

ANDRE GABANY

After surviving most of the war with false identity papers, Andre Gabany was imprisoned by Nazi sympathizers.

“An officer asked me to identify the good and the bad Hungarians, so that he could have the Nazi sympathizers executed. I had absolute power at age fifteen and I had not one person killed.”

Andre Gabany was born in Debrecen, Hungary in 1930. His family included judges, physicians, and businesspeople. At the beginning of the war, Andre’s father and grandfather had been considered “exempt Jews” because his grandfather was a respected judge. Andre’s father was inducted into the Hungarian army as a motorcycle messenger.

Andre, his mother and grandfather were living in Budapest. They moved to Sopron, to be close to an uncle who had been educated in Germany. They hoped this connection would help them receive better treatment, but things did not turn out that way. In Sopron, forced to wear the Star of David, Andre was spat upon and beaten by his classmates for being Jewish. The Gestapo took hostages to force most of the Jewish population into ghettos and his uncle was deported to Auschwitz.

Relatives helped his mother to obtain false identity papers and a Christian neighbor helped them escape from the Sopron ghetto back to Budapest. From there, they traveled to a small village next to Lake Balaton, pretending to be refugees fleeing from the Russian occupation. As the Russian army was approaching, Hungarian Nazis patrolled the area and discovered that the Gabanys were Jews. They were beaten and arrested, While they were being transported westward to Germany, they were liberated by the Russian army. In prison Andre met a high-ranking Russian officer. After the liberation, he asked Andre to identify the good and the bad Hungarians, so that he could have the Nazi sympathizers executed. Andre refused to do so.

Andre, together with his mother, came to America in 1948. He attended the University of California and Stanford University. Andre worked as a mechanical engineer and participated in major engineering projects including the first American space satellite and the design and construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit System. He and his wife Solange, who was born in Casablanca, Morocco raised their family in California.

Of his large extended family, only Andre, his mother, and his grandfather survived the Holocaust. His father had been driven out to a minefield by the Nazis and killed. Most of his schoolmates were deported and died.