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Claire Pongrass - Holocaust Rescuers Interviews

Sam and Pearl Oliner

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Interview with Claire Pongras, daughter of Laszlo Michnay

February 1985

*Daughter married a Jew
Hungary*

Head of the Seventh Day Adventist Church - a week after the Germans occupied Hungary, he preached in the church not to join in the persecution of the Jews day after day, until the churches were closed. A number of church families left the city to avoid being bombed, and gave L. M. the keys to their houses. This gave him the possibility of finding hiding places for the twenty-two families he saved.

Among them were Peterdi, Andor, poet and Varnay, Zsely, his wife, a writer who speaks about L.M. in her Autobiography. Mazovi, Vilmos, head of a synagogue. doctors, lawyers. Many of these people were known to L.M. before the war, because of his church work.

He would never accept money. Always taught the acceptance of every person, regardless of origin.

Besides offering these families shelter, he took them food every day from the supplies in his own home. The corner grocery store was owned by Jews, who gave him extra supplies to keep before the German invasion. Sometimes the family got worried that there would be insufficient food left for them. Somehow, "like a miracle," there always was more. Once, the older sister complained that father was going to give away their last chicken. He slapped her face, which he had never done before.

The mother was entirely in sympathy with the father's action. The family was sometimes worried, and yet, he never for a moment doubted that he was doing what he was meant to do, and had no fear.

The children's birthcertificates were copied innumerable times to assist Jews needing false papers. There were six in the family, Claire is the fourth, 17 in 1944, her father about fifty at this time. Two sisters had been enrolled in a Jewish school, later she went to a Scottish Colège, where forty of the forty two children were Jewish. In the country, where they went for holidays, he also always played with the few Jewish children, who were not accepted by the peasant children.

L. M. was a Lutheran teacher before W.W. I. He spent four years in Siberia as a war prisoner, and upon his return was profoundly convinced of the 7th Day Adventist religion. Previously he had been almost an atheist. He married a woman of Catholic background who joined his church.

He had a sense of mission- "Somehow nobody touched my father."

A doctor from Kassa (Kascice) came -having heard of L.M. in his hometown, asking for help for his daughter, who had false papers but nowhere to stay, and this woman, a young girl lived with them for six months, pretending to be Catholic. Father was offered money, and felt outraged that that girl's father assumed he could be bought. He never accepted money. After the war, when it was hard to obtain food, grateful survivors sometimes brought food - especially the doctor. Klari still living in Kassa.

One woman pretended to be dead - when Jews were lined up by the Danube and shot, then ran - borrowed clothes and was sent to L. M. to get further help.

L. M. 3

died 1965, heart~~th~~ attack in airplane. Much correspondence with Israel, honored - tree planted after his death.

Constance

Influence on Claire: learned to love - to be of service.
She had worked for community - for meals on wheels
Married to a Jew, but profoundly convinced of her own religion - her children brought up in her faith.
Feels strong affinity with Jews - sharing in their history and tradition, but also believing in Christ.

Married a Jew