

Email von Sandor Vandor an Yad Vashem, 19.7.2005

Dear Mr. Paldiel,

I am submitting my petition to Yad Vashem to grant recognition as a "Righteous Gentile" to Mrs. Maria Lackner. Mrs. Lackner fearlessly bucked the German laws and, facing possible punishment of death, she saved many Jewish lives. She routinely provided food for starving Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers during World War II. I was one of those Jewish forced laborers. I was hungry. Mrs. Lackner gave me food and thus SHE SAVED MY LIFE.

My name is Sandor Vandor. I was born 23 May 1925 in Paks, Hungary. In 1945 I lived with my family in Rákospalota. In the month of May, I was called up by the Hungarian Army to be ordered to report for forced labor. On 19 May, I reported to Vác center where labor companies and labor battalions were formed. My company was assigned to work at the bombed out Oil Refinery at Szöny. We were under Hungarian command and we worked there until late December. By that time, as the eastern front kept moving further west, our fate also moved to the west and we left Szöny in forced march towards Austria. Our regular commanders and guards were relieved from their duties and a brutal group of Hungarian Military Police took charge. It cost many Jewish lives. After a few days of marching, we reached the Austrian border, somewhere in the vicinity of Sopron. There, we were handed over to German command. In a camp in Burgenland we went through a de-licing process. New work companies were formed. From my old company only Gyuri – György Zafir, a childhood friend, from Rákospalota – remained with me in the new company. I am guessing that the German,s selected similar-aged young men to form our work group. We were moved to St. Anna am Aigen at the end of January 1945. Our work assignment was to build tank trenches in the fortification of the so-called "Eastern Wall". The work was heavy. The food was light. The assigned quota of work had to be completed every day, seven days a week. We completed our work assignment in groups of ten. After completing the work we were permitted to go back to the camp without escorts.

The daily food "Menu" was the same for seven days a week.

Breakfast: A ladle full of brownish color liquid called coffee and a small piece of high fiber bread.

Infrequently (once a week or once in ten days) the breakfast was supplemented with a piece of marmalade.

Dinner: A ladle full of grayish colored liquid called soup. The soup was entirely liquid, no solids. Lunch or snack was not in their dictionary.

The list is complete; I did not forget any item from our "menu".

Local citizens were aware of our hunger and, heroically bucking the trend, they surreptitiously provided food supplements for us Jews. From camp to work, with SS escorts, we walked to reach the work site every day. Along the pathway, we found small food packages deposited for us by the brave local citizens. At one house we passed daily, food packages were placed on the window sill. Individuals were lobbing food packages over the fence to our camp.

Those brave acts were like invitations to me. The message was: if you find us, we will give you food. Gyuri and me took the risk and climbed over the fence of the camp and visited neighboring villages to beg for food. We got food and we climbed back

over the fence to the camp. We were able to evade detection. If we would have had caught, we would have been faced death or even worse punishment.

On one of those excursions we knocked on the door of a house. A young girl about 13 years of age opened the door. Her name was Martha and she is a cousin of Mrs. Lackner. Mrs. Lackner appeared immediately. She not only invited us in but pulled us by the arms to come in. She prepared an egg sandwich and a glass of apple cider for Gyuri and me. She insisted that we finish eating inside the house. Then she gave us apples to take along for the road. Then she allowed us to leave. Without her food, I would not have lasted to see the day of liberation. In just about two months time, I had lost 1/3 of my body weight. On the day of the liberation – 5 April – I started to walk home to Rákospalota and the first day from 8:00 in the morning until about 4:30 in the afternoon I was able to walk just 3 kilometers. With my physical strength I was able to walk only 3 kilometers over more than ten hours time. Without her food I would not have lasted to see the day of liberation.

For 59 years in our family as survivors, we have talked about the bad things the Nazis inflicted upon us. We also mentioned untold times the good deeds we received from individuals during the holocaust. But the wrongs committed against us mostly overpower every thought we had in recognizing good deeds that benefited us. The wrongs could never be expressed with adequate words. The wrongs dwarf the good deeds. The good people of St. Anna am Aigen gave me food. This food sustained my life. I have mentioned this many times, but only recently did it register deep enough that their heroics needed to be acknowledged with a THANK YOU. I set out to correct this. I contacted the Mayor or the Marktgemeinde Sankt Anna am Aigen and just recently, in mid June, I visited St Anna/Aigen. The Mayor set up an uplifting venue for me at the local public school. Students with the aid of their teachers created an exhibit in the corridor of the school building. Three large easels had explanatory notes detailing the purpose of my visit. One easel specifically mentioned Mrs. Lackner's involvement. The story was enhanced with photographs. I was introduced to two classes of eighth grade students (14 years old). Briefly I told the students my story, the purpose of my visit and thanked that their grand mothers and great aunts followed their moral convictions, giving food to my fellow Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers, including me. With their heroic acts, they saved my life and other the lives of other oppressed Jews. During my visit, I was reunited with Mrs. Lackner. For 60 years, she told her story that she gave food to the Jews. For 60 years she says that she felt guilty she did not do more. I proved to her that the apples she gave me went a long way. I was there 60 years later to thank her for the apples. I pointed toward my younger son – Ron – who accompanied me on my trip. I also mentioned that on the way home I will stop to see my GREAT grand daughter Abby Rose, who was just born in early May. Thus I was able to show her just how far her apples went. She is 85 years young. She is the only living reminder of the women who actively helped Jews to survive. She deserves the recognition of RIGHTEOUS GENTILE. She deserves the recognition fast and should be honored while she is still alive. Also a collective recognition should be issued to the Marktgemeinde Sankt Anna am Aigen to recognize the many citizens of St. Anna for their efforts in saving Jewish lives.

Mrs. Lackner's full name and postal address:
Maria Lackner, nee Legenstein,
Date of birth: 11-01-1920
Aigen 13, 8354 St. Anna am Aigen Austria

Martha,s full name and postal address:

Martha Zöhrer, nee Lackner,

Date of birth: 08-07-1928

Nöstlstraße 13, 3172 Krottendorf/Weiz Austria

The following people would be able to substantiate my appeal for their recognition:

1. Mr. Josef Weinhandl, Mayor of Marktgemeinde Sankt Anna am Aigen, Marktstrasse 5. A-8354 St. Anna am Aigen, Austria.

E-mail < buergermeister@st-anna.at >

2. Dr. Eleonore Lappin, Institut fuer Geschichte der Juden in Oesterreich / Institute for the History of the Jews in Austria, Dr. Karl Renner-Promenade 22, A-3100 St. Poelten, Austria.

E-mail < eleonore.lappin@injoest.ac.at >

3. Shimshon Schvarc, Tel Aviv, Israel. – I believe that Mr. Josef Weinhandl, Mayor of Marktgemeinde Sankt Anna am Aigen, would able to provide further information on how to reach Shimshon Schvarc.

4. Klara Klein, Talme Elazar, Doar Na Hefer, 38812 Israel. Tel: 97246378107. She is the sister of György Zafir, also a holocaust survivor.

Please consider my petition in a timely manner, because time is of the essence in this case. Also please consider that without the heroic acts of the Righteous Gentiles, there would not have been many Jews who survived in Europe.

Das Ansuchen von Sandor Vandor an Yad Vashem ist noch unter Begutachtung.