me. How this woman, in her early 20s, alone with two babies, got out of the line and ran through the streets with them, and found safety, will always be unfathomable.

Once the war was over, did you return to your home?

When the war was over, we returned to our apartment. Every day my mother would go out to read the lists that were posted



Yitzchok and Magda Hertz with their two daughters, Judy (L) and Rivkah.

of people who had returned from the camps. She would check if my father's name was on the list. *Baruch Hashem*, my father survived Mauthausen and returned to us— weighing all of 80 pounds.

Following the war, food was scarce in the city of Budapest, so our family went to Nyerbator, in the countryside, where my father's family was from. I remember getting a ride on the back of a dog in Nyerbator.



Judy Hertz as a baby in Budapest.

What was it like to grow up in Europe after the war?

After the war, Hungary was under Russian control. The communists ruled and essentially Hungary was behind the Iron Curtain. No one was allowed to leave the country. The communists didn't allow anyone to own their own business. Many Jews who attempted to sell goods on the black market ended up in jail.

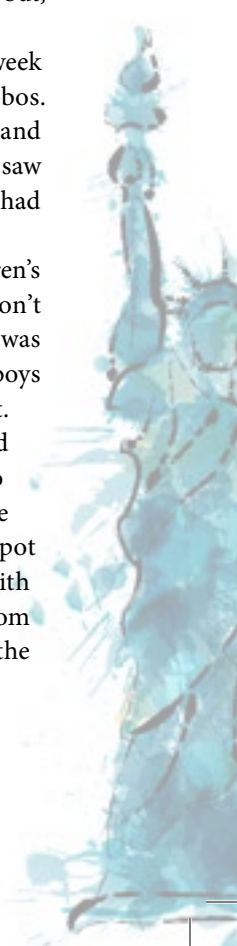
In order to support our family, my father did *kehilah* work and

was the head of the *chevra kadisha*, along with his friend Mr. Davidowitz. I'm sure my parents had worries about *parnassah*, and it was not easy living under the Russians, but, overall, I remember having a good childhood.

I went to public school and to a Hebrew class. Every week we had to make up the classes we had missed on Shabbos. The Russians were passionate about high-level education and taking excellent care of the children educationally. They saw the children as the future. The teachers in our school all had doctorates in their subjects.

We had a gymnasium. They would measure the children's backs to make sure they had straight posture. I don't remember any particular anti-Semitic events, however, it was easier for the Jewish girls than for the boys, because the boys were recognized as Jews at a glance, they couldn't hide it.

I remember that every Shabbos in the spring and summer, during warm months when we did not want to leave our stove on, we would bring our *cholent* pot to the bakery oven. Every family wrote their name on their pot and on Shabbos afternoon, it was a big social scene with all the Jewish girls coming to pick up their *cholent* from the bakery, and everyone's non-Jewish maids carrying the *cholent* home for them.





The new *chassan*, Moshe Fettman, is signing the *tena'im* at the *vort*; his *kallah*, Judy Hertz, is standing behind him.

When and how did you leave Budapest and emigrate to America?

In 1956, when I was 15 years old, the Hungarian university students staged a revolt against the communist regime. For a very short period of time there was a possibility of making it across the border. One night, my parents told us we were leaving. We couldn't take any suitcases because it would arouse the neighbors' suspicion and they would call the authorities. My mother told us to dress in several layers of clothes and told us to fill our pockets. My parents paid a non-Jewish guide, a person who knew how to navigate the land mines that were placed all along the border, to safely get us across the border into Austria. We went, and we made it to my aunt Ilush, my father's sister who lived in Vienna. Shortly after we escaped, the communists put down the revolution, the borders were again secured, and no one was able to get out until the fall of the Iron Curtain decades later.

In Vienna, our uncle, who had a clothing factory, made beautiful cashmere coats and suits for my sister and for me. To this day, people still tell me they remember the beautiful coats we wore when we arrived in Williamsburg.

You could not emigrate to the U.S. in those days without a sponsor. Luckily, my father had a second sister, Goldy, who had married and come to the United States before the war. She went to the embassy and sponsored our family to come to the United States. We came by ship and in 1957, our family settled in Williamsburg. We lived in an apartment on Keap Street. I remember when the Brooklyn Queens Expressway (BQE) was built.



THE FETTMAN FAMILY

would like to hear from any readers who may have had family in Budapest in 1944 when the atrocities on the Danube took place. Please email Mrs. Fettman's daughter at postreicher1@gmail.com.



Mr. and Mrs. Moshe and Judy Fettman got married on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5719/April 8, 1959, in Brooklyn, NY.

Because of their calm home, because of their *shalom bayis*, I remember a secure childhood and happy upbringing.

How did your family acclimate to life in America?

I started to attend Bais Yaakov in Williamsburg. It was a culture shock (in a good way) coming from the communist public school system. The Jewish girls who had preceded us here were very kind and helped us acclimate. I particularly remember how Debby Krausz nee Friedman and her mother Mrs. Friedman were very kind to the new Hungarian emigres.

At that time, the only *chevra kadisha* in New York was on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. My father was instrumental in founding the *chevra kadisha* in Williamsburg. Until a very old age, my father taught the *mesorah* and *halachos* from pre-war Europe to the next generation including the most complicated issues of *taharos*.

I met my husband at the young age of 17. I had no intention of marrying so young, and my husband was 27— ten years older than me! But wherever I needed to go, he was somehow there with his car asking if he could give me a ride. Finally, my mother said, “Either you marry him or let him go,” and I said, “I’ll marry him!”

His name was Moshe Fettman, and he was the son of Harav Chaim Pesach Fettman, *zt”l*, a *mechaber* of *sifrei Divrei Chaim* on Torah, *halachah*, and Kabbalah. We got married and settled in Crown Heights, not far from Lubavitch headquarters, and that’s where we began our family. *Baruch Hashem*, we were

blessed with five children. We cared that our home should be neat and clean, but we never wanted our home to be a museum. We knew the best use for it was for the children to bring their friends there. We hosted Chanukah parties, birthday parties, whatever was needed

Can you tell us something special about your husband?

If you’re going to learn one thing from my husband, it would be his extraordinary *ahavas Yisroel*. I’ll tell you just one story, of many.

We met with a man we know who had married a *georess*, a wonderful woman with a lot of *yiras Shamayim*. Both of them were a little uncomfortable with her past and embarrassed of it. My husband told the young woman, “Before Hashem gave the Torah to the Yidden, He offered it to other nations. They all refused it, but there were a few people in each nation who didn’t want to refuse it, they wanted the Torah. These are the *neshamos* who later became *gerim*!”

What connection with Lubavitch do you or your family have?

My husband and I were always friendly with Lubavitch. When we traveled, we would look for (and usually find) a Chabad *minyán* for my husband to join. We have attended Chabad public menorah lightings just because they are beautiful events and we wanted to support them.



I am very happy to have my story featured in this Chabad magazine, because my husband and I have long admired Chabad. No matter where my husband and I traveled, whether in Europe or the U.S., we always marveled at the breadth and reach of Chabad, how they provide kosher food, *minyanim*, and other *mitzvah* opportunities in the unlikeliest of places. I am impressed with the way they selflessly transplant their families to live in farflung places in order to reach lost Jews and build new communities.

Mainly, my husband and I were drawn to the Lubavitcher Rebbe's belief (that he not only spoke about but lived) in showing respect and having true *ahavas Yisroel* not only to those Jews who are just like us, but to those who are different. The Rebbe's warmth, and interest in them, was genuine, and that's something we must all learn from.

What message would you like to impart to future generations?

I am very grateful to Hashem that my family miraculously survived and experienced two great *nissim* (our escape from the massacre at the Danube River, and our escape from Hungary under communist control).

Throughout the war, under communist rule, and through the process of immigrating, my parents shielded and protected



Interviewer Chaya Feigy Grossman (R) with Holocaust survivor Mrs. Judy Fettman.

us from all the horrors and worries. Because of their calm home, because of their *shalom bayis*, I remember a secure childhood and happy upbringing.

I think this is an important message, that the sanctity and security of a Jewish home can be an island of safety and comfort amid danger, turbulence, and change. I thank Hashem for the *siyata diShmaya* that allowed a little girl who was three years old during the war to get married and have a beautiful family of five children as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren, *ka"h*, who continue to make their homes fortresses of inherited Jewish values and *minhagim*. ❧