

György and István Kun

This story of **György Kun and his “twin” brother István** is adapted from a testimony Gyorgy gave his daughter, Andrea Szonyi, in 1999. The story was published in the USC Shoah Foundation’s Summer 2013 PastForward digest.



Gyuri (left) and Pista Kuhn, date unknown. (Courtesy of USC Shoah Foundation)



Gyorgy Kun with daughter, Andrea Szonyi, 1999

In January 1932, in a village of Vállaj in the Hungarian countryside, a farm manager named Márton Kuhn and his wife, Piroska, had their first child. They named him György (Gyuri). Eleven months later, his brother, István (Pista), was born. Gyuri and Pista were very close: Gyuri remembered running in from the garden when his mother’s homemade donuts were ready; going to elementary school in the village and Jewish school in a neighboring town; and playing outside with Pista. It was “the good life,” Gyuri said.

As the government passed antisemitic legislation that violated even the most basic rights, Gyuri was denied entry into the secondary grammar school. So his parents managed to enroll him in a local high school instead. Life became increasingly difficult for the family. Schoolchildren often tried to attack Gyuri on his way home from school. In 1944, his family was evicted from their farm and sent

to a nearby ghetto, and from there to a brick factory in Székesfehérvár. “My parents couldn’t imagine where we would end up, so my mother kept repeating that we should always stay together,” Gyuri recalled. “No matter what, the family must not be torn apart.”

Brick factories like the one in Székesfehérvár were the last stop for many Hungarian Jews before deportation, and in May 1944, Gyuri and his family were loaded onto a train headed for Auschwitz. The first thing Gyuri remembered seeing upon arrival were Nazi soldiers with dogs, and prisoners of all ages in striped uniforms. The new arrivals were lined up for inspection. “Mom was holding our hands,” Gyuri remembered. “Dad was walking next to us. Then he was separated from us.” Márton Kuhn would eventually end up at Dachau concentration camp. Gyuri, Pista, and Piroska were brought face to face with Dr. Josef Mengele. “He asked my mother one word,” Gyuri recalled, “‘Zwillinge [Twins]?’ My mother did not speak German, but instinctively she replied, ‘Ja.’ ”

Gyuri and Pista were not only close in age, they closely resembled one another and, were even dressed alike. Their mother’s one-word answer to Mengele’s question “meant life for us,” Gyuri said, for the boys were immediately separated for experimentation. Their mother, however, was sent in a different direction.

“My last memory of my mother is that she is holding my hand and we are separated. We were simply torn apart: we, one way and she, the other. I had that picture with me a long time, and I know my brother did, too.” Piroska Kuhn perished at Auschwitz.

During registration, Gyuri and Pista gave their true birth dates, and Mengele’s mistake was immediately discovered. The adult inmates in charge of registration stared at them in “total bewilderment.” One of them was a 28-year-old man named Ernő (Zvi) Spiegel.

Sometimes referred to as the “twin’s father,” Spiegel was trusted by Mengele and respected by the other inmates. When the Kuhn brothers revealed they were not twins, Spiegel did not report them; instead, he falsified Pista’s registration so that his birthday matched Gyuri’s. “Then the numbers were tattooed on our arms,” Gyuri said. “I became A-14321 and my brother, A-14322.”

The boys survived Auschwitz and reunited with their father. During the 1956 revolution, Pista left Hungary for the United States and settled in Oklahoma City, where he studied to be an architect. In 1962 at the age of 30, while working at a hospital to finance his university studies, Pista became ill and died.

Gyuri remained in Hungary. After marrying in 1960, he and his wife, Ágnes, had a baby girl and settled in Budapest. He suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and other ailments that he believed stemmed from his experience in the Holocaust.

Throughout his life, Gyuri reminisced about Ernő Spiegel: how he risked his life more than once to save others; how he led the twins homeward when Auschwitz was liberated; how he appointed older boys to get the younger boys home when it was time to part ways; how he helped the boys hope “that maybe, one day, life would be joyful again.”

Gyorgy Kun's tattoo number: A 14321

Itsvan Kun's number: A 14322

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