

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:  
REMINISCENCES OF A TURBULENT YOUTH

by

ANDREW LOUIS REEVES

VOLUME I: THE PERIOD UNTIL 1945.

FIRST DRAFT, SEPTEMBER 1993

---

THIRD PRINTOUT (REVISED), JANUARY 2010

The author:

Andrew L. Reeves, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus (Occup. & Environ. Health Sciences)

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Address:

573 Pemberton

Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230-1711

Phone & Fax 313/822-4651

e-mail: [andrew.reeves@wayne.edu](mailto:andrew.reeves@wayne.edu)

P R E F A C E

---

MEMOIR-WRITING is the prerogative of the famous, and it is clear that--some youthful dreams to the contrary notwithstanding--I have not made it. So, what am I doing with this rather lengthy narrative which, bringing my life story just up to the arrival in the United States, already comprises some 100,000 words?

I have written it mainly with my children, children-in-law, and grandchildren in mind. They should have a written account of what it took to survive the vicissitudes of the twentieth century and to ensure that they could or can grow up as citizens of a free and prosperous country. As I attempted to describe my own ancestry I was amazed to realize how little I know of it. I have fairly accurate data only about my parents. My grandparents' lives are already quite blurred in my awareness and any effort at going back further in the family tree drew complete blanks in all directions. So, if my literary efforts are good for nothing more than to give my own grandchildren and their descendants a perspective of their own roots, that will have already accomplished a worthy purpose. In fact, the detailed family histories in Chapters 1 and 13 are of conceivable interest only to them.

However, the stories of my deportation, liberation, and escape seem to be commanding a wider interest and whenever I recounted these events in the company of my friends, I was invariably urged to commit these memories to writing. A manuscript I circulated resulted in the unanimous recommendation to have it published in book form. It is true that the historic times this autobiography deals with have already been reported, analyzed, and even fictionalized by scores of writers, but to these I can now add my own personal element. Moreover, it seems that the story and fate of Eichmann's "Schanz-Juden" (the deportees from Budapest who built the South-East Wall for the defense of Vienna) has not been written up in detail thus far at all. In that respect, this work might even be worthy of the historian's interest.

It is of particular satisfaction to me that I can now write not only of Nazism but also of European Communism in the past tense. By a string of luckiest coincidences, my professional and other travels allowed me to be bodily present in Budapest during the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy; in Berlin during the breach of the wall; in Beijing during the brief thaw between the death of Mao and the Tian-An-Men massacres; and in Moscow during the accelerating manifestations of ineptitude of the Perestroika reform movement. Where all this will lead may be as yet uncertain in some cases but the judgment of history on the Communist form of government has been spoken.

*Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is not a novel, and it contains no fictitious elements. Everything is recounted as remembered, with a conscientious effort at factuality, objectivity, and accurateness. The

historic framework is supplied as the context of my personal story. For background information, I used the resources of my library freely and I trust that at this point it is not necessary to burden the text with references and source credits. I am indebted to my wife Shirley for her careful grammatical review of my draft.

This work is dedicated to my grandchildren Danny, Melanie, Stevie, Philip and Alex. It comes from the first Reeves (spelled as such) and the first American in the clan.

Grosse Pointe, Michigan, October 1993.

THE AUTHOR

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

---

PREFACE.....	3
<u>Chapter 1--Ancestry</u> .....	6
Early History.....	6
Paternal Lineage.....	10
Maternal Lineage.....	12
Recent History.....	13
<u>Chapter 2--Childhood</u> .....	16
Neonatal Injury.....	16
Pre-School and Grade School Years.....	17
Middle School and High School Years.....	25
Conversion and Graduation.....	37
<u>Chapter 3--Nazi Persecution: The Early Phase</u> .....	40
The New Graduate.....	41
Worker at the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company.....	42
Intermezzo: Student of Law.....	45
<u>Chapter 4--Nazi Persecution: The Middle Phase</u> .....	49
The German Occupation of Hungary.....	49
Labor Service in the Hungarian Army.....	54
October 15, 1944.....	57
<u>Chapter 5--Nazi Persecution: The End Phase</u> .....	65
Deportation.....	65
Slave Labor on the South-East Wall.....	65
Death March No.1.....	75
Mauthausen Concentration Camp.....	78
Death March No.2.....	81
Gunskirchen.....	83
<u>Chapter 6--Liberation</u> .....	87
The Last Days in Gunskirchen.....	87
May 4, 1945.....	88
First Days of Freedom.....	97
Living on the Fat of the Land.....	101
Leonding DP Camp.....	108
<u>Chapter 7--The End of an Era</u> .....	109
Homecoming.....	109
The Siege and Occupation of Budapest.....	112
Summary: Balance Sheet of the Holocaust.....	115
THE END OF VOLUME I.....	125

C H A P T E R   O N E

---

A N C E S T R Y

AS FAR AS I KNOW, I come one hundred per cent from Jewish-Hungarian stock--but personal awareness of my ancestry goes back only two generations, i.e. to about mid-nineteenth century. All earlier family history must be inferred from general historical facts.

Early History

Scattered Jews have lived in the territory of Hungary at least as long as the gentile Hungarians, and perhaps longer. The country was part of the Roman Empire: the western part under the name of Pannonia since the Emperor Augustus and the eastern part under the name of Dacia since the Emperor Trajanus. What happened to the Roman settlers (among whom, according to gravestones, there were Jews) during the period of the Great Migrations is not known. The country reputedly served as the headquarters of Attila's Huns in the fifth century A.D. and of Bajan's Avars in the seventh century A.D. The Hungarians conquered the land under their chieftain Árpád in the ninth century A.D. and it has been alleged that some of these conquering Hungarian hordes were also Jewish.

This allegation is not quite as far-fetched as it might seem at first glance. It is well known from medieval sources that the Khazars, an ancient people of the North Caspian steppes, adopted the Jewish religion sometime in the eighth century A.D.--the story, told and retold many times, was the subject of Judah Halevi's "Kuzari", and more recently of Arthur Koestler's "The Thirteenth Tribe". Koestler goes so far as to suggest that the whole body of Eastern European Jewry essentially descended from the Khazars. More conventional historians believe that only the Khazar royal court and perhaps a few other leading families converted and these converts were absorbed, or otherwise disappeared, when Eastern Europe adopted Christianity.

Hungarian Jewry developed an interest in the Khazar question when archeological research indicated that the Hungarian tribes during their pre-conquest migrations in Eastern Europe came into contact with the Khazars and were actually joined by a sub-tribe of the Khazars called Khabars. If these Khabars were of the Jewish religion, and if they remained with the Hungarians after the Conquest, then the situation allows the assumption that among the conquering tribes settling in the land of Hungary in the ninth century A.D. there already were Jews.

I personally learned of this hypothesis in the 1930's in the course of Jewish religious instruction rather than in the regular history classes. No doubt it was taught to us as countermeasure to official Nazi-inspired propaganda that depicted Jews as late and nefarious infiltrators into the fabric of the Hungarian nation. Asserting that our roots in the land went back all the way to the Conquest, and were tied up with a steppe-dwelling,

horse people indistinguishable from the ancient Hungarians, was psychologically important. As to just how plausible this whole hypothesis is, I would have to leave that to the historians. The question seems ludicrously irrelevant today but was not at all so in the climate of the 1930's when I grew up. If all Jewish people were not Semitic then the main doctrine of anti-Semitism, with all the racist nonsense current at the time, was automatically called into question.

I can remember that at some point during my high school days our entire class was subjected to "anthropologic examination", consisting of measurements of stature, hair, skin and eye hues, skull angles, and so forth. My skull was classified as "Turkish" which at the time was a source of immense satisfaction to me. It tended to suggest that my "blood line" perhaps went back to these ancient tribes, or to the Ottoman conquerors of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungary, and was at any rate not "Semitic". Therefore, "anti-Semitism" in reality did not apply to me at all! (Alas, I was to learn differently as time went on.)

Probably the first antagonisms between Jews and non-Jews in early Hungarian society occurred during the Christianization of the nation under King Stephen I in the eleventh century. Western missionaries, mainly Italians and Germans, were invited into the country and I can well imagine that if there were Jews among the early settlers, attempts at converting them must have been a whole lot less successful than converting the pagans. Some exasperation and hostility must have arisen in the early Christian church of Hungary towards Jews as stubborn resisters who rejected salvation when offered to them, and as worshipers of a different, and perhaps sinister, God. When the first written Hungarian constitution was framed in 1222, whole paragraphs were devoted to the disabilities imposed on Jews--offices they could not hold, lands they could not own, special taxes they had to pay, and related matters. These measures were virtually forced on King Andrew II by seditious noblemen and churchmen. At least they prove without a doubt that Jews did indeed live in Hungary that early in the nation's history. As to how they made their living, the legal disabilities must have steered them into the one occupation left open: commerce.

In the fourteenth century, the great epidemic of the Black Death (the bubonic plague) swept over Europe, ravaging the population. The epidemic did not spare Hungary, and the vicious and absurd accusation that the Jews deliberately caused the epidemic by poisoning wells, did not spare Hungary, either. An edict was passed under King Louis I (1342-1382), expelling Jews from the kingdom. Just how completely the edict was enforced, and what exactly happened to the expellees, is unclear. At any rate, the edict was expressly rescinded about 4 years later and there is again evidence of Jews in the country under King Matthias I in the fifteenth century and during the Turkish occupation of Hungary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both King Matthias I and the Turkish overlords were reputed to be relatively friendly to Jews. The country was liberated from the Turks by an international army headed by Prince Eugene of Savoy in 1686, and the formerly Turkish province of Hungary was converted into an Austrian province. From the Gentile point of view, oppression of the population did not change much and from the Jewish point of view it definitely worsened. The liberation of Hungary from the Turks had distinct religious overtones. It was regarded as victory of Christianity over Islam and in a sense it can be considered to have been the last Crusade. As in former crusades, the Jews again did not fare particularly well but it must be said that in this instance

the Protestant converts in the Christian population did not fare too well, either. The Thirty Years' War that ravaged Germany 1618-1648 was still in memory. The Treaty of Westphalia which ended that war specified, "*Cuius regio eius religio*" [To whom belongs the land, belongs religion also--i.e., the feudal lord of each domain could choose religion for all his subjects] and since Hungary was now ruled by the Catholic Habsburgs, it was expected that all inhabitants of the realm would become Catholics. It must have been an infuriating disappointment that there was resistance against this idea even among Protestants, let alone Jews. A flurry of restrictive edicts followed against all non-Catholics, and Queen Maria Theresa (1740-1780) even assessed a "tolerance tax" specifically on Jews.

The New Age in that part of the world began with the Emperor Joseph II (1780-1790), an unusually enlightened monarch for his age. He is the wit who, when asked what he thought of the French Revolution, replied "Sir, I am a royalist by trade." It must be admitted that he took his "trade" seriously and he had a keen sense of honor. Even though he exercised royal powers in Hungary, he cannot be properly called King--he refused to be crowned King, because he objected to the very reactionary oath the King had to make at the coronation ceremony. Joseph II did not think much of the entrenched privileges of the Nobility, or of the Church, (earning thereby the hearty dislike of both) and the changes he made, or attempted to make, for the modernization of life, personal liberties, and religious freedom were almost as momentous as those of the French Revolution.

Joseph II granted Protestants complete equality in all aspects of public life and encouraged Jews to come out of their medieval isolation. Among his many other reforms, he decreed that Jews, like other citizens, must henceforth have *family names*--something quite rare in the Jewish communities of earlier times, when most individuals would be known only as "Jacob ben [son of] Isaac", and so forth. A suitable pool of surnames was to be offered for the newly named persons to choose from, but the way the edict was administered, the available choices became rather restrictive. Established family names of the nobility and gentry were naturally excluded, and so were the titles of most manual trades (e.g., Smith, Carpenter) at the request of the respective guilds. In practice, the names for ordinary Jews who had no "pull" with the authorities and no funds with which to bribe them, were chosen from contrived constructions not heretofore used as family names, always in German, and frequently with a phony bucolic ring--such as Grünberger, Rosenbaum, Blaufeld, and so forth. Since Habsburg sovereignty extended over virtually all of Central and Eastern Europe at the time, these types of names were adopted by, or forced upon, most of European Jewry and are known ever since as "Jewish names".

In nineteenth-century Hungary, Jews lived in reasonable harmony with their Gentile neighbors. In a typical Hungarian village, there would be just a few Jewish families. The village store would be typically Jewish-owned (so much so that, in the country vernacular of the Hungarian language, "going to the Jew" meant going shopping) and frequently the village pub or inn would be Jewish-owned also. In the rural towns, wholesale businesses and emerging manufacturing enterprises were frequently Jewish, and many of these grew into corporations of national significance (e.g., the steel works of Csepel or the china factory of Herend were Jewish-founded and for a long time Jewish-owned).

In the large cities, Jews flocked into the professions. Schools of medicine and law, and eventually also of engineering, were attended by Jews far out of proportion to their numbers in the population which led to a situation in which the intellectual life of the country became to a large extent Jewish-dominated.

Meanwhile, strivings for Hungarian independence led to the revolt against Austrian rule in 1848-1849 under Louis Kossuth, which Jewish-Hungarians wholeheartedly supported. The revolt was crushed with intervention of the Russians and Hungary was subjected to an autocratic, colonial-type rule from Vienna for 18 years. However, weakening of the Habsburg position after the Battle of Königgrätz (signaling the ascendancy of Bismarck's empire) induced the Austrians to reach a compromise with the Hungarians and in 1867 the Austrian Empire was transformed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which Hungary achieved virtual independence for running its own domestic affairs. The Emperor Franz Joseph was also crowned King of Hungary. His reign, which lasted into World War I, was characterized by general domestic tranquility, social and technical progress, and full emancipation of the Jews.

The Jewish community of Hungary was not quite homogeneous. The nineteenth century saw considerable migratory activity within the confines of the Empire, mainly from the villages of what is today Poland and the western Ukraine, into the great urban centers of the Monarchy, including Budapest. The Jewish migrants brought with them the Yiddish language and the strange, colorful customs of "hasidic" piety that were generally at variance with the more assimilated ways of locally reared Jewry. Frictions developed, which in Hungary culminated in the split of the Jewish faith in 1871 into "Orthodox" and "Neolog" congregations (the latter being the approximate equivalent of Conservative in current American terms). These splinter groups mutually did not think much of each other's religious practices and lifestyle. In Orthodox eyes, the Neologs betrayed the time-honored ancient tenets of Judaism and did not deserve to be regarded as Jews at all. In Neolog eyes, the Orthodox clung to weird outdated customs which never had genuine scriptural justification to begin with, and were now hopelessly out of step with modern times. Furthermore, they unnecessarily focused Gentile attention on the more exotic aspects of the Jewish faith. The sharpening competition that Gentiles had to face with talented and aggressive Jewish peers in business and the professions did not exactly help, either, and popular hostility towards Jews reared its ugly head again and even became a factor in the political life of the Monarchy. Political parties with "anti-Semitism" as their main or virtually only program came into being.

Ancient superstitions were revived, and a notorious court case, the "Blood Libel Trial of Tiszaeszlár" rocked the country in the 1880's. A 14-year old village girl disappeared one day and local Jews were accused of having slaughtered her in order to obtain her blood for ritual purposes. Unbelievable as it may seem in relatively modern times, the case was actually tried in regular court and the story of that trial ("A Nagy Per" [The Great Trial] by Karl Eötvös, the chief defense attorney) really makes fascinating reading. The prosecution produced an alleged eyewitness, the 15-year old son of the local kosher animal slaughterer (himself a Jew, of course) who claimed to have observed the proceedings through a keyhole in the door of the synagogue into which the girl was said to have been enticed. No sooner was this sensational testimony obtained than the drowned body of a young

female, dressed in the vanished girl's belongings and bearing no sign of physical violence, was recovered from the Tisza river. Identification procedures for the waterlogged corpse were peculiar, to say the least. At the inquest, the mother of the vanished girl was induced to deny that the all-but-decomposed body was her daughter and the fact that the skull was hairless (after several weeks in the river) was taken as proof that the body belonged to an Orthodox Jewish woman who had her hair shorn by religious custom. The prosecution offered a most fantastic theory according to which the body was a "plant", dressed in the disappeared girl's attire with conspiratorial participation of virtually the entire world Jewish community, in order to cover up a ritual murder. The trial dragged on for months, during which the "material witness" was sequestered in the prosecutor's household. The defense eventually showed not only the untenability of the body-switching theory but also that the alleged murder could not have been visible from where the boy said he saw it. When all the evidence was heard, the Court returned the only verdict possible--full acquittal of the accused.

This trial was the international sensation of its day and the perfect counterpart of the better publicized Dreyfuss case in France a few years later. Both showed, regrettably, how superficial the seeming acceptance of Jews into European society had been and how easy it was to find deep-seated prejudice under a thin veneer of imposed civility. Nonetheless, Hungarian Jews were generally reluctant to draw the conclusion from this situation. Zionism, although invented by a Hungarian (Theodor Herzl) had very limited following in Hungary. Patriotic allegiance to the Fatherland was the typical sentiment among Jews and "anti-Semitism" was believed to have been resolved with the Tiszaeszlár acquittals. It was in my generation that it was unfortunately proved that Hungarian Jews were living in a fool's paradise.

#### Paternal Lineage

It was into this general background that one Louis Rosinger was born in the 1850's in the Transdanubian (Western Hungarian) village of Enying. He was my paternal grandfather.

Of the parentage and childhood of Louis Rosinger I know nothing. Only the circumstantial evidence of how he brought up his children indicates that he not only belonged to the "Neolog" branch of Jewry but was totally nonobservant. This was not a rarity in nineteenth-century rural Hungary. Rules of the Jewish religion require that community services can be held only if a quorum of ten adult male Jews is present, and that was frequently not attainable in small villages where scattered Jewish families lived. Since travel on the Sabbath was also prohibited by religious law, these scattered families were virtually cut off from regular worship. Being Jewish was only a matter of personal awareness and of the pertinent entry in one's official record. It seems that Louis Rosinger's Jewishness was of this category. From what I know, he grew up with the peasant lads of his village and looked like one of them. However, his family owned no land. When he grew up, he found employment in the service of the Count Draskóczy and became his Supervisor of farm hands ["gazdatiszt"]--a somewhat unusual occupation for a Jew.

In the late 1870's Louis Rosinger met and married Serena Stern, one of three daughters of a Jewish innkeeper in the village of Sarkad (East

Central Hungary). Louis and Serena had four children, of whom the youngest was my father.

The oldest son, Armin, lived in Arad (now Rumania) and became a civil engineer. He worked for the State Railroads and was prominently involved in the construction of the Székelykocsárd rail line--a spectacular engineering feat of the time, with tunnels and viaducts traversing one of the very scenic mountain valleys of Transylvania. During World War I he served as Lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian Navy and Uncle Ari's photo portrait in the resplendent dress whites of a naval officer used to be a proud family possession. Uncle Ari died of a service-connected ailment in the early 1920's and left a young widow, Anna, who remarried afterwards and lost touch with our family.

Next child of the Rosingers was daughter Margaret. I know little of her girlhood. During World War I she met and married Géza Klein, a prosperous merchant in Nagyvárad (now Oradea, Rumania). They had one daughter, my cousin Erzsi (Elizabeth). Unfortunately, Erzsi's parents both died in the Spanish flu epidemic of 1919 and Erzsi became totally orphaned at age 2.

The second son was Ernest. I remember him as a tall, gaunt, severe-looking man with whom it was not easy to develop a warm relationship. Uncle Ernest became an insurance claim adjustor. He married the pretty buxom Janet Tyroler from Temesvár and they lived in a small apartment in Budapest, only a few blocks distant from us. They had one daughter, my cousin Mary.

Finally, the youngest child of the Rosingers was son Sándor (Alexander), born in the village of Tass in central Hungary, on November 17, 1890. Just as little Sándor was about to enter school, Hungary celebrated the 1000th anniversary of its foundation. The event was commemorated with various festivities everywhere in the land, and also by encouraging citizens bearing foreign-sounding names to "magyarize" them into Hungarian names. This encouragement was extended to Jews bearing the German names given to them a century earlier and many Jewish-Hungarian families availed themselves of the opportunity, including my grandfather. In 1896, all the Rosingers became Révész (the Hungarian meaning is "Ferryman") and that is the surname under which young Sándor entered school. Just why this name was chosen, I don't know. I doubt that there were ferrymen in our ancestry; but it was practical to choose a name with the same initial as the old name and this one was apparently not subject to any protective restriction. To my knowledge, the only sizable extant Révész clan at the time was from the county of Szabolcs in northeastern Hungary. Our family has no connection to them.

My uncle Ari carried assimilation a giant step further. Sometime after the name change he also changed his religion. From the point of view of worship, I am sure it made no difference to him at all--he used to be a nonobservant Jew and now he became a nonobservant Christian. It did make a lot of difference with respect to one's place in the community. Heinrich Heine, the famous nineteenth-century Jewish-German poet who also converted, said that the baptismal certificate was one's entrance ticket into European civilization. Whether the Gentiles into whose ranks the newcomer wished to blend saw it that way or not was debatable. Not debatable was the attitude of the Jews, who saw in the act of conversion an act of cowardice and betrayal and treated the apostate with utmost contempt. To even moderately religious Jews a convert was a dead man, not known and never to be acknowledged, not to be recognized on the street. Family members would hold a regular mourning

ceremony for him. Uncle Ari could get away with this act only because no one in his family cared one way or another. I think it was a prerequisite for him getting his naval commission. He obtained the Christian name András [Andrew] in baptism, and used it instead of Armin (which was judged too Jewish-sounding) in professional life.

The other Révész youngsters remained, for the time being, nominally Jews. Sándor attended primary school in Arad and secondary school in Budapest, and graduated in 1907 from a commercial curriculum. He found employment in the insurance business and was stationed until 1914 in the town of Szabadka (now Yugoslavia). He was called to arms in World War I and received commission as Lieutenant of the Infantry (a less prestigious branch of the service where a person of any religion could become an officer). He was severely wounded in the Battle of Gorlice on the Russian front in May 1915. In close combat, a rifle bullet fired at no more than 10-15 feet penetrated his chest, narrowly missed his heart, and exited through his back. A lung was punctured and several ribs splintered. Fortunately, he had both the fortitude and the good sense to insist that he be returned to Budapest for medical attention rather than delivered to the field surgeons. After a series of very grave operations and long convalescence, he recovered sufficiently to return to light military duty and in 1916 he was given the command of the railroad station of Brassó (now Rumania). By war's end he had a chestful of military decorations earned in service, including the "Large Silver Medal of Valor" for his conduct in action.

My father's character was clearly influenced by his rural background and military experience. He was a man of great self-discipline who demanded that quality from others also. He was not accustomed to be contradicted, but his somewhat stern attitude was tempered by a good sense of humor. In social settings he was typically the life of the party--I can imagine that he "lived it up" as top cat in the small-town setting of Brassó during the war. His "Jewishness" was virtually zero; he did not even know much about the rules and customs of the religion, let alone practice them. His intellectual strength was mainly in dealing with figures, and in organization. His weakness was foreign languages. He never even learned passable German, which in the dual monarchy and perhaps even later, became a limiting factor in his professional advancement.

Towards the end of World War I, Grandfather Louis died, and his widow Serena moved back to her native village of Sarkad, to join her two sisters Nina and Fanny. The latter was married to a grain merchant by the name of Louis Weisz, who also died a few years later. The three old ladies set up a common household and were running the village pub. Upon the tragic orphaning of my cousin Erzsi she was taken in by my grandmother and raised there. Great-aunt Fanny's son Herman (who magyarized his name to Vámos) continued to run the grain store and developed it into a prosperous wholesale business.

#### Maternal Lineage

In the small town of Komárom on the Danube in northwestern Hungary was born in December 1861 Jacob Stern Jr., my maternal grandfather. I know nothing of his parentage but I understand that the "Jr." in his name did not signify that his father was also called Jacob. Rather, there were two Jacob Sterns in the community at that time, of whom my grandfather was the younger one. Stern (the meaning is "star" in German) was indeed a very common

surname all over Hungary and it may have been noted that it was also the maiden name of my paternal grandmother. There was no known relationship between them.

Jacob Stern, Jr. was a strictly observant Jew in the tradition of the "Neolog" (rather than Orthodox) branch of Judaism. He was a steady and leading member of his congregation (serving as its Head for one year during my childhood); his household was impeccably kosher; and he practiced daily prayers and weekly celebrations of the Sabbath with all the paraphernalia of the traditional religious Jew. His native tongue was Hungarian but he understood Yiddish, and I believe that at least one branch of his parentage could have been migrants from the eastern areas of the Monarchy. Jacob, Jr. had only a fourth-grade education and became apprenticed to a haberdasher at age 12. When he grew up, he moved to the town of Érsekújvár a few dozen miles to the north of Komárom and opened a haberdasher store there. In the 1880's he married the daughter of a local merchant family, Janet Kolman. They had six children, of whom the fifth was my mother.

Vilma was the oldest daughter. I remember Aunt Vilma as a sweet and kindly lady, a bit overweight, to whom I was quite close during my early childhood. She lived with my grandparents, being a divorcée which was quite unusual in those days. Aunt Vilma's first marriage was a sad farce. Her husband, Zoltán Lusztig, turned out to be an absolute addict of card playing--I am not even sure what his game was, but I understand that he was willing to neglect anything--including wife, business, family, friends--for the sake of card games which invariably lasted through the night. I understand that this included the wedding night. Inevitably, it led to divorce in a few years. Aunt Vilma later remarried when I was already a grade schooler.

The next offspring was son Endre (André; in the Hungarian language a name distinct from András [Andrew]). Uncle Endre went to law school and became an attorney in Budapest. He was a small, frail, baldheaded man with a gentle demeanor but he could become surprisingly aggressive in legal debates. He had an incisive intellect and was greatly admired by his brothers and sisters as "the brains" of the family. In 1930 he married Fritzi Adler, daughter of a wealthy merchant family from Galánta (northwestern Hungary, now Czechoslovakia). Aunt Fritzi had a Western European education; she was well traveled; she spoke fluent English and French. She was also a fairly accomplished classical pianist and generally a few notches above the social and cultural level of the family into which she married. The fact that she was well aware of this did not make her too popular with her in-laws but her educational attainments did serve, perhaps grudgingly, as a model for the upbringing of children in the family and I quite admired her during my adolescence. Uncle Endre and Aunt Fritzi lived in a larger apartment, more luxuriously furnished, and in a better neighborhood than other members of the family. They had one daughter, my cousin Vera.

The next son was Hugo, who died a soldier's death in World War I and I know virtually nothing about him.

Next offspring of the Sterns was daughter Maria. She was just two years older than my mother and the two sisters were quite close throughout life but also quite competitive in matters of social attainment. Maria was the more intellectual but less beautiful one. She married in 1926 the commercial salesman Gyula [Julius] Fried and they settled in Budapest. They had one

daughter, my cousin Eva who was probably the closest person to me during my childhood.

My mother Bözsi [Betty] was born in Érsekujvár on May 21, 1897. She had an eighth-grade education that was a respectable educational attainment for a woman in those days. The mental picture I have of my mother as a young person is a petite, vivacious, very beautiful country girl who was naïvely enthusiastic about things she knew very little about such as science, music, theatre. After completing her schooling and until her marriage, she worked as office girl in a local lumberyard business.

The youngest child of the Sterns was son Dezsö [Désiré] who remained a bachelor until my adolescence and lived with my grandparents in Érsekujvár. Dezsö became a journalist who edited the local weekly newspaper and was also correspondent of the Hungarian-language daily in Prague. As my grandfather entered retirement age, he also gradually took over the reins of the haberdasher business and developed it into an elegant, modern store. Uncle Dezsö was the diplomat in the family who could get along with anyone and was well liked by everyone. He was the universal favorite of us children.

At some point towards the end of World War I, the Stern boys (but not the girls or the parents) also "magyarized" their surname. As already alluded to, this was the great fashion of the day among Hungarians having foreign-sounding names and it was regarded as a commendable expression of patriotic allegiance. The name chosen was *Sándor*; again, the identity with my father's first name was purely coincidental. Both Endre and Dezsö bore this last name as adults, even though Dezsö found himself living in Czechoslovakia when the borders were re-drawn after World War I.

#### Recent History

World War I ended with dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This affected several of the places mentioned heretofore. Arad, Brassó, Nagyvárad, Temesvár became Rumanian; Szabadka became Yugoslav; Komárom and Érsekujvár became Czechoslovak. The Hungarian population of these towns perceived the new order as a monstrous injustice. Hungarians were in fact openly oppressed and persecuted in the areas annexed by Rumania and to a slightly lesser degree in the areas annexed by Yugoslavia. The new Czechoslovak republic was at least on paper committed to democratic treatment of its minorities but even there, being Hungarian, or having recently demonstrated allegiance to Hungary by "magyarization" of one's name as my uncles had done, was no great recommendation to public favor. The town of Érsekujvár was so solidly Hungarian that nobody in town spoke, or even knew a person who spoke, the Czech or Slovak languages. There was puzzlement as to what the new name of the town would be; in other cases it was typically some kind of transmogrification of the old name (*Şubotica* for Szabadka; *Timișoara* for Temesvár; *Komárno* for Komárom; and so forth) but in the case of Érsekujvár the new name was not recognizable. I heard the story that during the first days after the changeover the townsfolk walked to the railroad station in order to see what the new name of the town had become. The new signs were just installed. Upon inspection of them it was first assumed that the new name was *Východ* ["Exit" in Slovakian].

In actual fact, the new name was *Nové Zámky*; the translation, rather than superficial corruption, of the name Érsekujvár that in Hungarian means "The Archbishop's New Castle". The origin of this name is obscure since there

had been no archbishopric, or even bishopric, in Érsekújvár at least since the reconquest from the Turks. Nové Zámky means New Castle in Slovakian. This was the town which I visited so often in childhood and although it is a mere 50 miles from Budapest, the trip required passport, visa, currency clearance, customs inspection, and a train trip lasting the better part of a day with endless standing at the border where these transactions were accomplished.

What remained of Hungary after the truncation by the armistice agreements that led to the Treaty of Trianon was thrown into chaos at war's end. The demise of the Habsburg monarchy left a political vacuum into which moved revolutionary fringe groups, and just a year-and-a-half after the Russian Bolshevik revolution, Hungary also became Communist. The Communist rule in Hungary in 1919 was a naively radical regime, comparable to the Great Cultural Revolution in China some 50 years later. The economic foundations of the country were badly shaken, personal liberties were absurdly curtailed, and everybody I spoke to in my family described it as a nightmarish experience. The regime lasted only 5 months, but it did plenty of damage in that short time. Among other things, it virtually ruined again Jewish-Gentile relations. It seems that among the Communist functionaries in Hungary there was overrepresentation of Jews, or there were Jews in particularly visible positions, which was grist to the mill of emerging Nazi propaganda equating Communism with Judaism. After the Communists in Hungary were overthrown by a popular counterrevolution headed by Admiral Nicholas Horthy, retaliation against Communists frequently degenerated into general Jew-baiting. It took several years before political and economic consolidation of the country enabled matters to return to a more or less even keel. My father resumed his position with the Foncière Insurance Company, now in Budapest.

Sándor Révész and Bözsi Stern met at the Hungarian lakeside spa of Siófok in the summer of 1922. I wish I knew more about the courtship. Uncle Endre confided to me once that he was the designated agent of the family to check out my father's credentials after my mother had announced at home that Sándor was likely to ask for her hand. Uncle Endre was the obvious choice for this duty because he had professional contact with the corporate counsel of the insurance company where my father was employed. I understand that Sándor was given glowing references: solid, hardworking, no obvious bad habits, and no debts. Parental consent was given amidst general rejoicing, and the young couple was married in Budapest on November 25, 1923. I am the only offspring of that marriage and I was born in Budapest on October 13, 1924. I was named after my paternal uncle the naval officer and in my middle name after my paternal grandfather. I was circumcised after birth according to the Jewish rite.

C H A P T E R   T W O

---

C H I L D H O O D

ON THE WHOLE, I had a happy and carefree childhood. I certainly had a doting mother who saw no other purpose in life but to rear me, and who surrounded me with almost smothering love. My father was inclined to some degree of sternness but in showdown situations I could always count on my mother's indulgence. In short, I was probably spoiled rotten--I don't know which of my bad habits are a consequence of that upbringing; certainly my utter and lifelong dependence on women. On the other hand, this background also gave me a great deal of self-confidence and sense of security. I remember my parents with nothing but gratitude.

Neonatal Injury

An unusual and potentially disastrous injury was inflicted on me immediately after birth. It seems that the public health regulation requiring the eyes of all newborn babies to be disinfected with a 1% silver nitrate solution (for the purpose of preventing infection from the birth canal) was then new in Hungary; it also seems that by druggist's error the solution used in treating my eyes was silver nitrate not at 1% but at 10% dilution. Naturally, I developed a nasty inflammation of the cornea in both eyes and I understand that for several weeks after birth, my eyes were swollen shut. My parents desperately summoned all medical help imaginable, but there was not much that could be done at that point. When my eyes opened up at between 1 and 2 months of age, serious chemical burns with discoloration in front of my pupils were said to be distinctly visible in both of my eyes, and the prediction of all specialists (including the Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Budapest) was that, although in all other respects I was a healthy baby, I would grow up blind.

It is easy to imagine the impact of this news not only on my parents, but on the whole wide family and circle of friends. When in later life I met even distant acquaintances of my parents or members of the ophthalmologic profession active at that time in Budapest, they would invariably remember the postnatal problem with my eyes and would frequently marvel that I grew up to be a seeing man. I heard bits and pieces of this story frequently in childhood and I understand that even after the acute inflammation had subsided and the corneal scars contracted to naked-eye invisibility, it was still highly questionable whether I had eyesight or not. The first opportunity to test that was at about 3-4 months of age when I would be placed in a position where I could follow moving objects with my eyes *if* I saw them. I understand that I passed the test, causing some rejoicing but it was still uncertain just how much, or how sharply, could I see things and to test that was not possible until 2 or 2½ years of age. Eventually it became evident that in my left eye I had a serious loss of sight indeed (visual acuity measured as between 20/200 and 20/400 and only slight improvement possible with glasses); the corneal scar was right in front of my left pupil. But here was the miraculous surprise: in my right eye I had no loss of sight

at all! The corneal scarring, although present, somehow missed the optical axis. I understand that the chances of this happening after the injury I suffered was infinitesimal. When the examining doctor got up from testing me, he is said to have grabbed my mother by the shoulders and said in an emotional voice: "The good Lord must love the Révész family very much".

So, I grew up with only a negligible visual handicap. Since I never knew anything else, I took it for granted that seeing clearly with only one eye was normal. Essentially, I look at things only with the right eye and I did have occasional squinting problems and cross-eyedness problems, but they came and went. Corneal transplant operation was considered for me but this procedure was in its infancy at that time and since my eyesight for everyday purposes turned out to be good enough, my parents (wisely) decided against it. Glasses were prescribed, but with my right eye I did not need them and with my left eye they did little good, so I soon neglected wearing them and eventually discarded them (I became an eyeglass wearer only for age-induced presbyopia). Of course, I ended up having little or no steric vision. I am not good at judging distances and I get no extra enjoyment from watching stereoscopic ("3-D") movies. Otherwise, this whole unfortunate event ended surprisingly well and had no significant influence on my life.

A long drawn-out rigmarole was the liability lawsuit arising out of this accident. The pertinent legal customs in Hungary in the 1920's were very different from modern "toxic tort" litigation in the United States. If any such accident were to happen here and now, the victim would probably walk out with his entire future financial needs well cared for. As it was, only the out-of-pocket expenses strictly related to eye doctoring were sued for to begin with, and even about that claim there were embittered courtroom debates. Of course, Uncle Endre was our attorney and I can remember being presented in court (made to wear my glasses, too, over my protest) at about the age of 5 or 6. The issues at trial were, first--was the person sent to get the eye rinse solution a registered nurse or midwife who could have answered questions regarding the prescription? She wasn't! Second--was the drugstore to which she went a registered apothecary shop or merely a "droguerie"? It was the latter, and it developed that the person sent on this errand chose to get the solution there contrary to instructions, because it was closer. So, responsibility for the mishap became diffuse and in the end my parents were forced to accept a pittance as settlement.

All that was of course barely given a thought in the general thanksgiving that the crisis ended relatively well. Numerous times my parents reminded me that I owed my eyesight to a near-miracle and that I must always maintain special compassion for the blind because, but for the grace of God, I would be one of them. I was exhorted never to refuse alms to a blind beggar, no matter how needy my own condition--and I never have.

#### Pre-School and Grade School Years

Until my age 10, we lived in a small apartment on the 4th ("mansard") floor of a nice Art Nouveau style apartment house in a good neighborhood on the Pest side of Budapest, only one block away from the beautiful large City Park [Városliget]. Our lifestyle was modest but stable. My dad's position with the Foncière Insurance Company was firm and he was not subject to layoff during the Great Depression. In fact, he was at some point promoted to Manager [Cégvezető] and put in charge of all the rural branches of the

Company that required him to travel a lot. These were pleasurable excitements for me because he never returned from a trip without bringing some small present for me. The economic stability in the midst of rather hard times all around us was one mainspring of the emotional security I enjoyed as a child, and I can remember my amazement when on my first school day in September 1930 I looked around in the class and saw that 3/4 of my classmates were dirty, shabby, neglected kids--the kind I was usually admonished not to associate with, or even talk to, on the streets or in the City Park.

One advantageous side effect of the hard times was that hired help was cheap and plentiful. My mother always had a full-time live-in maid, usually a village girl who would come to the big city as much for the education as for the pitifully low wages. In the 1920's and 1930's the Hungarian countryside had not quite emerged yet from the nineteenth century and I can remember how some of our newly hired servants would marvel not only at streetcars and electric lights, but even at such things as multi-storey houses and paved streets. Some expected the streets to be paved with gold, on the basis of stories heard at home. There was also apprehensiveness about the wicked ways of the big city. Moral responsibility for these country girls was incumbent on the employer and discipline was strict. During the week, there was no freedom at all. That is not to say that they toiled incessantly, but even during rest periods they were not allowed to leave the apartment and had to be at their masters' beck and call 24 hours a day. At that, they did toil quite a bit; they were the first to rise in the morning and start the fires in the ovens; breakfast had to be ready and the rooms warm when the masters got up. They would keep the house spotlessly clean, assist my mother in shopping and cooking, serve the meals and do the cleaning up. Their workday did not end until the supper dishes were done. The only "liberty" (i.e., going-out privilege) they had was Sundays 2-10 P.M. Certain spots in the city were known as meeting grounds of these servant girls; there they would meet each other from the same village; be courted by young squires (typically soldiers also on Sunday liberty from their barracks) and perhaps go to a movie. Not being home by 10:00 sharp required a pretty airtight excuse and certainly no recurrence if it was not to be the cause of instant dismissal. Turnover of these maids at our house was sometimes high until the right one was found but those would stay with us for years, and in 2 or 3 instances they married out of our house with my parents even supplying a modest dowry or wedding gift. With many of these maids I had developed quite a friendly relationship although they would always keep their distance and address me respectfully as "young master".

Frequently between my ages of 4 and 8, we also had what would have to be called in English a governess or "nanny", although these expressions evoke a living standard and social class far from my parents' lifestyle. But, again, these employees were quite inexpensive to hire. In addition to meals at the family table, they would receive a pocket money stipend and although they would occasionally help my mother with a few chores, their main responsibility was to play with me, to take me on walks, and, mainly, to teach me German. The nannies were namely invariably Austrian girls who spoke virtually no Hungarian, frequently from the city of Graz where, it was said, it was established custom of the lower middle classes to send young girls to Hungary for a year or two in order to see more of the world and to gain child-rearing experience. As a vestige of Habsburg times in Budapest, it was still regarded essential that families with intellectual aspirations teach their children German and the employment of these "Fräuleins", as they were called, was a flourishing business.

I had barely learned Hungarian when the first such "Fräulein" was hired and I can distinctly remember my resentment when suddenly a new companion who spoke unintelligible gibberish was foisted on me. For a week or so I refused to open my mouth but eventually my resistance melted. The new playmate was cute and quite cooperative and some sort of communication became indispensable. It was said that in three months' time I began to speak fairly proficient German. By the time I entered school I was close to being bilingual and I learned Hungarian and German reading and writing virtually together.

My best friend in those days was Gabriel Deckner, son of a local dairy executive who lived on the second floor of the same apartment house as we, in a much more roomy and luxurious apartment; Mr. Deckner was a well-to-do man. Gabriel and I were for many years inseparable. We went to the same grade of the same school and we played together in our free time in the nicely landscaped back yard of our apartment house. As an adult I re-visited that apartment house a few times and had to marvel at the tininess of that yard or garden--it was perhaps 40 x 60 ft, not all of it accessible to us children, but in those days it was for us *The World*--more than just figuratively. Both Gabriel and I were enthusiasts of geography, and by age 8 or so we both had a pretty good understanding of maps and overview of world geography. In the garden we had a mental layout of the globe; the shrubbery was the tropical rainforest; a sandy area was the Sahara Desert; the niches with garden furniture were the major cities of the world. There were also the arctic regions (remote corners) to which exciting expeditions could be conducted in the manner of Roald Amundsen or Capt. Scott. We had a great time playing together and just incidentally we also learned a lot because the play ideas and claims had to be constantly checked out in an atlas.

At some point, Gabriel got a copy of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (in Hungarian translation) and we both devoured it repeatedly. The garden was duly reconstituted as the Hindustani jungle and we played out each chapter of the book, with him impersonating Bagheera, the Black Panther. I was Baloo, the Bear. The building caretaker's children, Joe and Margie, were also drawn into these games although they frequently weren't sure what was going on. Gabriel and I were calling the shots, and we amused ourselves hugely.

Another important playmate I had in those days was my cousin Eva, who, like myself, was a sole child and we slept at each other's houses on weekends frequently. Eva was the closest thing to a sister I ever had, and Aunt Maria (or Mariska, as she was affectionately called) was like a second mother to me. Eva was 3 years younger than I and sometimes exasperatingly slow (at least in comparison to Gabriel) in getting the point in map reading and the other fun things that were at the center of my interest. Nonetheless, we grew up very close to each other and spent a number of vacations together.

The chief joint vacation spot and general family meeting ground was my grandfather's house in Érsekujvár. He had an old-fashioned one-story country house, U-shaped, surrounding a small central courtyard. The middle tract, facing a relatively busy street, was the store. A side wing, with entrance gate, contained the very modest living quarters. Kitchen, laundry, and pantry were in the other side wing, accessible only through the courtyard. There was no indoor plumbing and up to my age of 6 or 7, no electricity. A funny looking pump in the center of the courtyard gave non-potable water (the outhouses were right next to it); for drinking water, one had to go with jugs to the town well a good half-a-mile distant.

Visiting at my grandparents' was always pure joy. Family reunions were held there about twice a year; usually we would spend some part of summer there and almost invariably also Easter week. The ceremonies surrounding the celebration of the Jewish Passover, observed there to a tee, filled me with awe, curious interest, and great enthusiasm for some parts and annoyance with other parts. The Seder meal, which my grandfather would preside over in all pomp, was nothing but fun. Gorging myself on matzo all day long while playing was fun, too, but the prohibition of certain activities on the Sabbath (writing, cutting or tearing, handling money--these acts would fall under the Talmudic definition of "work" and therefore forbidden) imposed a severe limitation on what we children would be allowed to do, and these days frequently sank into unrelieved boredom. I can remember more than one occasion on which pencils or scissors were snatched out of my hand with the admonition, "you can't do that on the Sabbath". Insult was added to injury when on a Sabbath day grown-up guests came for a card game and I caught them "red-handed", so to speak, keeping a written score. I ran indignantly to my grandfather.

"How come they are allowed to handle pencils and I am not?"

"That's different--they are only playing." That was clearly the wrong answer to give. At about age 6, as I then was, I already had a well-developed sense of fairness.

"What do you mean" I retorted angrily. "I am only playing, too!"

My grandfather was a reasonable man and gave quiet orders that the vigilance as to how we children amused ourselves on the Sabbath should be relaxed, but the damage was done. I think it was then and there that I lost, once and for all, my respect for "religiousness" as a way of life.

My childhood encounters with Jewish religious practice were virtually confined to my stays in Érsekújvár. There were no observances of any kind in our own household. That sort of thing was not in my father's tradition and my mother readily adapted to his non-religious ways. My uncles and aunts generally followed suit. I became aware of "being Jewish" more in acts of omission than of commission; even though we lived just a block away from the beautiful parish church of St. Dominic, I was never allowed to go in there and I can especially remember my chagrin at being pulled away when I wanted to take a closer look at the illuminated nativity display put up there at Christmastime.

Kosher practices were not observed in our kitchen but my mother did retain a cooking style that probably stemmed from religious roots. Dairy foods and meat were not generally served together because they "did not match"; she used no other shortening but goose fat. Pork products, however, eventually found their way to our table, partially out of economic necessity.

Both of my grandmothers died before I reached the age of seven, and both died of cancer of the stomach. It used to be said that our ethnic group perhaps has a hereditary propensity for that type of cancer and indeed it showed up in other family members as well, but today, from my perspective as a toxicologist, I am inclined to blame a dietary factor. It is noteworthy that cancer of the stomach in the United States in this century has shown a steady downward slope, bucking the trend for other cancers, especially

lung cancer. Among our many bad societal habits, we are doing something right, and it is not certain what. The wide availability of refrigeration that would inhibit the growth of molds on food has been sometimes credited for this phenomenon (the mold *Aspergillus flavus* is known to elaborate a substance that proved to be highly carcinogenic in animal experiment). This explanation in my view ignores the fact that in Japan, where modern refrigeration has been equally available, the incidence of stomach cancer has shown no downward trend at all. My guess is that true credit for the decline of stomach cancer in the United States belongs to changing cooking habits, and specifically to the general switch from animal fats to vegetable fats. Animal fat, and perhaps particularly goose fat (or, in the case of the Japanese, raw fish fat) perhaps contains an agent that upon lifetime use fosters the development of stomach cancer. This theory is of course in need of confirmation.

As for the passing away of my two grandmothers, it was my maternal grandmother in Érsekujvár whom I have known better and missed more, but it was the death of my paternal grandmother in Sarkad that created new problems. My orphan cousin Erzsi was raised by her and the poor kid at age 11 or so was virtually orphaned again. For a while she was handed back and forth between her paternal relatives in Transylvania but this did not seem to work out, and one day she showed up in our apartment in Budapest. I remember the event clearly because it was the first occasion on which I was allowed to stay up past my regular bedtime (a privilege that I eagerly coveted in those days) in order to listen to her harrowing tale. I think my parents were so fascinated that they simply forgot to put me to bed. Her adventures were extraordinary indeed; substantial inheritance was involved which her paternal uncles wished to put their hands on, and they managed to get rid of her when this was accomplished. Erzsi stayed with us for a few months but because of the smallness of the apartment this was not a feasible long-term solution and Uncle Ernest's living space was similar. Eventually, her admission to a girls' boarding school was arranged where she stayed until her age 16, spending an occasional week end with us.

Unfortunately, the question of paying Erzsi's boarding school expenses caused a breach in the relations between my father and my uncle Ernest. I am not sure on what grounds, but Uncle Ernest wanted no part of this responsibility and the whole burden fell to my father. Following this dispute, they would not speak to each other for seven years, and Uncle Ernest, Aunt Janet, and cousin Mary dropped out of my awareness as relatives between my ages of approximately 5 and 12.

Some delightful treats and one great outrage must be still mentioned before I conclude my reminiscences of these early years. The treats were fabulous foreign summer vacations that were becoming rare privileges in the depression years. I can still remember the novel experience of being in the center of attention and the hushed and envious silence of my schoolmates when I spoke about my "adventures". Fortunately for me, my father's idea of a perfect vacation was seashore and sun, while my mother preferred mountains and pine forests. Frequently, a summer vacation would be split between these alternatives. Before I turned 12, we went 3 times to the island of Grado in the Adriatic Sea; twice to the village of Maria Schutz on the Semmering pass in the Alps; once each to the Austrian mountain spas of Tobelbad, St. Radegund, Velden, Reichenau, and to the Italian seaside resort of Portorose. In transit, for a day or two, I got to know the cities of Vienna, Graz, Trieste, and--as the crowning thrill--Venice.

Earliest and most memorable of these vacations were the ones to Grado. There was no causeway to the island then; access was possible only by ship or motor launch and there were no motor vehicles on the island. It was a veritable children's paradise. The bathing beach, with colorful canvas cabanas in quadruple rows, faded into invisibility in the distance. It must have gone on for miles; it was for me the practical illustration of infinity. I can remember that more than once I resolved to explore this phenomenon and walk to the last cabana row to see what came next, but every time I progressed a few hundred feet and there were still row upon row of cabanas as far as the eye could see, looking no different from where I started (and our own cabana receding farther and farther into the distance behind me), my resolve would evaporate and I would meekly return to familiar realms. The last row of cabanas remained unexplored. Maybe there was no last row.

I was a little more daring when it came to exploring the delights of the sea, and it was in fact there that I committed my first act of premeditated insubordination to parental orders. Of course, my parents would take me into the water every time they went, with all the splashing and horseplay one could wish. On my own, however, I was not allowed to go into the sea. The problem was, the best sand playing was where the lapping wavelets would wet the sand, and I negotiated a compromise with my parents according to which I could go into the water unaccompanied "up to my ankles". That still appeared quite restrictive especially since hundreds of children were cavorting about, seemingly unsupervised, in the shallow areas of the water on the beach. I considered that at age 5, as I then was, I really could not be expected yet to be an expert in anatomy and I decided that I was going to confuse my ankles and my knees. I walked into the water boldly; the beach in Grado has the gentlest possible slope so that my deliberate misinterpretation of the parental law allowed wading in for many yards. Of course my mother saw me and ran after me, but before she could scold me I pointed to my knees and said, "I am not up to my ankles yet!" The ruse worked; I escaped punishment. Of course, such a trick works only once. I did get a thorough (and, the truth be told, unneeded) explanation as to which were my ankles and which were my knees; but at least I could sample once, however briefly, the sweet sensation of being in the sea on my own.

Equally enjoyable were our Alpine vacations, where one summer my cousin Eva also came with us. I remember my life's first cable car ride (to the Rax-Alp) and the thrill of finding patches of real snow up there in July; another thing with which I could impress incredulous schoolmates. Hiking in forests and collecting delicious wild strawberries, playing tag among haystacks while peasant men and women, busy on the slopes, would exchange yodel messages with each other across the valley floor, and a sensational excursion to the stalactite cave of Postumia (now Postojna, Yugoslavia) are among my happy memories.

In a class by itself was a 2-day trip to Venice at age 11½ so that I already could do, and did, some mental preparation from travel guides and picture books. My parents had their honeymoon trip there and for them it was a sentimental return experience. For me, it was the thrill of my life--much of what I saw was as expected and even more was different. The chief excitement was a solo exploratory trip from our hotel right after we arrived; it required a pretty tough act of persuasion but I prevailed, and my parents allowed me, with map in hand, to go down and look around "in the immediate neighborhood". Again, I interpreted the limitation liberally and

once I was on the street I headed for where the Piazza San Marco was expected to be, on the basis of my map. I negotiated some pretty labyrinthine passages, always carefully tracing my progress on the map so that I would know when to turn right and when left, and where to find bridges across the canals. Of course it would never do to ask passers-by for directions; for one thing, I spoke no Italian. I was truly on my own in a strange, beautiful city and I don't think that I had enjoyed anything quite that much in my entire life up to that point. The Piazza was exactly where it was expected to be and stepping into it, with the famous picture postcard view opening up before me, was one of the unforgettable moments of my life. I can remember that I made an attempt to remain serious and blasé, as befits a seasoned traveler who can find things on his own, but it was impossible. The beauty of the golden domes of the Basilica, the graceful Campanile, the tourist bustle on the square with the hundreds of pigeons, and mainly the exquisite white-and-pink marble of the Doge's Palace so enthralled me that my face broadened into an involuntary smile. The pride of having found it on my own was not a negligible pleasure, either. After just standing there for maybe five minutes, I retraced my steps to the hotel. My parents and I spent the next day-and-a-half in substantial sightseeing, and we "did" Venice--including gondola rides, a swim on the Lido, evening *serenata* on the Canale Grande, and visiting many of the famed spots. I went through the Doge's Palace with an English-speaking group (my parents elected to skip it since they had seen it on an earlier occasion) and it was my first opportunity to try out my English "in real life" after about 2 years of study. There was a boy about my age in the group, freckled and red-haired, and we exchanged a few words:

"Where are you from?"

"From Manchester."

"I am from Budapest."

I attempted to carry on the conversation but was admonished to keep silent and listen to the guide who was explaining something about Tintoretto--not half as interesting as finding out something about my new friend. We grinned at each other a few times during the tour but I never found out even his name.

It is apparent from these stories that as a child I was quite privileged but also overprotected. I have no doubt that it was done with the best of intentions--it's true that I was a skinny fellow of short stature, usually near the short end of the class lineup, but I was not particularly frail. The sole exception was a series of recurrent middle ear infections between the ages of 4 and 9. My mother's efforts to watch over me constantly perhaps gave me a subconscious feeling of being something extremely precious, but it could be on occasion annoying. I have recollection of a fall day when I was to go with a group of friends to an indoor swimming pool. My mother decided to come along--that would have been all right, even though she was the only parent present--but she insisted that I change into dry swimming trunks every time I came out of the water. This kind of protectiveness would of course drive me up a wall and, needless to say, would make me the laughing stock of the kids for many weeks.

The "outrage" alluded to, and the only really bad memory of my childhood, was medical. At age 7 the decision was made to have me

tonsillectomized. Whether or not this was a medically sound decision is not the issue (I understand that my tonsils "grew back" which would indicate that the operation performed was not an extirpation, only a "nipping" which is no longer performed these days). The procedure was certainly very much in vogue then. My objection is to *how* it was done, and specifically to the total lack of emotional preparation. Because of my frequent ear troubles I was familiar with ambulatory ENT care and found nothing unusual in being taken to the doctor for a "checkup"--but events were taking a strange turn. There was a layout of strange instruments on the table. I was being tied down to the chair, including hands, feet and even head--when I objected there was some fast-talk about how the delicate examination required that I remain entirely immobile--but having a rubber apron tied around my neck really made the situation look ominous. Presence of my father was the only reassuring feature (my mother had walked out of the office already--she could not stand the excitement) but even he excused himself at some point, at a nod from the doctor. We remained alone. My mouth was pried open, a cotton mask was thrown over my face, and the doctor said, "Now I am going to put you to sleep." I yelled protests as loud as I could, but nobody heard; I tried to free myself but the restraint straps would of course not give. The last memory I have is the doctor's grinning face behind the ampoule of anesthetic held high and sprayed on the cotton mask.

When I awoke, the one overwhelming sentiment I had, overshadowing any physical pain, was that of betrayal. It simply shattered my confidence in doctors or actually in grownups generally, including my parents--although there was at least the emotional fig leaf that they were not physically present during the outrage. Pain was not the issue; I could stand pain, including that inflicted by doctors, and I daresay that I had plenty of experience in that because my recurring ear troubles required frequent lancing of the eardrums. The issue was "sneaky assault", and having tricked me into cooperating with my own immobilization. I was furious, and it had a lasting emotional effect on me--closest thing to how a female must feel after a rape.

Even more shattering was that the essential parts of this scenario were repeated some six months later, in a dentist's office. There the problem was pulling one of my deciduous molars; it could have been done with a minimum of local anesthetic if any. How my parents were talked into letting the doctor put me to sleep again I don't know. They must have warned him however that I was no longer a "naïve" patient because tying me down was not even attempted. Rather, various assistants and other grownups sneaked up to the chair and held down my arms, feet and head while the doctor again sprayed anesthetic into my face in the already familiar fashion. My last thought was, with my heart sinking to the floor, "They are putting me to sleep again."

That was too much. From then on, open warfare existed between myself and the medical/dental profession, whose members, as far as I was concerned, simply could not be trusted. Of course it was inevitable that as a growing boy I would every now and then require medical or dental attention, but these visits were for me always traumatic and I was suspicious to the bone. I was firmly resolved not to tolerate being put to sleep again, and I would follow the doctor's every move with hawk's eyes--at the slightest suspicion, I would bolt and run, before it was too late. More than once I can remember a waiting-room-ful of grinning patients while I darted out of the office, screaming, and heading for the exit door, with my mother haplessly after me. It took years before I would be tamed, and credit in that regard goes

to a Dr. Lévai who finally understood the psychology of my situation and made peace with me by explaining meticulously beforehand everything he was going to do; warning me if the procedure was to be unpleasant or painful; and even letting me examine the instruments he was about to use. In short, he treated me as a grownup or at least as an intelligent child, which was all I ever wanted in the first place.

The long-term psychological residue of these events in me was a lifelong horror of surgical anesthesia. I am fortunate that up to now in adult life I have never needed any serious surgery but there were times when I would have let them cut my belly open without any painkilling in preference to enduring once again the terrifying and helpless experience of being put to sleep as I remembered it. That memory haunted me as a nightmare for years--nay, for decades. I was adamantly resolved as a young adult never to let that happen to my own children; fortunately, the procedure of "slumber-narcosis" with ethyl chloride spray, so popular for small surgical interventions in the 1930's and 1940's, went out of fashion by the 1950's and there was never any need for me to put my resolve into action.

#### Middle School and High School Years

In the fall of 1934 we moved within the city of Budapest to a larger apartment. We now had 3 rooms + kitchen, or a whole room more than formerly. On the other hand, our new flat was in a larger and less elegant apartment house, one of those typical Eastern European mass dwellings, with our own unit approachable only through labyrinthine inner courtyards and corridors. Space gain was the paramount consideration of the move and a few years later our living space was further enlarged by remodeling, and adding another room from an adjacent apartment. At age 13, I was finally accorded that ultimate luxury in middle-class Budapest--a room of my own.

The move also involved changing schools, and very reluctantly I became separated from my friend Gabriel. For a while we would still periodically go to see each other, but eventually of course we both found new friends. From the fifth to the twelfth grade I went to the Kemény Zsigmond Gymnasium (secondary school) in Budapest, about a 15-minute walk from our new apartment.

I was an A/B student through most of my school days. An all-A report card always eluded me, even in grade school (my best result was in the third grade, with only one B in arithmetic) and occasionally I would sink to a B/C average (my worst report card was in the ninth grade, with 5 C's--but that was a punitive measure with all my marks diminished by one unit because I was involved in a silly prank against one of our teachers). On the whole, I enjoyed school and in retrospect I think highly of the education we received in Hungary. Discipline was strict, and there was very little non-intellectual padding of the curriculum. It's true that compulsory education reached only up to age 14 (8 grade school classes). After grade 4, students had the option to transfer to a "Burgher's school" where standards were a bit higher, or to a "Gymnasium" (college preparatory school) lasting 4 and 8 years, respectively. These schools charged a modest tuition. There was never any question but that I would go to a college preparatory school, and in fact one of the privileges my father had as a wounded war veteran was that my education in state schools was free as long as I maintained at least a B average. That gives some idea of the trouble I got into when I lost that status for a while in the 9th grade. It will be

illuminating to dwell for a moment on the prank I was penalized for, because it illustrates the no-nonsense approach of school authorities to discipline.

Our history teacher in the 7th through 12th grades was Mr. Arday, one of the more eccentric members of the faculty who was referred to by the student body only by his nickname (in loose translation), "Hubert the Hunter". The name originated many years before my time when he once reputedly came to school in a green hat adorned with a quail's feather. Otherwise, he was a distinctly non-rustic type (which of course made the nickname even funnier): stiff, myopic, and a hypochondriac who always held a folded handkerchief before his mouth as a sort of filter against microbes. He was the only teacher who addressed us kids in the formal third person rather than in the familiar "thou" manner customary in the Hungarian language when communicating with children or young people. Naturally, he was the irresistible target of all sorts of tricks and pranks and a prime object of universal derision. What was sometimes lost sight of was that, for all his eccentricities, Mr. Arday was a pretty efficient teacher of history. He was methodical, plodding, with more emphasis on barebones information relating to the general flow of events from century to century than on the stories and legends surrounding romantic characters. The basic chronology of world history was hammered into each of us whether we cared for it or not. I was at the time completely captivated by the natural sciences. History was a colossal bore for me and Hubert the Hunter a ridiculous clown. Nonetheless, I emerged from his classes with a good bird's eye view of the subject that in later life developed into a genuine hobby interest.

Playing tricks on Hubert the Hunter was daily routine in the whole school. Chalk would be invariably soaked for his class so it would not write on the blackboard; the pen on the teacher's desk would be smeared with ink so he would become blue all over when signing the class record. One day the idea occurred to someone that if we inverted the step for the teacher's podium, maybe his foot was going to get caught in it. Just how it came that I was the kid who physically carried out the operation I no longer know--but I did it, and the whole class watched with baited breath when Hubert the Hunter entered the classroom a few moments later.

He saw the trap, skipped over the inverted step while mounting the podium, and there was no amusing episode. He said something about the insolent rascals who are trying to upset class order and who will surely get their just desserts, but then delved into the subject for the day. However, after class he went to the Principal's office to lodge a formal complaint.

An investigation followed, and for a few days the whole school was abuzz with the rumor that the tormentors of Hubert the Hunter were on the carpet. Our homeroom teacher (the German instructor, who was a far less efficient teacher than Mr. Arday but a man with a sense of humor) opened the formal inquiry in the class.

"I am not even going to ask who did it" said he, "just, who saw it being done?"

(Silence.)

"In the whole class, there is not one soul who saw it being done?"

(Silence.)

"Révész, was it perchance you?"

"Yes, sir" I answered. It was obvious that someone had ratted on me. There was no other possible reason to single me out.

"You admit having perpetrated this act, prejudicial to class order and decorum?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well then, why did you not report voluntarily when I asked who did it?"

"Sir, you asked who saw it being done."

The homeroom teacher laughed. "Well, right you are. I did ask that. It seems that you are the only honest boy in the class. Obviously, you are the only one who could not have seen it being done, if you did it yourself. You are to come with me to the Principal after class, for a commendation."

In the Principal's office, I had to listen to a stern lecture about class conduct, and a formal reprimand was entered into my school record. My parents were notified by registered letter and summoned to a conference. I was to get a C in citizenship for the semester (a very grave matter; even a B in citizenship was regarded as seriously below par) and all my grades were diminished by one unit. Had I been anything but a pretty good student, that might have meant flunking. As it was, I ended up with a miserably bad but passing report card. Eventually I found out who informed on me. Characteristically, he was one of the instigators of the prank. Needless to say, we were not great friends after the incident.

Worst part of the ordeal was to have to explain everything to my parents. My father came up with the punishment that perfectly fitted the crime: he ordered me to go to Mr. Arday's home on next Sunday afternoon in person, and make a formal apology. I still remember the utter misery of the situation. Up to the last moment I kept hoping that an earthquake, or the fall of a meteor on the city, or some other such relatively preferable disaster would relieve me of this unspeakable humiliation. That did not happen. After a miserably reluctant trip I finally found myself before his apartment door. Ringing the doorbell was like activating the electric chair, with myself strapped in it.

Hubert the Hunter came out personally to see who was the visitor. I stammered, "Mr. Arday, sir, I came to apologize..."

"Ah, it's you, my friend. Actually, I have no business with you. You had your reprimand. Maybe that will make you think twice before you commit another outrage of this kind."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then. That's all." The door was slammed shut. The whole conversation took not two minutes; the expiatory act was done and I could go home with a feeling of immense relief, but at the same time somewhat

disappointed that he did not ask me in. To his credit, it should be said that Hubert the Hunter did not carry his grudge too long and after a year or so the incident was forgotten. Only the German teacher (who was involved in the case in his capacity as homeroom teacher) kept teasing me by calling me by the nickname "podium-upsetter" for a few years.

Our school program was generally demanding, especially by American standards. In the middle grades and high school years, we progressed in mathematics to introductory calculus; in Latin, we read Ovid and Cicero in the ninth grade, Virgil and Livy in the tenth grade, Pliny the Younger in the eleventh grade and Horace and Tacitus in the twelfth grade. We also had two years of biology, two years of physics, one year of chemistry and mineralogy. Hungarian as well as German language and literature were in the curriculum from the fifth grade, and a second modern foreign language from the ninth grade. The latter was in theory a free choice between English, French and Italian but in practice only one or two of these were offered in any single school. In our class, the second modern foreign language was French. We got a good overview of French literature with readings from various authors from Molière to Anatole France, and also conversational training with a native speaker, Mr. Gachot from the staff of the French Legation in Budapest. He cooperated with the school board by special arrangement. We also had a good systematic treatment of world geography and world history. With the exception of the second foreign language, electives did not exist and everything was compulsory. A few optional classes were offered after hours including engineering drawing, fine arts, and classical Greek. The few non-intellectual subjects once or twice a week included singing, free-hand drawing, and physical education.

The quality of these classes was of course variable, depending on the teachers who ranged from the exciting and inspiring through the conscientious but dull all the way to the lazy and neglectful. At its best, the education we got was easily the equivalent of an American college degree in the liberal arts but it was not necessary to take it all that seriously in order to pass. I suppose it was possible to get through all of secondary school and still learn very little, but most of us managed to acquire some education, at least through "osmosis" if nothing else. The textbooks were on the whole well written and well illustrated and frequently interesting enough so that I would sometimes read through them during the first school week in September and then just coast through the entire school year with very little day-to-day preparation.

In my personal case, school education was augmented with a vigorous program of extra classes at home from specially engaged tutors. As mentioned, by age 10 I was fairly fluent in German and my parents decided that it was time to start another foreign language. It was to be English; throughout my middle and upper school years I had an English tutor come to the house twice weekly and give me a language lesson. By age 12 I was reading Oscar Wilde in the original. The following year piano was started. I took off like a fireball, finishing two years' worth of exercises (of the Bach, Bertini, and Czerny kind) in one year. Unfortunately, after that I stopped cold. I lost interest. My piano teacher struggled with me for a while; she begged, cajoled, threatened, but there was nothing doing. I simply refused to practice regularly and after 3½ years of piano instruction my musical education was given up. I never reached the point of playing concert pieces or anything beyond the simplest exercises from sight; but I did acquire a lifelong interest in good music and a modest ability to play what interested

me for my own pleasure. (Alas, the need for keeping that up vanished with the acquisition of hi-fi equipment in later life.)

On the other hand, my language training was a success. I also had French and refresher German lessons during high school years and by age 18 I was, besides being fluent in Hungarian and German, also reasonably proficient in English and French. In addition to school Latin, I also studied some Hebrew through religious instruction. I did not study classical Greek that I later regretted.

Religious instruction in the public schools was part of the regular curriculum, and for these periods the class would be segregated into Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant groups. It is worth dwelling on religious instruction for a moment because I can illustrate with it two interesting and completely incongruous points: anti-Semitism and dyslexia.

As a child, I was not generally aware of anti-Semitism and in grade school we would form friendships without inquiry into religious affiliations. Eventually, however, the personal preferences for making friends would follow pretty much religious lines. In retrospect, I am absolutely certain that the Christian kids *learned* in religion class to avoid, or discriminate against, Jews and I have a personal experience with which to prove it.

It was in the third grade; the Catholic religion period was held in our usual classroom and children of other faiths were asked to leave and go to other classrooms. I was about to get my things together when my schoolbag tore open and for a few minutes I was down on my knees under the bench, collecting spilled papers. In the meantime, the Catholic religion instructor (a nun) entered; the class got on their feet, chanting "Praised be Jesus Christ" and sat down again, while the nun proceeded to set up the usual display on her desk: the crucifix, framed portraits of saints, and the other paraphernalia of Catholic religious instruction, just as I bobbed up my head from under the bench. The class broke out in excited shouts, addressing the nun. "No! Don't! Not yet! We still have a Jew in the room! Don't let the holy objects become contaminated!" I ran out of the classroom bewildered, while the nun sort of shielded the holy objects from my gaze. The incident made a profound impression on me. Some of the loudest shouters were kids with whom I thought I was getting along fine, and I wondered what kind of "contamination" my mere gaze would inflict on their holy objects. Much later in life when I had gained familiarity with Christian traditions, I came to realize that systematic anti-Semitism is inherent in much of the basic Christian teachings. Only the antagonists of Jesus are customarily designated in New Testament commentaries as "the Jews" but not his followers, to say nothing of Jesus himself. In fact, my first wife Liesl told me once that she was expressly taught in Catholic religious instruction in Germany that Jesus and the Apostles were *not Jewish* but "Galilean-Aramean"--with the exception of Judas, of course, whose very name was invariably invoked as representative of Judaism and whose person was presented as the eternal prototype of Jewish mentality.

It is this kind of tendentious disinformation that is in my opinion at the root of "instinctive" revulsion from Jews that some Gentiles claim to feel, and for all its pious disclaimers and condemnation of "excesses", I blame Christianity, and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, for fostering the emotional climate in which these "excesses" became possible.

But that is another story to which there will be opportunity to return in this narrative.

In Jewish religious instruction, we were taught the Old Testament stories and of course how to pray. The latter made some Hebrew knowledge indispensable and we were taught how to read printed Hebrew right from the first grade. The experience has significance for me because I always was, and still am, an extremely poor reader of Hebrew. I suppose that in American schools I would be classified as "dyslexic". It's not that I don't "know" the Hebrew characters or their sound equivalents; it's not, either, that I did not get plenty of imposed remedial training, sometimes *ad nauseam*, to improve my skill in that regard. Finally, as one who presently speaks 3 languages fluently and 3 more with some degree of proficiency, I hope no one will attribute my problem to innate feeble-mindedness or lack of normal linguistic talent.

In my opinion, I have become "dyslexic" in Hebrew because I was taught it the wrong way right in the beginning. Quick recognition of those words frequently occurring in prayers was the central goal of early instruction and reading letter-by-letter was not called for--I suppose, in current American terms, we were taught by the "look-and-say" method. Phonic information was supplied alongside but not made the backbone of instruction, and there was no requirement or even much opportunity to practice word skills by writing as well as reading. The result was that most of us grew up as highly non-proficient readers of Hebrew, forever stumbling and struggling with new texts, and reading fluently only the well-known prayers. Since that was all that was intended as objective of the instruction, it was deemed good enough and nobody complained. Very few students, mostly those who had reinforcement from the home turf, became good readers of Hebrew and for the rest of us it did not matter. It was only in the United States when my own children went to school that I recognized, with alarm, that here the children were taught English reading the way I was taught Hebrew reading. The general consequences were exactly as I could have predicted. For a while I attempted to fight the trend and in Waterford township I even served on a "Citizens' Advisory Committee to the Board of Education", where I tried to explain my experience, and my opinion on the look-and-say method of early reading instruction, to whomever would listen. Of course, I achieved nothing. In fact, I was probably dismissed for a crackpot. My recounting of the high school curriculum I was required to take in Hungary only made things worse; in one instance it was patiently explained to me that that kind of "elitist" education was unsuitable to the United States because here we attempt to educate all children. My comments on the educational methods for language instruction only provoked amused smiles. Who was I to talk, in view of the obvious fact that I never learned even accent-free English? Perhaps they thought that if my ideas were accepted, the children here would also start speaking with an accent. Generally, I must say that my encounter with the educational establishment of America was one of my less uplifting experiences in this country.

On my thirteenth birthday I had a regular Bar Mitzvah. I suppose my parents would have been tempted to skip it but no way would that have been condoned by the school rabbi and religion teacher, who derived extra income from preparing us Jewish students for the event after school hours. I was duly taught how to lay on the prayer straps and other strange paraphernalia of the traditional religious Jew (which, quite frankly, I never made use of in later life) and I was prepared for the Bar Mitzvah proceedings,

including the fluent reading of the scriptural passage assigned for that particular Sabbath. When the day arrived, I sailed through the ceremony without hitch and afterwards of course there was the customary celebration with family and friends at which I received many handsome gifts.

There were several other big family celebrations just around that time, as some of my aunts, uncles and cousins were married. The first of these was Aunt Vilma's second marriage in the early 1930's to Max Hartenstein, a widower, and prosperous owner of a big furniture store in the village of Topolčany, some 25 miles north of Érsekújvár. Uncle Max was a taciturn, gentle, but not particularly cordial man and a much more strictly religious Jew than was customary even in my grandfather's house. He belonged to the "status quo" congregation of the Jewish faith (i.e., that branch which refused to recognize the split into Orthodox and Neolog; it differed from the Orthodox only in a few minutiae) and he was much less prepared to compromise in that respect than other members of the family. I think it was actually at my Bar Mitzvah party in our apartment in Budapest that at one point a near-crisis situation developed. By mistake, when looking for the toilet, Uncle Max opened the door to the pantry; and saw there, hanging by a string, a whole smoked ham. I heard the incident described, how he slammed the door shut in as much shock as if he had seen a human corpse dangling from that string. He was heard to comment afterwards that he had some inklings already that our household might not be strictly kosher, "but not *this!* For Heaven's sake!!!"

Uncle Max would forever after avoid coming to our house if he could help it, and if it was unavoidable he would always plead an upset stomach and would not touch food, not even a glass of water. I suppose that in his eyes the potential presence of pork contaminated *everything* in our house, just like in Gentile eyes a glimpse from me had contaminated the crucifix. Religious bigotry gives no quarter no matter from which side it comes.

The next marriage celebration was my cousin Erzsi's who barely a few years after she graduated from the boarding school, met and got engaged to Laci [Lester] Bihari, a bank clerk and very likeable young man. They made an attractive pair. The wedding of Erzsi and Laci at about my age of 12 or 13 was the occasion at which my father and his brother Ernest were finally reconciled. We resumed friendly relations, and I became quite close to my cousin Mary who was 2 years my senior and somewhat inclined towards a "flapper" mentality. She became a nurse after graduating from high school and soon got engaged to a young surgeon, Miklós Roth.

The last of the family weddings during my childhood was Uncle Dezsö's, when I was already in the twelfth grade. His bride, Ilona Weisz (no relation to my paternal relatives of the same name) was a gentle, dark-haired beauty whose brother André was a chemical engineer (first such specialist in the family) for whom I developed great fondness and respect. Dezsö and Ilona had a baby born in 1943, Adam Sándor.

My mother's dotting relationship to me did not change much as I grew into adolescence, but the relationship with my father became more distant. I found his authoritarian ways harder and harder to take and was particularly annoyed that even purely theoretical discussions could not be carried on with him as between equals. A good example was the rather ludicrous argument one day about the orientation of Aunt Mariska's living room Windows-- according to the map, they were between southerly and southwesterly, just

a few degrees off due south. Yet, my father insisted that they were westerly and brooked no contradiction. He refused to look at documentation I offered and in fact swept the map off the table in an impatient, furious gesture. If he pronounced judgment on an issue, there was to be no disputation on any grounds. That sort of attitude was hard enough to take when he was right, let alone when he was not. As a budding intellectual, I was gravely offended. The natural consequence was that I gradually gave up discussing my concerns with him. I am afraid that between my ages of 12 and 18 there was not much substantive communication between us.

The year 1938 looms large in my memory for several reasons. Budapest was in a frenzy of civic beautification projects to prepare for an International Eucharistic Congress of the Catholic Church held there in May. Cardinal-Secretary Pacelli, who subsequently became Pope Pius XII, was the Vatican's envoy and the event involved much ceremony and pomp. The subject of the Congress of course did not interest me but the civic preparations did very much, and for a while I developed a hobbyist's enthusiasm for city architecture and urban planning. I assembled a collection of the street maps of the great cities of the world such as Paris, London, New York, and made imaginary improvements in them--I ended up with a composite plan I called "Idealopolis". (Unfortunately my plans for Idealopolis were confiscated one day when I was caught working on it during German class in school.)

In July 1938 my parents and I went for what turned out to be our last foreign vacation. My father's employer, the Foncière Insurance Company, had an Italian sister firm, the Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà. Employees of the Foncière were welcome at the Riunione's recreational facility in Portorose, and in 1938 for the second time we availed ourselves of this opportunity.

Portorose was (under the name of Portorož, still is) a lovely spa on the Istrian peninsula, just 2 steamer hours south of Trieste, where gentle green hills meet a beautiful blue bay of the Adriatic. The Riunione's compound was well located near the beach. The clientele was predominantly from the company headquarters in Trieste, with a sprinkling from other towns, including just a few foreign guests from Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and ourselves from Hungary. There was a sizeable group of youngsters, more or less my age, and by the second or third day of our month-long stay I felt completely comfortable with them, in spite of the language barrier. I still spoke virtually no Italian, but German was established as the lingua franca for communication with the "internationals" even among children. There was also a boy from Zagreb and one from Bratislava (the latter was Peter Karvaš, who became a noted author after the war).

It did not take me long to zero in on a girl who was somehow different from the rest, and before the first week of our vacation was over I was, for the first time in my life, in love. Silvana Samaestri was a slightly built chestnut blonde, two months younger than I, who was just beginning to develop girlish forms and she was indescribably lovely. Our fathers knew each other through professional channels and my dad related to me that original name of the family, when Trieste was still an Austrian port, was Sägmeister--it was "Italianized" to Samaestri with the same intent and at about the same time when this kind of thing was also in fashion in Hungary.

Samaestri or Sägmeister, Silvana became my heartthrob which was a novel and fascinating sensation. My life acquired a new meaning: the purpose of my existence was to be with her. When I was not, I was totally consumed by

longing and looking forward to a reunion. The problem was, when I was with her, the experience so utterly engaged all my faculties that I had no presence of mind left even to utter a word. I was just totally immersed in the admiration of her sweetness. Our great romance consisted mostly of walking next to each other in the group with other kids, and of me throwing the ball to her more frequently than to others at the ball games on the beach. At some point the older girls in our group organized evening dances, and she and I danced a few times which for me was heaven and hell all at once. It was my first dancing experience and I was clumsy, embarrassed, and hopelessly self-conscious. At the same time, the touch of her body and the scent of her hair drove me nuts. It was a powerful, disconcerting, almost primordial kind of sensation that grabbed me in the bone marrow, so to speak. To let go at the end of a dance number was the hardest thing. Our parents watched us with huge amusement and I think that my mother knew that I was in love before I did. Silvana and I kissed once, lightly on the cheek, at the moment of taking farewell on the steamer pier in Portorose, in full view of our parents. I never saw her again. But as the ship pulled out and I watched her receding figure across the water, I knew that a new epoch of my life had commenced in which nothing would be ever the same again.

Silvana remained the unrivaled queen of my heart for at least two years, during which time catching on the radio the tunes to which we danced, or otherwise recalling our brief moments together, drove blood to my face. I still treasure the memory, innocent as it was, as a once-in-a-lifetime experience--my first love.

In the fall of 1938, romantic thoughts were driven into the background by the march of history. Nazi Germany was flexing its political muscles and just 6 months after having annexed Austria, it now had designs on Czechoslovakia. The Munich Conference of the four powers was followed by the Vienna Accords at which the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia was implemented, and the strip of land inhabited by Hungarians in Southern Slovakia was returned to Hungary. The event was cause for joyous celebrations among all Hungarians, including our family--mixed with just a little bit of uneasiness over the fact that Nazi Germany played a decisive role in this gain and might one day present the bill in terms of demanding influence in Hungarian domestic politics. This likelihood loomed all the more ominous after the notorious anti-Semitic atrocities on November 9 in Germany: the "Kristallnacht", commonly, and quite inaccurately, translated as "The Night of Broken Glass" as if the expression conveyed nothing else than glass sherds. Of course, it did that, but also much more. "Crystal Night" intimated something mysterious, almost mystical: the inexplicable longing for the elimination of everything impure from the world. It was represented as the first step towards achieving spiritual purity for the great German nation.

At any rate, Érsekújvár was among the towns "liberated" and my parents and I were among the first to travel there when the area was opened up. We took great pleasure in such sentimental things as seeing ÉRSEKÚJVÁR on the railroad station instead of NOVÉ ZÁMKY (to say nothing of "Kijárat" [Exit] instead of "Východ"), or the Holy Crown of Hungary instead of the Czechoslovak lion over the entrance to the post office, and so forth. Visiting Grandfather now became a minor trip, possible for a weekend, instead of the complex and time-consuming enterprise it had been. Our visits became more frequent, and it was at about that time that I really got to know my grandfather well. He was already 77 but still in excellent physical and mental shape, and we became "friends". Grandpa was not at all what one would

expect from a small-town shopkeeper who never got past the 4th grade. He was distinctly an intellectual, well read, interested in theater and music, and a whiz at writing short, humorous, limerick-type poetry. Frequently he would send me messages in verse, teasing me about some things we experienced together, or other funny occurrences. He could also be seriously enthusiastic, e.g. in discussing the relative merits of Beethoven and Rossini (his taste definitely favored the latter). Jewish practices were more a lifelong habit with him than a matter of conviction; my failure to follow suit did not ever come between us and generally he displayed great wisdom and tact in simply not noticing things that were not intended for him to notice (in contrast to Uncle Max).

In 1939 I acquired a "brother". One of my mother's girlhood friends, still residing in Érsekujvár, wanted her son to attend high school in Budapest and a deal was struck according to which he was to live with us and share my room with me for 4 years. Andrew Horváth was just 6 months younger than I; I already knew him superficially from brief encounters in Érsekujvár and was looking forward to the experience.

Andrew and I never hit it off the way I had once with Gabriel. We had a polite and smooth relationship but our interests were too different; Andrew was a practical-minded fellow with a more commercial and technical bent and did not share my highly theoretical forays into science or my whimsical hobbies like Idealopolis. In spite of living together, we remained rather distant. Nonetheless, knowing him gave me entrée into the youth society of Érsekujvár where I would be soon as much at home as in Budapest.

Érsekujvár was full of beautiful girls of my age group, somehow more of the lovely ingenue-type than the girls of Budapest. Andrew Horváth himself had a sister and a cousin both of whom were great beauties, but it was with a distant relative of my own that I had the most memorable encounter, and one that was to become my first substantial "necking" experience.

My late maternal grandmother had two surviving brothers: great-uncle David Kolman with two sons, Hugo and Ernest; and great-uncle Julius Kolman with two daughters, Sara and Julia. Julia was married to a soap company executive in Érsekujvár, Miklós [Nicholas] Neuwirth. They had an adopted daughter, Alice--actually, she was Uncle Miklós's niece who lost her parents in an accident at age 9 or 10. I had my eyes on her from the moment she surfaced in our family and watched her grow into a cute brunette. The Neuwirths and my parents were quite close and I saw Alice frequently during our stays in Érsekujvár. I managed to feign complete disinterest so that one late spring when the Neuwirths came to stay with us in Budapest, our parents thought nothing of leaving us alone at home while they went out one evening. It was school vacation and my roommate Andrew Horváth was with his folks. I was 16, Alice 14. No sooner was the front door slammed shut than our hands happened to meet, sort of by accident; the whole atmosphere around us seemed to be charged with a strange excitement. Alice's cheeks were unusually intense with color and her eyes were shining. Important things were just waiting to happen. We were looking at some illustrated magazine on the couch and I put my arm around her. She said, kind of plaintively and hoarse with suppressed excitement, "Andrew--stay." I was determined to handle the situation with more aplomb than my encounter with Silvana and answered with feigned lightheartedness (but actually with a pounding heart):

"I'll stay. But you, too, stay--with me!" I pulled her to me; there was no serious resistance. We were both eager to learn. I was particularly craving to find out how she smelled: was it going to be like the scent of Silvana? The answer was both yes and no; in one fell swoop, I learned both the common denominator and the individual variations on the scent of the human female.

Our first kiss was a clumsy and fumbling affair but we learned fast, and before long the point in this strange adult custom was becoming quite clear. To me, it was a revelation: I watched in awe as every cell in my body seemed to be responding. Alice, too, appeared to be impressed. I can remember her spontaneous exclamation, with a distinct note of delighted surprise: "JÓ!" [Feels good!] as she nestled more comfortably in my arms and turned to me with a little more abandon. We started kissing in earnest.

We sat and kissed for hours; accompanied by whispered sweet-nothings and by what in today's terms would have to be regarded as lightest petting. I discovered the expedient of blotting my lips between kisses by burying my face in her hair, and thus made even the pauses in our kissing enjoyable. It was all so powerfully exciting, strange, delightful, but ultimately also frustrating, that it reached the point of physical pain. When we heard the noises of our parents returning home and we jumped up in alarm, I could barely manage to stagger into my room and pretend being immersed in some reading material. I still don't know for sure whether they caught on or not.

I spent all night and most of next day in a totally confused amorous daze. I couldn't wait to be with her again but unfortunately there was no opportunity for a repeat session. We could only exchange meaningful glances and a few quick, stolen kisses during subsequent days of their stay. We maintained a friendly but not exclusive interest in each other for several years.

A few times in earlier years I had already spent some time in boys' vacation camps, and in the summer of 1940 I went for a month to a co-ed young people's camp in the Mátra mountains. I was looking forward to the occasion with excitement. After my heady experience with Alice, I was bursting with self-confidence. I was ready to play the field and devastate the girls at the camp *in toto*.

That's not quite the way it worked out. With utter shock I had to realize that I was not a prime drawing card at the camp. I already knew, of course, that I was not a prominent athlete, especially in the game that counted most: soccer. Now I had to find out that I was not a particularly good-looking fellow, either. The young beauties at the camp would barely acknowledge my existence. I sometimes wondered, am I transparent or something? Why do they always look past me or through me, forever trying to find someone else? The girls who did express a more or less frank interest in me were the pits. Eventually, a sort of pecking order developed and I did find some acceptable partners to flirt with, but it was bilaterally a compromise and no serious attachments were formed. The main lesson I learned at the Mátra camp was that I had a fairly low standing on the teen-age totem pole and for a while I maintained a sort of defensive hostility towards beautiful girls who "outranked" me or for whom I was not good enough.

When I was 17, I decided that my paternal grandparents' untimely death was no reason I shouldn't get to know my paternal relatives in Sarkad a little

better. I wrote to my great-aunt Fanny, asking her if I could come and visit her--the reply was prompt and warmly inviting, so I spent a pleasant vacation there. Aunt Fanny was in her 70's: a squarely built, obese, typical peasant woman who could be quite noisy and assertive when arguing with business clients but full of tender solicitude when dealing with family members, especially me. It was obvious that she was delighted that I came to visit her and she did everything she could to make my stay pleasant, including an immense welcoming party to which all the young people from virtually the entire county were invited. Sarkad is a much smaller place than Érsekújvár, also more remote, and to have a young fellow from Budapest going there for a couple of weeks must have been something of a local sensation. It was great to be in the center of attention again and the wounds suffered the previous summer healed somewhat. I had a few fleeting flirtations, including one with my second cousin Eva Vámos, an interesting redhead. Great-aunt Nina was not much in evidence. She turned out to be a highly eccentric recluse to whom I spoke just twice, on arrival and at farewell.

I also found in Sarkad a highly dramatic family situation. Aunt Fanny's son Herman was married to a pretty widow, Belle (née Grosz); Eva was their daughter but Belle also had two sons from her former marriage, Laci and Paul Héthelyi--both already in their thirties at that time. The Héthelyi boys were half-Jewish, their late father having been a Gentile. Laci had left the country before the outbreak of the war and was at that time a clandestine celebrity as the Hungarian-language announcer of the BBC in London--a fact that had to be kept quiet for obvious reasons. Paul stayed at home and just a couple of years before my visit he married a local beauty whose looks were obviously superior to her tact and who was openly contemptuous of her husband's Jewish connections. Once she made a highly offensive remark about her mother-in-law Belle--something about how she would not care to be seen publicly with "that Jewess" or words to that effect. That was somehow within earshot of Belle herself who, deeply insulted, would not talk to her daughter-in-law again and swore not to cross her threshold, ever. Some vague regrets were subsequently expressed but not to the satisfaction of Belle, who was adamant about keeping her sworn resolve. All family, including my parents, were watching the developments with baited breath and the general predictions were that Belle would soften once there was a grandchild on the scene.

A grandson indeed arrived, and was already about a year old when I dropped into this situation. Belle had not softened, and had not seen her grandson yet--they were living maybe fifteen miles from each other in neighboring villages. Paul, in the middle of this whole mess, did what he could. He went to see his mother *daily*; tried to induce her to let bygones be bygones and accept the apology. She wouldn't. He also tried to get his wife with baby to accompany him on one of these visits but *that* the wife would not do, unless there was prior assurance that she would be received, and that was not forthcoming. The feud was in full swing when I vacationed in Sarkad and in fact I went to visit the Héthelyis once and did meet the wife and baby. I can't say that I was comfortable and sensed a great deal of condescension in Mrs. Héthelyi's attitude towards me. It was obvious that she was trying very hard to please her husband by tolerating his Jewish relations. To my knowledge, Belle died some 3 years later without forgiving, and without ever laying eyes on her grandson.

### Conversion and Graduation

This episode gives an idea of the social situation in Hungary in the early 1940's. Anti-Semitism, fanned by incessant Nazi propaganda, was rampant and there were not many Christian circles free from it. The difference from the Jewish point of view between the "good" and the not-so-good Gentiles was only whether or not they engaged in "excesses", i.e. violent or otherwise coarse displays of hatred. Some degree of revulsion was to be taken for granted. As Kálmán Mikszáth, the famous Hungarian novelist once said, "an anti-Semite is one who despises Jews more than necessary". It was characteristic of the Jewish frame of mind that this quotation was accepted as funny, and I can remember my own view at the time, seeing plenty more or less justified reasons why Jews were not generally lovable and doing my utmost to shed mannerisms, speech patterns, mentality, or any other attribute that could be considered Jewish.

In this emotional climate, aggravated by economic necessities, the idea of conversion had obviously occurred, especially to those not committed to Jewish religious practices anyway. That was virtually synonymous with taking on the Roman Catholic faith, at least in Budapest, where that was by far the largest Christian denomination. Hungarian Protestants were concentrated only in certain areas of the country (Calvinists around the city of Debrecen and Unitarians in Transylvania) and the typical student body in my school, for instance, was 2/3 Catholic, 1/4 Jewish, and a sprinkling (2-3 students per class) Protestant. My parents talked about conversion now and then but I generally maintained a negative attitude. However, my dad had existential reasons of his own and around Christmas of 1938 both he and my mother got themselves baptized Roman Catholic in the St. Dominic's Parish in Budapest. Just prior to the event, there was a dramatic confrontation between us. I was expected to come along and join, but I flatly refused. I gave an impassioned and long speech, to which my father listened with uncharacteristic patience. I spoke about the moral issue, about the dishonesty of doing this kind of thing under duress, "like rats fleeing the sinking ship". When I was finished, he got up, said to me, "you are a hotheaded ass" and walked out of the room. They went forward with the plan while I remained for the time being a Jew.

My parents' conversion was to be treated as a dark deep secret. Apparently my dad needed the baptismal certificate for professional or company-statistical purposes; none of our friends were to know, let alone family. Uncle Max and Aunt Vilma would have gone into mourning ceremony for us. The uncles and aunts living in Budapest learned about it sooner or later and eventually followed suit when, in the 1940's, out of survival necessity, this kind of thing became much more common. In fact, by the fateful year 1944, most middle-class Jews of Budapest had converted. The Roman Catholic Church encouraged these conversions, insincere though they mostly were from the religious point of view, by holding out a vague half-promise to protect these "New Christians" from persecution. In the end, the Church was not in a position to do that with any degree of effectiveness. At any rate, the mere fact that they did not mind exploiting the savagery of the times for proselytizing purposes, rather than raising the beacon of universal humaneness without religious discrimination as they should have in the true Christian spirit, does appear to be quite reprehensible.

My father, who never in his life got even close to a synagogue, continued with the same attitude towards churches. My mother, however, always the romantic, made a *bona fide* effort to take her own conversion seriously.

Occasionally, when she was sure no acquaintance was around, she would secretly slip into a church, contemplate the strange imagery, and even attend mass. Afterwards, she would confidentially comment to me that all was not unacceptable in the Christian religion--I think she was touched by the very human appeal of the nativity scenes and the equally human depictions of the suffering of Jesus on Calvary. These certainly bring the concept of Deity closer to the human condition than the austere and impersonal God of the Old Testament. As I began to study art appreciation I also felt the need to have some background information on the subjects of Renaissance paintings, and felt quite out of it when I found myself uninformed on such themes as the Transfiguration or the Wedding at Cana. My attitude towards conversion softened, and with the existential argument getting stronger by the day, I consented to go through with the baptism just before I was to graduate from high school. The act was timed cleverly, just missing the press deadline for the school yearbook so that in the published class roster that all the world would see, I was still listed with the old religion. In my high school diploma, which I would presumably use in job hunting, my religion was already shown as Roman Catholic.

My baptism was a simple and dignified ceremony with only my parents attending, and one of my father's business associates serving as godfather. The preparation I had to undertake for the christening was minimal. In my previous schooling, I was taught virtually nothing about Christianity. In contrast to Christian religious education that deals with Jews in hostile terms, Jewish religious instruction ignores Christians. I can remember that in my tenth-grade Jewish religion textbook which gave a historic review of the Holy Land under the Romans, there was (in the context of the various popular movements of the time) the following sentence: "To the circle of Essenes belonged also one Jesus of Nazareth, who is held to be the founder of the Christian religion." That was all; for purely intellectual reasons, some reinforcement of knowledge was obviously needed. I got myself some textbooks and catechisms to familiarize myself with my new religion. Soon afterward, in June 1942, I graduated from high school with a final grade average of B+. I was eagerly looking forward to entering the adult world.

Since age 6 or 7 I had no doubt whatsoever that I wanted to become a scientist. My first love was geography but by age 9 or 10 this gave way to astronomy, and by age 12 or so, to geology. I also had brief flings with biology and physics but from about age 14 my decision to become a chemist had been pretty final. The problem was, Hungarian universities operated on the quota system since the 1920's, and Jews were admitted as students only up to their percentage in the total population--i.e., 5% nationwide (in Budapest, about 25% of inhabitants were Jewish). That was how the unwanted preponderance of Jews in the learned professions was intended to be remedied. The stratagem did not work. All it did throughout the 1920's and 1930's was to steer young Jewish intellectuals abroad. After graduating from the frequently superior western universities and technical academies, they would come home and still compete successfully for the dwindling number of professional jobs available in the country, and the intellectual life of Hungary remained just as "Jew-ridden" as it was before.

By about 1939, new legislation was enacted to extend the quota system to jobs as well. Companies were given a few years of grace for full implementation of the new "Jewish Law" in order not to disrupt the economy of the country completely, and dismissals of Jewish employees from established positions were limited and gradual. The immediate effect of the

new law was a complete nation-wide freeze on employing Jews. At the same time, a "Jew" was defined as anyone born in the religion, irrespective of present religious affiliation. Eventually, under German influence, the definition was placed on a "racial" basis, and anyone with two or more Jewish grandparents was regarded as Jew, even if born in the Christian religion. Certain exemptions were made, for instance for war veterans wounded in action, and my father was not affected for a while. Unfortunately, this kind of exemption was not hereditary and it looked like the gaining of a foothold in the adult world that I was about to enter, was going to be an uphill struggle.

## C H A P T E R   T H R E E

-----  
N A Z I   P E R S E C U T I O N :   T H E   E A R L Y   P H A S E

I WAS 8 YEARS OLD when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, 15 when World War II broke out in Europe, and 17 when it truly became a world war by involvement of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Japan. Hungary joined the war on the German side in 1941 and became hopelessly embroiled in it, in spite of the reservations that many leading Hungarians had about the wisdom of that move. Actually, Hungarian entry into the war was achieved by trickery: through bombardment of a frontier town by German warplanes disguised with Soviet insignia. It was widely rumored in Budapest that this was a deception but the march of history could not be halted.

Before I graduated from high school, the now famous Wannsee Conference had already taken place in Berlin, at which SS General Reinhard Heydrich communicated to representatives of the German government the Führer's orders that European Jewry was to be exterminated. The continent was to be "combed through from west to east" and all Jews concentrated in detention camps, where "conditions of labor would cause most of them to succumb". The survivors were to be given "special handling" lest they become "the nucleus from which the Jewish race could resurrect itself". A young SS colonel, Adolf Eichmann, was entrusted with the task of implementing this order and all ministries and government agencies were to give their full cooperation.

The German state machinery went about the performance of this task with frightening efficiency. All over German-occupied Europe, Jews were branded with a yellow star for easy recognition, collected in "ghetto"-s, and systematically shipped to the extermination camps of Auschwitz, Maidanek, Treblinka, and others. There, conditions of labor indeed caused most of them to succumb, and those not deemed capable of work were immediately subjected to "special handling" in gas chambers, followed by retrieval of valuables such as dental gold, and cremation of the remains. War regulations enabled all this to be carried out in appropriate secrecy, but obviously the scale of the operation made the complete suppression of all leaks impossible. Sinister stories about these eastern camps were heard in Hungary also but most people judged them unbelievable. Even though Hitler and members of his Nazi Party were obviously madmen, the German people as a whole were still the nation of Goethe and Beethoven and to ascribe to them such savagery seemed absurd. At any rate, Hungary was still an independent country and in spite of some Nazi influence in internal politics it was outside of direct SS jurisdiction. Thus, the country became a sort of precarious haven for Jews in the midst of the Holocaust already in progress elsewhere.

Unfortunately, this did not apply to members of the military. Hungarian troops were fighting on the Russian front under German command, and so a situation developed in which a military enlistment order for a Hungarian Jew was tantamount to a death sentence while a deferment was equivalent to a reprieve. In the Hungarian Army, a new rank was created specifically for Jews, one notch below the Private, called "Labor Serviceman". Labor

servicemen were not armed, they were concentrated in battalions of their own with regular soldiers holding all command positions, and they could not be promoted out of the Labor Serviceman rank. All regular soldiers, including freshly enlisted privates, were to be regarded as full military superiors and addressed "Sir". A few specific humiliations were added, such as the prohibition of wearing buttons with the Hungarian state insignia on coats and caps like other soldiers, or having the military ID cards marked with a huge red "Z" (for Zsidó, i.e. Jew) painted across it. Otherwise, the treatment accorded to the labor service battalions was entirely at the discretion of the commanding officers. Some of them were capable of bizarre cruelties, especially outside of the country's borders where they were not inhibited by the presence of a familiar civilian population. Of the labor servicemen taken to the Ukraine in 1942/43, not many returned safe and sound but in all sincerity virtually the same can be said of the regular Hungarian fighting troops, who were used by the German high command as cannon fodder. Among the victims was also Laci Bihari, my cousin Erzsi's husband. Nothing is known of the circumstances of his death.

#### The New Graduate

At the time of my graduation from high school, my age group (1924) was not yet called up and the immediate objective of our family efforts was to find an occupation for me in which I would be relatively safe from random conscription orders. That was easier said than done. The universities were virtually inaccessible. The quota for Jews was of course hopelessly oversubscribed at every college, and admission of Jewish applicants who like myself did not even have an all-A report card from high school, was out of the question. Getting a job was equally problematic. Companies were struggling to meet the new legal restrictions on Jewish employment even without adding new liabilities to their statistics. I can remember my father's angry rhetorical question to a group of business friends, some of whom were Gentiles:

"Here he is, the new graduate--what is he supposed to do? Into the University, they won't take him, a job they won't give him. What is he to do?! Go and steal?!"

The question remained unanswered; from July to October 1942 I walked the streets, making job applications to whomever would accept them, only to be turned down in due course anyway, in a bitter charade that was clearly past the point of diminishing returns. Being able to list Roman Catholic as religion did not make all that much difference. Authorities were getting wise to the flurry of conversions taking place at about that time, and in many questionnaires after "Religion..." another line was added: "Former religion..." Some wily Jews converted again, e.g. from Catholic to Lutheran, in order to be able to answer both questions without having to disclose Jewishness. But that kind of stratagem only yielded short-term results. Eventually, the fact that the applicant was subject to the restrictions of the law against Jews would be found out and rejection or dismissal followed.

It was October 1942 that I succeeded in tracing a connection, through my godfather's friends, to one of the major drug manufacturing houses in Budapest, the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company. I received instructions to present myself at the company hiring office and to apply for an ordinary hourly job. I was to present my report card from the 8th grade (4th gymnasium class) as evidence of schooling and if there was any question about what

I had done since then, I was to say that I had been "sick". Under no circumstances was I to admit that I was a high school graduate. To do so would have immediately placed me in the "intellectual" classification irrespective of what job I was applying for, and it was in that classification that Government agencies were watching most closely the compliance with the Jewish law. In a "non-intellectual" classification, i.e. with only an eighth-grade education and applying for an hourly job, it was hoped that my application would slip by.

I did as I was told, and the whole hiring procedure turned out to be simple enough. My papers were looked over with bored indifference and no questions were asked. I was hired in with a wage of 0.50 pengö per hour (about 10 U.S. cents at the last available international exchange rate) and I was given a clock card, locker key, work coveralls, and, most importantly, a company ID document confirming that I was a worker at a military supply firm. I was to report for work the next day, October 23, 1942, at 7:30 in the morning.

#### Worker at the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company

My new life as a proletarian was about to unfold. The only event in my life that I can compare it with was my first day in school at age 6, when the fascination was, associating with the "untouchables". Now I was to become one of them. Some understanding of Hungarian sociology is required to appreciate the momentousness of the experience. Serfdom was officially abolished in Hungary only in 1848; the mentality was dying very slowly and in the first half of the twentieth century, Hungarian rural society was still sharply divided into "gentlemen" and "peasants". In the cities, the emerging urban class was accepted into the lower echelons of gentlemanhood if they were educated but treated like peasants if they were not. "Educated" meant being at least a high school graduate. The dividing line between gentlemen and non-gentlemen was the high school diploma, and this penetrated into all aspects of public life. In the corporate environment, it determined whether or not one was entitled to use the executive facilities in dining, recreation, or even the washrooms; in the armed forces it determined whether one (by 1940, only the Gentiles, of course) was slated to be commissioned as officer after the briefest training period or remain forever a noncommissioned officer at best. Even in postal address or formal conversation, high school graduates were entitled to a special honorific designation [Tekintetes], loosely translatable as "The Respectable..." or "Your Respectability". It's true that this was the lowest of a whole hierarchy of titles all the way up to Excellency, but it was a title, and non-gentlemen were of course not entitled to any honorific designation at all. (They would be colloquially addressed as "my good man" or, if the speaker was less jovially inclined, just "hey, you!") This gives an idea of the heavy heart I had in having to deny my hard-earned credentials but it was abundantly clear that it was the only thing to do under the circumstances.

The customs and morals and even the speech of the proletarian class were different from what I was accustomed to. There was no easy camaraderie, whereas in the bourgeoisie this was common even on first encounter. Communication was stiff and because of the language forms used it sounded unfriendly even if it was not meant to be. Inquiry into personal matters was avoided. Profanities were used much more freely than in middle-class speech and--something that absolutely astounded me--they were uttered even in the presence of women. (In polite society, that was just about the worst

offense imaginable.) I don't know how convincing my act was, trying to blend in; I had an elaborate cover story prepared regarding my doings since the eighth grade in case my fellow workers inquired but nobody did, not even after I got to know some of them rather well. That sort of thing was simply not done. People minded their own business.

Working hours were long and we were kept busy incessantly, but the work was fascinating. Unseen beneficial hands had me assigned to the "Organic Department" of the plant, which was in essence an oversized chemical laboratory. Because of the war, the usual flow of raw materials was disrupted and the company found itself in a position of having to manufacture its own bulk chemicals from a few available precursors. The regular industrial equipment to do that was not available and laboratory methods had to be modified into a semi-bulk process. I learned the unit operations of the chemical laboratory such as vacuum filtration, vacuum distillation or crystallization in gallon-size flasks and beakers. My boss was Mr. Senkariuk, a Bukovinian chemist who spoke only broken Hungarian and my German knowledge, which I admitted having, was a factor in becoming assigned to him. It was a fortunate choice. Mr. Senkariuk was a kind, patient man who realized at once that I had more than the average worker's interest in chemistry and he explained to me everything we did. He took some pleasure in my eagerness to understand what was going on and he taught me a lot. Soon we became almost friends, although the respectful distance was of course maintained. Before long, I was proficient enough so that multi-step chemical reactions could be entrusted to me. During my stay at Dr. Wander, I synthesized virtually from scratch such fairly complex molecules as benzyl benzoate, oxyquinoline carboxylic acid, or the diethylaminoethyl ester of phenylpropylacetic acid, and gained practical knowledge of most basic procedures in preparative organic chemistry.

It was a different situation with Mr. Senkariuk's immediate supervisor, Dr. Kiszal, head of the organic department. He was not friendly to me at all; on the contrary, he viewed my efforts to learn chemistry with hostile disdain and reprimanded Mr. Senkariuk for "wasting time" by explaining things to me. Perhaps he suspected my real background. He instituted disciplinary action against me for the most trifling infractions--once he confiscated my chemistry textbook lying on the bench, opened to the page where the reaction I was then working on was described. He reported me for "reading on the job". Fortunately, Dr. Kiszal's supervisor, the chief engineer of the plant, was my secret benefactor who arranged for my being hired into the plant. He treated these complaints lightly and staged reprimands or meted out punishments that caused little harm.

At home, my new identity as a working man earned high respect. My mother proudly accepted from me a token contribution from my earnings and then boasted to all family and friends that I have become a sustaining member of the household. At 25-30 pengö per week, which included the customary overtime hours, my income was really just decent pocket money. It was a sobering thought that some people had to live, or even support families, on incomes that were in the same ballpark as my earnings--for a worker with about 10 years of seniority, perhaps 2-3 times my wages. It gives some idea of the gulf between the proletariat and the middle class, although by western standards all incomes in Hungary were relatively very low.

My new affluence was probably a factor in finally acquiring a steady girlfriend in late 1942. Agnes Kardos was a pretty, willowy brunette, a tad

taller than myself, even though only an eleventh-grader. I first met her at Aunt Fanny's party in Sarkad; when I heard that she and her folks moved to suburban Budapest the following autumn I gave her a call. We started seeing each other, first occasionally, then with increasing frequency, and by Christmas or so we were "going steady"--i.e., planning leisure activities together as a matter of routine. Typically, on alternate dates, either I would take her to a movie and/or pastry shop or she would treat me at her parents' house. Whenever there was opportunity, we had dizzying petting and "smooching" sessions--but nothing more; the customs and morals we both grew up with made anything else still unthinkable.

At about the same time, interesting things were happening also at work. A female co-worker, Barbara Horváth (no kin to my roommate) seemed to be paying particular attention to me and soon we had a vigorous flirtation going. Barbara was honey-blonde, and exceedingly slender (a current comparison for her build being Cher, or Madonna) and at least 10 years older than I. She was unmistakably a proletarian but a good notch above the common vulgar kind, and she treated me with a mixture of motherly solicitude and coquettish seductiveness. One thing led to the next, and in early 1943, at age 18½, at her folks' house where she invited me one day after work, I had my first consummated sexual encounter. Obviously, I was a blustering and blundering beginner who had a lot to learn, and she taught me a lot. Our relationship continued for the balance of my employment at Dr. Wander, i.e. a good six months.

Agnes and Barbara were not aware of each other's existence. I found such a schizophrenic love life distinctly distasteful at first, but the two women fit into different niches of my life. To press for a consummation of my relationship with Agnes, even assuming that it could have been successfully done, would have been completely unacceptable socially--the possible consequences (i.e., pregnancy while still in high school) were too horrible even to think of. To break with her on account of Barbara was also out of the question. We needed each other to go out with socially; we were just beginning to be counted as a couple in teen-age Budapest society for purposes of party invitations. To bring Barbara into this circle would have been a total absurdity. For one thing, she was out of our age group. Furthermore, my relationship with her was technically a felony according to the laws then in force; Nuremberg-type prohibitions of "racial pollution" were already on the books in Hungary as in Germany, and our affair was a strict secret even vis-à-vis fellow workers at the factory. A character like Dr. Kiszél would have probably loved to see me go to jail (or worse) for such an offense. Barbara was sweet about this whole matter and understood the limitations of our relationship. She assured me that it did not matter to her that we could not be seen publicly as a couple, and I had complete confidence in her that she would never exploit our secret relationship in any way--and she never did. So, I continued with my double life and eventually became quite satisfied with it. Dividing my attention between two women probably helped to avoid falling in love too deeply with either one.

Towards the summer of 1943 the political climate in Hungary underwent a subtle change. The battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad were already history, and formerly invincible Germany was now retreating on all fronts. Italy was effectively out of the war and Axis victory was beginning to look less and less a foregone conclusion. Wiser heads in the Hungarian government were beginning to look for a way out, or if that was not entirely possible, at least to reduce cooperation with the Germans to the practical minimum

so as not to infuriate the Allied Powers against Hungary more than inevitable.

This change also meant some easing of the pressure on Jews. None of the anti-Jewish laws were repealed, but they were beginning to be enforced with less zeal. At some point during the summer of 1943, word was passed to my father that an application from me to the College of Law of the University of Budapest would receive benevolent consideration. Professor Baranyay, a Cistercian monk who taught canon law at the University, became member of the admissions committee of the law school and he also had a seat on the Board of Directors of the Foncière Insurance Company where my father worked. Of course I applied, and by September 1943 I found myself, speechless with surprise, admitted for matriculation as regular student of law at the University of Budapest.

#### Intermezzo: Student of Law

Law was just about the last thing I wanted to study. Chemistry was my No.1. interest but I would have gladly gotten involved with physics, biology, geology, or even medicine or engineering; in all these fields I had some hobby interest at one time or another. Law never interested me, but this was no time to quibble. The fantastic opportunity to become a University student of no matter what field had to be grabbed, and grab it I did. After 11 months of work at the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company I was just becoming eligible for a week's vacation that I took, and then wrote the management that because of other plans I could not return to the job. Mr. Senkariuk and a few worker friends were confidentially informed that I was going back to school but only Barbara knew that the "school" was the University. We continued to see each other for a few more weeks but eventually our relationship petered out.

Being a University student was in itself euphoric. Even the antiquated matriculation procedures that sometimes required one standing in line for hours were experienced as delightful, because I was again with my own. There was again the easy camaraderie and cordial friendliness with fellow students, even if strangers; and the customary opening of lectures, "Ladies and Gentlemen", made me bask in satisfaction. I was a gentleman again.

Law studies on the freshman level included Roman civil law and Hungarian constitutional history as required subjects and Ecclesiastical canon law as recommended elective. Since the professor of canon law happened to be my personal benefactor who got me into the college, I enrolled in the recommended elective as well and on the whole I attended classes with reasonable diligence. With respect to the subject matter, all I could do was to echo my mother's opinion on Christianity: it wasn't as bad as I had thought. Especially the class on Roman law was taught by an outstanding specialist and proved to be quite interesting: we followed the gradual emergence of legal concepts from early Republican Rome all the way to the Institutions (law code) of the Emperor Justinian. The main attraction, however, was plenty of free time. University regulations permitted taking any offered class as an elective, even in other colleges of the University, with the exception of a few laboratory courses with restricted access. I enrolled in atomic physics, organic chemistry, paleoanthropology, geology--I did meet some raised eyebrows of an occasional clerk in the Registrar's office but explained glibly that a good lawyer must be well

versed in all subjects. (It was a different matter that in these science courses I got all A-s while in the law classes I barely passed.)

The atmosphere at the University was exhilarating. In intellectual circles, disillusionment with the Germans was rampant and political matters were being discussed with surprising frankness. It was generally agreed that Germany was losing the war. Students with Jewish background like myself were no longer subjected to any harassment--in sharp contrast to pre-El-Alamein days, when ultra-rightist youth organizations held sway and used to stage frequent beatings and other intimidation at the University, in order to deter the few matriculated Jewish students from attending classes. These organizations were now quiet, subdued, and the general attitude was rather cordial to students about whom Jewish connections could be assumed. To be sure, virtually no one at the University had "Religion...Jewish" in the student ID card; by 1943 virtually the entire Jewish middle class of Hungary had converted. These conversions did not matter legally because the definition of a Jew was not by religious affiliation. Nevertheless, some practical easements or relaxation of harassments could be expected if one was nominally a Christian. Just as 75 years earlier the Jewish community of Hungary was split into Neolog and Orthodox, now the split was into the converted and the diehards. The converted were further split into those for whom the conversion was a complete farce and who (if they survived) reconverted to Judaism after 1945; and those who were willing at least to explore what Christianity was all about and who frequently did not reconvert after 1945. As already alluded to, I belonged to the latter category.

For those of us who were thinking along these lines, a youth club existed in Budapest, called the Association of the Holy Cross. The name was deliberately misleading. There was not much religious emphasis although the "spiritual advisor" was a young and very personable priest, himself a convert, who held occasional seminars as remedial Christian religious instruction for those who had missed it in school. Otherwise, the Association of the Holy Cross was mainly a social meeting ground for people of my kind. By October 1943 I met there a girl who burst into my life like a meteor. Julia Ötvös was not yet 16, but precociously developed, and a mindboggling beauty--resembling a bit the latter-day American film starlet Brooke Shields. First, I did my best to ignore her (as already mentioned, my personal experience with beauties was not encouraging) but for some mysterious reason she seemed to be attracted to me. One evening in the Holy Cross clubroom, I happened to sit down at the piano to play some of the showpieces I had taught myself, based on the meager systematic instruction I had in my early teens, and a group of people gathered around the piano, including Julia. I could play things like the introductory cadenzas in Beethoven's Emperor Concerto, or simplified transcriptions of symphony movements, operatic ouvertures, and the like, and I suppose that to untrained ears it might have sounded impressive. I got some polite applause, but eventually the crowd dispersed to do other things. Julia stayed, listened to my playing with apparent fascination, and kept begging me to play more and more--until it was time to go home, and naturally I offered to escort her home, which was only common courtesy to any female companion in those days. By the time we said goodbye to each other in front of her house door, I knew I had a new girlfriend.

Without question, Julia was a prize. If my piano playing was a factor in winning her, I could only regard it as a lucky fluke because, quite frankly, I was far from being a virtuoso. Of course, she was musically

unsophisticated. She was pretty unsophisticated in most other things as well, and generally she could be characterized as a delightfully unspoiled, naïve, high-spirited tomboy, with her mind quite childlike but her body very much a woman. I just happened to be the guy in the right place at the right time, and I became her "first great love". Within a week or two after our piano encounter we were "going steady" and the time had come for me to tell Agnes that our friendship was over. It was a difficult, tearful scene but it could not be helped. Julia completely monopolized my thoughts day and night, and although I kept telling myself that it was too early to say whether we were intellectually compatible or not, I experienced total infatuation. Julia was the perfect ingenue: innocent, enthusiastic, and breathtakingly beautiful. We reassured each other of our mutual undying love but, for the first several weeks of our friendship, physical contact consisted only of holding hands. She was simply not ready yet for anything else. Of course I laid siege to her, demanding a kiss--and she resisted; some of this was virtually played in public in the circle of kids we were hanging out with, and created some hilarity. Julia was not perturbed. She had a sense for the dramatic, and she was working up to a spectacular climax. On St. Nicholas' day in early December 1943, several of us went for a winter hike in the Buda hills. It was a mild and sunny day, with some snow on the treetops and Nature was at its most beautiful. Julia was her usual irrepressible self, forever clambering around on odd paths among the rocks, and I, of course, playfully after her. She climbed on top of a rocky promontory, towering over the landscape--the other members of our group were visible as so many insects, a good hundred feet below. It was in this "eagle's nest", as it were, that she stopped, reached her hand for me to join, turned to me with closed eyes, and offered her lips for a first kiss that remains one of the sweetest memories of my youth.

Julia and I were virtually inseparable for the next several months. I could adjust my University schedule so that I could usually meet her when her school let out (she was a tenth-grader) and walk her home. Frequently we spent all afternoon together. Julia needed some tutoring in mathematics that I was only too glad to provide, and her parents also became quite fond of me.

March 19, 1944 was another sunny Sunday on which Julia and I went to hike in the Buda hills, getting off bright and early in the morning. We were having lunch at the Normafa Inn when I discovered that I didn't have my penknife; there was a possibility that I had left it at home and I went to make a telephone call to make sure that I had not lost it. My father answered the phone in an obviously distraught manner, almost in alarm. Was I all right? Was everything OK? Were we planning to come home right away?--I was perplexed; I tried to reassure him that of course everything was all right; the weather was beautiful; and Julia and I were at the moment enjoying a nice pair of Debrecen sausages with mustard, and all I needed was my knife. What's the matter, anyway? My father answered cryptically, "Some of us think that there are too many soldiers around here."

I was mystified. The inn was filled with the usual noisy Sunday noon crowd, mostly civilians, and nobody looked worried. I recounted my conversation to Julia, who said, with a laugh, of course parents were always worried. As for "too many soldiers", so what else was new? It was wartime, wasn't it?

I was not quite convinced; it wasn't like my father to be worried about nothing. At my urging, we cut our hike somewhat short. When we arrived back in the city, we ourselves became aware of a changed mood. The streets seemed empty; on the streetcar, nobody talked. When the streetcar crossed the Danube bridge into Pest, I caught glimpses of German soldiers standing about. I still did not put two and two together. German soldiers, after all, were not a rare sight on the streets of Budapest in those days. We arrived home uneventfully, first stopping at my place. There, we learned the stunning news from my father: as of that morning Budapest seemed to be under German military occupation. A general curfew was in effect; places of entertainment were closed; assembly of groups of people was prohibited. Regular broadcasting stopped and the radio played military marches all day. At some point, official announcement was made that German troops had arrived in Hungary, stressing that the move was by friendly agreement between the two governments. The population was urged to accept the event calmly, treat our German comrades-in-arms kindly, and continue to struggle together for the glorious final victory, blah-blah-blah. It was clear that a new and very ominous chapter of our lives had just started.

C H A P T E R   F O U R

-----  
 N A Z I   P E R S E C U T I O N :   T H E   M I D D L E   P H A S E  
 -----

IT TOOK A FEW DAYS to assess the situation from bits and pieces of information circulating in the city and from official pronouncements. Obviously, the Germans had been aware for some time that Hungary was having second thoughts about fighting the war. A general staff plan for the occupation of Hungary, "Operation Margarethe" had already been in existence and in March 1944 Hitler decided that it was time to put the plan into action. He asked Admiral Horthy, the Regent of Hungary, to Klessheim near Berchtesgaden on the pretext of a conference and informed him there that in view of the outrageous acts of disloyalty Hungary had committed--lukewarm handling of the Jewish question was cited as one of them--he had no choice but to occupy the country militarily in order to ensure efficient compliance with war objectives. Horthy was detained and his communication with his home base thwarted by fake air raids until the occupation had become an accomplished fact. Without explicit orders from the top, the Hungarian Army dared not offer resistance.

It remains an interesting historical question whether Horthy should have abdicated under the circumstances, to symbolize national protest against the occupation. He did not; in his memoirs he pleaded that doing so would only have removed the last restraints on German terror. Maybe; but by staying in office he also gave seeming endorsement to what transpired under his regency. In actual fact, the terror was bad enough. Politicians, journalists, and other public figures known to have reservations about cooperating with the Germans were rounded up by the Gestapo by the thousand during the first few hours of the occupation and were already under arrest at the time of my telephone conversation with my father. The national government resigned; Horthy was required to appoint a new government "approved" by the Germans but even they had only token authority. Real power was in the hands of a Resident Reich Plenipotentiary. Furthermore, along with the occupying troops came SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann with his staff, to organize personally the handling of the Jewish question.

The German Occupation of Hungary

Volumes have been written about the Holocaust and a very sketchy recapitulation of events in Hungary in 1944 will suffice here. Right in the beginning, Eichmann appointed a "Judenrat" [Jews' Council] from prominent synagogue leaders as conduits of his edicts towards the country's Jewry. Members of the Judenrat were to enjoy certain privileges but they had to "answer with their heads" if his decrees were not carried out to the letter. As of two weeks after the occupation, all Jews had to wear a six-pointed star four inches in diameter, "canary yellow" in color, prominently and permanently affixed to their clothing when out of their own homes. This was followed by restricted permission to leave home (e.g., shopping time for Jews was limited to the afternoons, namely when choice merchandise from the grocery stores was already gone); there was to be a special type of Jewish ration card with restricted access to foods; certain purchases were

altogether prohibited; Jews had to surrender any radios and telephones they owned, as well as cameras, binoculars, all vehicles including bicycles, all jewelry, gold, silver, precious stones, certain types of apparel (e.g., furs) and certain types of footwear. Bank accounts and stock accounts were frozen. Long-distance travel was completely prohibited; within the city, Jews were allowed to board only the last car in each streetcar train and only during certain hours of the day. A virtually endless list of other restrictions and harassments was published piecemeal, in drip-drip fashion, with the newspapers carrying a new regulation or two affecting Jews virtually every day. A special spot was reserved in the daily papers for just this purpose, like the feature columns or the comics. Indeed, the purpose was comparable, namely to entertain the populace and to divert their attention from their own miseries. The rules sometimes covered ridiculous minutiae such as regulating the ownership of cats and dogs by Jews. Normal life was made nearly impossible which was precisely the intent, and Jews were in a sense dared to violate these ordinances in some trifling way and thus provide excuse for their own arrest and maltreatment or deportation.

The housing question in Budapest presented some problems for the authorities. Because of the number of Jews involved (estimated to be around 300,000 in the Capital alone) it was not technically feasible to collect them in a secluded ghetto as in the smaller towns, at least for the time being. The solution was to designate a number of the more decrepit apartment houses in Budapest as "Jewish houses". These scattered Jewish houses were marked over the entrance with a huge yellow star, and Jews were allowed to live only in these houses--without requiring any Gentile residents already living there to leave, however. The living space allotted to Jews was one room per family, regardless of size. Thus, in the average Budapest apartment, kitchen and bathroom had to be shared between 3-5 families, comprising 2-6 persons each. It can be left to the imagination what sort of disruptions, frictions, and other complications the overcrowding caused, even with the best of intentions.

In the meantime, Colonel Eichmann went about the technical organization of the elimination of Hungarian Jewry, in the sense of the Wannsee directive.. Obviously, this could not have been done without cooperation of the locals and to the everlasting shame of the Hungarian nation it must be admitted that enough collaborators were found on all levels to ensure a remarkably efficient accomplishment of this rather gigantic task. It would have been nice if the Hungarian populace had offered the same kind of resistance to the German demands as the Danes, whose King was reputed to have said that if the Germans introduced the yellow star in Denmark, he would be the first to wear it. (In fact, the Germans desisted from doing that, for precisely that reason.) Wholehearted local support, or at least tacit consent on the part of national leaders, was indispensable for carrying out anti-Jewish measures and on the whole the Germans got it in Hungary. The job of rounding up Jews was started in the rural areas where population density was smaller, so that the experience gained could be utilized for the last and toughest act: the liquidation of the Jews of Budapest. From May through July 1944, all Jews of Hungary outside of Budapest, irrespective of age or sex, were herded into collection sites or transit camps and kept there under sometimes unspeakably miserable conditions for days or weeks, to await railroad transport to Auschwitz. The gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz were working at top capacity throughout the spring and early summer of 1944, dispatching about 6,000 persons per day. Within the timespan of about 2½ months, more than 400,000 persons of all ages and sexes, or

virtually the entire rural Jewry of Hungary, were killed in a highly coordinated, efficient, assembly-line fashion. With the exception of the actual killing, the whole process of grotesque humiliation, dispossession, herding and shipping like cattle, was done in plain sight of the general population. Even though the action was called "resettlement" and deportees were required upon arrival (and just before entering the gas chambers) to send preprinted postcards to their former neighbors with the fanciful postmark "Waldsee" [Forest Lake] as if they had been taken to some kind of spa, not many were fooled. The fact that the Jews were being shipped to their own extermination was plain enough. The worst scum in the Gentile population openly sneered, and the majority looked the other way. The fact that many of them could benefit from this situation, either by getting some of the confiscated loot or by being able to move into emptied living space, made the tragedy bearable.

The first feeble attempt at protest came from the Roman Catholic Church. It was the classical "sorcerer's apprentice" situation: the Church became terrified by the malignant spirits she herself had unleashed. In early June 1944 Cardinal-Archbishop Serédi, Prince Primate of Hungary, circulated a draft of a pastoral letter to all the bishops for joint signature and distribution to all parish priests of the country, for reading aloud from the pulpit to the faithful on a certain Sunday in June. As it happened, the pastoral letter became public only after the war and it proved to be a strange document. It started out by deploring the vicissitudes of war in general, condemning specifically cruelties attributed to the Allies--the terror bombing of cities that resulted in indiscriminate killing of women and children; or the alleged maltreatment of prisoners. It even made reference to the obvious canard of dropping exploding dolls or other toys from airplanes, specifically to kill children. (This story was allegedly invented by the French in World War I to stir up hatred against the Germans--it was now being used in the opposite direction.) The pastoral letter went on to confirm that insofar as individual Jews were guilty in any of these atrocities they deserved punishment, and that in any case they used to have such a strangling grip on the cultural and economic life of the country that self-defensive measures against them in these fields were justified. However, having said that--and here the language of the pastoral letter became quite blunt and firm--it still remained a fact that Jews were human beings, created by God, and that depriving them of life and liberty without individual judicial process, or denying them all opportunity to earn a living, and generally to inflict on them cruelties that a decent person would not do to animals, were contrary to the Christian spirit and must be counted as grave sins in the eyes of the Lord. The pastoral letter closed by exhorting all Hungarians not to assume the terrible, awesome responsibility before God and man of having to answer for such crimes by taking part in them, or giving a helping hand in their perpetration.

This pastoral letter was duly signed by all bishops and dispatched to all Roman Catholic parishes throughout the country, with instructions to make it public the following Sunday--3 or 4 days hence. Obviously, a copy reached the Germans and their Hungarian supporters in the government quickly, and the alarm was sounded. Much of the rural population was quite religious and such a head-on collision with the Church was judged a disaster. Collaboration of the locals in the roundup and guarding of Jews was still practically indispensable. Post offices throughout the country were immediately ordered to intercept and impound this piece of mail but it seems that in a few instances the order arrived too late. Some messages slipped

through and arrived at their destinations. Extraordinary efforts were made in these instances to prevent publicity. All available pressure was exerted on the bishops to withdraw the letter; just exactly what threats, promises, or other persuasions were used is not clear and the "negotiations" were never made public. Historic fact is only that on Saturday, or less than 24 hours before the planned announcement, a brief note bearing the personal signature of Cardinal Serédi reached the parish priests already in possession of the letter, saying, in effect, "The pastoral letter dispatched earlier this week was *only* for the information of the Reverend Clergy and is *not* to be read or otherwise communicated to the parishioners." The priests, themselves under strong pressure from the authorities, of course complied. The disaster was averted; the deportations could go on undisturbed as before. Some cosmetic improvements such as increasing the availability of drinking water in the transit camps were made.

The next set of protests came through diplomatic channels. The Swiss, the Spanish, the King of Sweden, and even the King of England (though technically a belligerent enemy) sent personal messages to Regent Horthy, reminding him that maintaining the honor of the Hungarian nation required doing everything possible to stop the deportations. These warnings became all the more impressive when successful Allied landings in Normandy made it abundantly clear that total defeat of Nazi Germany was only a matter of time. Horthy was admittedly in a difficult position: as head of state of a country under military occupation, he had limited freedom of action and members of his government, "approved" by the Germans, were in reality abjectly serving the Germans. Anything said in state council sessions was immediately reported to the Germans. Nonetheless Horthy, although never a friend of the Jews but still a gentleman of the old school, finally resolved to do what he still could. At that point, that meant only trying to save the Jews of Budapest. The "cleansing" of the countryside was virtually complete. Horthy made sure through clandestine instructions to a few confidants at the State Railroads that no sufficient rolling stock was available around the Capital and also created conditions in the city by redeployment of gendarmerie units that made the initial concentration of Jews difficult or impractical. He then reported to the Germans that the "cleansing" of Budapest had to be postponed for technical reasons.

Eichmann was not pleased; he took it upon himself to do as much on his own as possible. The internment camp of Kistarcsa was located on the outskirts of Budapest. Enemy alien hostages, refugee Poles, and some other political prisoners were detained there, including a few thousand "prominent" Jews (i.e., former journalists, bankers, and others with foreign connections). Eichmann packed these Jews into a railroad train and gave orders for the train to leave for Auschwitz. Word of the action leaked out, was passed to members of the Judenrat in Budapest, some of whom had secret channels to communicate with the Regent. The Regent was informed and he immediately ordered the Hungarian railroad authorities to stop the train and send it back to Kistarcsa. The order was issued none too soon: the train was already approaching the border station. It was halted there and the order from the Chief of State was obeyed, in spite of frantic protests of the escorting SS personnel. Inmates of the train were reprieved for the time being.

Eichmann was furious; he was quoted as muttering, "The old fool [i.e., the Regent] is not going to outsmart *me*." For a day of the following week, he scheduled a special meeting of the Judenrat. A member who was in bed with

the flu and sent word to excuse himself was nonetheless ordered to attend, and an ambulance was dispatched to fetch him. To the assembled community leaders, Eichmann expressed his dissatisfaction with the "morale" prevailing among the Jews of Budapest and solicited proposals and discussion on how to improve it. This sudden concern was certainly a novel phenomenon; the typical attitude used to be callous disregard of how the persecuted were responding to their persecution as long as the despair did not lead to riots or other resistance. Eichmann now said that he was determined to improve "morale" and demanded that each council member sketch out a proposal with specific recommendations within the general German policy, which would of course remain unchanged. It was a quixotic assignment; the Judenrat members looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Eichmann forbade any council member to leave for any reason until his position paper was completed and fully discussed. At some point in the late afternoon, a note was handed to him by an aide and he said smilingly to the Judenrat members: "All right, now. The whole project is cancelled. You can all go home."

What happened was this: While the Judenrat members were kept busy, the Jews of Kistarcsa were being reloaded into railroad cars and the train was again dispatched to Auschwitz. Eichmann invented this ruse in order to interrupt the channel through which the news could reach the Regent. The note handed to him said: "The deportee train has left the last Hungarian railroad check and is now crossing the border into the Generalgouvernement [i.e., occupied Poland]". So, Eichmann had won in the end; all inmates of the train were gassed upon arrival. However, this turned out to be one of the last Hungarian transports to Auschwitz. The Russians were getting too near in the east; the bitter fighting in the west made railroad stock increasingly scarce. Eventually, in the fall of 1944, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler ordered the discontinuation of gassings in Auschwitz. The remaining Jews of Budapest got another reprieve.

I lived at home only for the first six weeks of the German occupation. Actually, my parents were still in a somewhat fortunate position: even though the exemption from anti-Jewish ordinances that my father had enjoyed because of his military record during World War I was revoked, he was still treated with some consideration. It also happened that the apartment house in which we already lived was designated as a "Jewish house" and thus we were spared the chaotic experience of having to move by an impossibly early deadline (others had about 10 days to comply with this requirement). Of course, it was not possible to keep our entire apartment to ourselves but we could arrange for Uncle Gyula and Aunt Mariska with cousin Eva to move in with us. My father, as war invalid, was still entitled to a separate room all his own. Thus, the inevitable crowding and sharing of facilities was at least within the family.

I can well remember the rather jolting experience of first going out with the yellow star on April 3, 1944. How the affected Jews reacted to this medieval marking makes a poignant psychological study. At one extreme, there were a few suicides; one involved a business associate of my father whom I had known and liked very much. Mr. Dénes was a Captain of the reserve from World War I days and a veritable military nut. His apartment was full of decorative swords, halberds, muskets, and other martial paraphernalia and organizing jousts, duels, and the like was his favorite hobby. They found him on the morning of the first yellow star day in his full military uniform with all decorations, the yellow star sewed exactly over his heart and punctured by a bullet fired from a handgun held in his right hand.

At the other extreme were those who flaunted the yellow star, looking rather provocatively at passers-by, to see whether or not they could get a rise out of them. There were also those who tried to conceal the marking by holding a briefcase or package over it. The response of decent Gentiles was mostly discomfiture. People would just try to look away. Open sneers occurred occasionally, but they were not the rule. Sometimes, passersby would mutter something encouraging: I can remember that on the first yellow star day, when I was walking with Julia (her parents made a point of asking me to escort her) a man came up to us, fingered the yellow star on my coat, and said with a wink: "This fabric is inferior quality--it won't last!" After the novelty wore off, wearing the yellow star became no more traumatic than wearing a nametag at a professional meeting today, and among the Orthodox who had sidelocks and distinctive clothing anyway, it became something of a joke--"Do Gentiles really need this to tell I am Jewish?").

One could learn to live with the other restrictive ordinances as well. Almost everyone had Gentile acquaintances or neighbors to whom valuables could be entrusted; it was understood that they could keep the objects if the owner perished and were to return them if the owner survived the war. With negligible exceptions, this was the way it happened. Grocers would frequently hide some merchandise for their old-established Jewish customers. Of course, there was a flourishing black market and some Jews who were talented in wheeling-dealing, including my salesman uncle Gyula, could make out quite well in spite of the hard times.

Schools closed, and the University announced the early scheduling of the final examinations. I can remember going to the freshman final oral at the law school with the yellow star. There was absolutely no harassment; if anything people treated me with concern. I passed the examination (in fact, I did not do too badly on the section on Roman civil law). Soon thereafter, my military enlistment orders arrived and I was commanded to present myself for induction into the labor service on May 8, 1944 at the infantry barracks of Jászberény.

#### Labor Service in the Hungarian Army

Times had changed; 2-3 years earlier a conscription into the labor service was a dreaded disaster. Then, the labor battalions were typically taken to the Ukraine to perform behind-the-line services under German command. The officers put in charge were frequently sadist psychopaths specifically selected for their known cruelty, and serving under them was tantamount to a death sentence or worse. But the Ukraine was already surrendered to the advancing Russians; and within Hungary it was now the civilians who were subject to the Germans whereas the Hungarian army still operated under its own command. The Army was now almost like a shelter. I presented myself for induction with no bad forebodings, although my parents were filled with apprehension.

On the whole, my confidence was vindicated. The capricious hardships and petty harassments inflicted on us were no worse than those any new military recruit had to endure, and after a week or so of fussing with registrations, enlistment records, shifting individuals back and forth, and some pretty harebrained exercises in between, we were eventually organized into Labor Service Companies. The unit to which I became assigned was No.701/301, consisting about half-and-half of birth year groups 1902

and 1924. To our delight, we received orders to return to Budapest for rubble clearance duty after air raids, and some military warehouse work in between if time permitted.

Among the 20-year-olds, many of us knew each other already from school days and we were looking forward to become comrades-in-arms (or, as one wag put it, "comrades-in-shovels" as we were of course not armed). The administrative cadre assigned to us was a motley crew, to say the least. The commanding officer was Lieutenant Dósa, an absurdly obese young man of about 30, who tried to balance his distinctly un-military appearance with a clipped, harsh style. He was immediately surrounded by a coterie of sycophants who catered to his every whim and wish, from choice food and drink to choice prostitutes. We saw little of him throughout our service. The executive officer was Sergeant Tóth, a hopeless alcoholic in a virtually constant drunken daze. In his relatively sober moments he was not a bad sort, but these moments were increasingly rare and eventually nonexistent. The bizarre episodes attributable to his drunkenness became commonplace, but for the same reason the circumvention of his orders and getting away with basically forbidden acts were also easy. Among the other cadre personnel I remember Corporal Domonkos as just about the stupidest man I ever met in all my life. He must have had an IQ in the 70's; if one wanted to divert his attention or get out of unwanted assignments all one had to say was something like "Corporal, Sir, I just saw a fish walking in the yard"--whereupon Cpl. Domonkos would immediately rush out to investigate the phenomenon. He would come back 10 minutes later disappointed, and spend the rest of the day trying to hunt down the false informant and struggle with the task of putting him on report (the name of the culprit would be invariably reported to him as Woichodeburastenkowski or something similar). The one sensible person we had among our commanding cadre was Corporal Cseh, the cobbler of the village of Jászberény, who viewed the whole situation with wry amusement and did as little as possible, consistent with staying out of trouble.

With this kind of officer corps, it was a miracle that our company accomplished anything. Of course, people of our own moved into the command vacuum and even though labor servicemen were not supposed to be "promoted" even to the lofty rank of ordinary private, contingency arrangements were made and a new quasi-rank was created for labor servicemen in command positions, called "Deputy Supervisor". Under the leadership of the deputy supervisors we went about our tasks quite efficiently, and did some really valuable rescue work after air raids, as well as general cleanup of debris and restoration of utility services to the stricken areas.

Morale in the labor service was high for the circumstances. As long as the work required of us did not directly support the war effort of the Germans, there was no perceived conflict of interest and we made a special effort to display those virtues which according to prevailing propaganda we as Jews were not supposed to have: discipline, martial spirit, and ability to complete tough assignments. We wanted to be *soldiers*, and I am sure that in the whole Hungarian Army there was no snappier and more exacting performance of the roll call or of daily reports to the commanding officer than those staged by our deputy supervisors. We also wanted some of the romanticism of military life. One of us got permission to bring in his jazz accordion for playing daily reveille and taps on this instrument. Throughout our labor service, bugle calls on the jazz accordion signaled the opening

and closing of each day, and gave our military life a slightly surrealistic and ironic flavor.

We served in civilian clothes, and our "uniform" consisted of a military cap from which the Hungarian state escutcheon had been removed (this was intended as extra humiliation, implying that we were not deemed worthy of the honor of wearing this patriotic emblem). On the other hand, as members of the military, we did not have to wear the yellow star, either. Our military laborer status was indicated by a yellow armband to be worn on the left sleeve of our civilian jacket. By special intervention of the churches, converts were allowed to wear a white armband instead of the yellow armband (I suppose the white color was perceived as less humiliating). Our company consisted of two platoons of "yellow armbanders" and two platoons of "white armbanders". The latter were marched to church every Sunday; otherwise our treatment was the same, and on the whole, not too bad. We had better access to food than much of the civilian population, certainly the Jewish segment of it; and even though our diet was monotonous (typically, mutton goulash day after day) it was adequate. With the occasional exception of the crazy, inconsistent, drunken ravings of Sergeant Tóth, there were no significant cruelties. Generally, our "cadre" was content to be left alone and let the deputy supervisors run the show. On days when no emergency services were required we had to report to military warehouses or military hospitals to do odd jobs. In these institutions there were occasional officers inclined to maltreat labor servicemen but the general organization was chaotic enough so that it was sometimes possible to get lost or otherwise evade these characters.

As soon as news of our return to Budapest leaked out, there were of course attempts by our folks to see us or be with us. We were billeted in an elementary school on the outskirts of the city and it was not difficult for civilians to hang around and/or to follow our group movements. Julia distinguished herself by being among the first and most persistent to seek contact and of course her looks created a sensation. Soon she was known to virtually everyone in the company and thought of as a sort of regimental mascot. In her outgoing way she could make friends with some of our supervisory cadre and arrange to slip in a few times, and she and I could have a few priceless private moments together. There was absolutely no contest about her being the prettiest and also among the most loyal of anyone's girlfriends in the whole company. My prestige soared, and when at official visiting time on certain Sunday afternoons some other good-looking women also came to visit me (including on one occasion Barbara, who found out my whereabouts from my parents), my reputation as a ladies' man was established beyond doubt. In the informal and rather hilarious comradely association we had, called "The Tapirs", I became established as "Révész, the Miniature Bull". To tell the truth, I enjoyed the notoriety, deserved or not.

The one sensitive restriction to which we were subject, at least in theory, was the policy of absolutely no leaves. Since all of us were residents of Budapest, even a leave of a few hours would have been enough to visit our folks but such leaves were forbidden in principle. We were to be treated as prisoners, and all movement to and from work or other assignments was in closed formation, under armed guard of the "cadre". Of course, that's not quite the way it worked out in practice. We first learned to go AWOL from church service, then from the public bath where we were taken every fortnight, and finally from almost any place, including some work

situations. These AWOL excursions were of course not without risk. The armband had to be slipped off, the cap hidden, and one had to move about as a civilian. If a policeman or soldier one encountered on the street became suspicious, he could ask for ID papers and serious trouble could follow, but these incidents were rare. An alternate method of going AWOL was to organize armed guard for oneself, pretending to be taken to some kind of solo assignment or audience--a character like Corporal Domonkos could be tricked into providing official escort, thinking that he was taking the labor serviceman to answer a summons. More often, armed escort could be had for a few cigarettes or other form of payment. Naturally, these official-looking excursions were not completely without risk, either, and in any case there were not enough cadre soldiers available to satisfy demand. Simply slipping out as a civilian remained the most frequent method of "playing hooky". We could take surplus food and tobacco to our families, and of course just being with them in private for a few hours was a treat.

Of the fate that had befallen rural Jewry, we heard only rumors. It was generally known that great cruelties were visited on them in the transit camps and that the Germans had taken them by the freight-train-ful for "resettlement". I even saw a "Waldsee" postcard at a neighbor. Sinister stories abounded, but one did not know how much credibility to accord them. In Budapest, there were enough intermediary layers of officialdom between the occupiers and ourselves that there was no direct contact with the Germans, except in a few instances when we were scheduled to do labor in their barracks or official quarters. These job situations were generally not any worse than our other assignments.

#### October 15, 1944

By the end of the summer, the intensity of German occupation in Hungary had decreased somewhat. Military manpower was needed elsewhere to slow the retreat of the German army on all fronts; the deportations were halted and the Eichmann commando was recalled to other realms. In late August 1944, Regent Horthy had acquired enough maneuvering room to dismiss the slate of ministers foisted on him in March, and appoint a new Hungarian government with the confidential mandate to seek a way out of the war. Unfortunately, this task was pursued with a singular lack of sophistication. The Germans remained informed of everything, and could prepare their own countermeasures. When finally public announcement of Hungary's intent to ask for a cease-fire was made, the Germans were in a position to capture immediately all key positions in the country, to take the Regent and his family prisoner, and to continue with the war on Hungarian soil as if nothing had happened.

October 15, 1944 or just 2 days after my 20th birthday, was the fateful day. It was a Sunday, and I can remember that our platoon was summoned in the morning to some auxiliary duty in one of the military hospitals and dismissed from there prematurely by about 11 A.M. It looked like the perfect opportunity to go AWOL, and as the marching column was formed on the street for returning to our quarters, I slipped around a corner and made my way home. As I entered the apartment building where we lived I became immediately aware of a strange excitement all over the house. People were standing in clusters, some talking exuberantly, some listening to the sound of radios emitting from the few Gentile apartments remaining in the building. I soon learned that a proclamation of the Regent had just been read on the radio, in which he openly reproached the Germans for breaking their commitment with

respect to defense of the country and announced that Hungary had no other choice but to seek a cease-fire with our erstwhile adversaries. After a while the proclamation was rebroadcast and I heard it with my own ears. It was difficult to suppress supreme excitement. The Regent gave a brief and completely candid summary of recent historical events, including how Hungary was coerced into participating in the war; how Hungarian soldiers were used as expendable pawns on the front; and how the country was treacherously occupied in the spring by the Germans while he himself was lured out of the country and detained abroad. Specific mention was also made of the "well-known inhumane handling of the Jewish question". As for the future, the Regent concluded, "...I appeal to every honest Hungarian to follow me on this difficult road which is the only one that can lead to the salvation of our Fatherland".

People wept; embraced each other; some made theatrical gestures of tearing the yellow star from their clothing and throwing it into the garbage bin. There was general rejoicing and some hidden bottles of champagne were brought out, saved for just this occasion. A radio announcement followed, calling on all members of the military forces to await orders of their superiors. This was repeated several times, with the addition that no cease-fire was in effect as yet, and the war was still on. By about 2 P.M., an air raid was sounded but it was not clear whether the attacking planes were Allied or German--indeed, were there any attacking planes at all, or was it a fake? The radio played military marches. The Regent's proclamation was not repeated again. People waited, some with a bad foreboding; when the all-clear was given I decided to go back to our company quarters to see what was going on.

Nearly everyone was AWOL; in fact, it was not really AWOL this time because the cadre, themselves wondering what would come next, gave at least tacit consent for people to go home. By mid-afternoon many were beginning to trickle back. Some brought bad news about German troop movements they saw, and about bands of the Arrow Cross roaming the streets. A rumor circulated that maybe we were going to get arms and have a chance to fight the Germans. All we could do was sit tight and wait.

The Arrow Cross was the lunatic fringe of Hungarian politics: a mixture of ludicrously obtuse theorists and the most uncouth street rabble. They stood in such low esteem even with the Nazis that they were given no role in the puppet government formed after the German occupation. They were named after their emblem that was a variant of the swastika. Their "program" consisted of a wild hodge-podge of pseudo-Wagnerian naïve-romantic notions seemingly adapted to Hungarian conditions and called "Hungarism"; of blaming the Jews for all the ills of the world; and politically, currying favor with the Germans at any price, including military sacrifice of the country if needed for the German war plan. The time had come for the Germans to play this last card in Hungary.

By the morning of October 16 it was publicly announced that Regent Horthy had abdicated and a government of the Arrow Cross was in office. The war was being continued with all vigor on the side of our heroic German comrades-in-arms to the glorious final victory. Anyone talking about a cease-fire was to be instantly executed for high treason. Military personnel were to await orders of their superiors. The civilian population was urged to keep calm.

The next several weeks were a veritable nightmare for the entire country. Hungarian participation in the war was indeed continued in complete disregard of the national interest, but the only remaining war objective with any chance of realization was the "final solution" of the Jewish question. Adolf Eichmann and his staff descended on Budapest again to finish the job they had so reluctantly interrupted in the summer. Plans for a concentrated ghetto, enclosed behind walls, were drawn up but only people under 14 or over 60 were to be herded into it. Jews of working age were to be deported. However, Auschwitz was already closed and rolling stock was scarce. The answer was to shepherd Jews on foot to the west--a distance of about 150 miles to the Reich border. Towards the end of October, all civilian male Jews and a few days later all "Jewesses" within the mentioned age brackets were ordered to report with 3 days' supply of food and one small suitcase-ful of spare clothing to a large football field in Budapest for "resettlement". The male group was relatively small since most men were in the service, but the gathering of the women was a pitiful sight of epic proportions. About one-half to two-thirds of the affected persons complied; the alternative was to go into hiding for an indeterminate period and risk being shot if found. Dependable hiding places were scarce and cooperating Gentiles risked their own lives. Feeding hidden persons was tantamount to depriving oneself of rations that were already meager. Well over a hundred thousand people reported to the collection point as required by the directive. Throughout the month of November 1944 the Budapest-Vienna highway was one immense moving carpet of wretched humanity, dragging their suitcases and dragging themselves, amongst shouts and proddings of accompanying Arrow Cross brutes who were driving the people as if they were animals. The highway was said to have been strewn with the corpses of marchers who could not keep up and were "put out of their misery". My cousins Erzsi and Eva were among the marchers; my girlfriend Julia was among the marchers; innumerable other friends and friends' friends were among the marchers. I had the chance opportunity to meet Eva on her way to the collection point. She fell around my neck, weeping. It was the last time I saw her.

The question of what to do in these circumstances was not an easy one. Being in a closed army unit was no longer the relative refuge it had been, and everybody knew that our turn to be deported could not be far off. It was to be a race between the murderous efficiency of the Nazis and the military progress of the war. The Russians were perhaps 25 miles away to the east of Budapest and on quiet, dark nights one could hear and see the cannonade at the front. Some thought that they could sit out the turn of the tide in hiding, and in the days following the Arrow Cross takeover several fellows vanished from our company quarters including, for a total of 2 days, myself.

My abortive attempt at going into hiding was entirely the brainchild of my mother. We had some old family friends, the Gardons, who owned a small factory on the outskirts of Budapest, called the Hungarian Iron and Metal Works. I think they mentioned during a visit some months prior, in an entirely offhand and noncommittal way, that if need be one could probably hide out somewhere in their plant. Now my mother decided that it was time to take them at their word. The question was, how to penetrate the layers of clerks and servants at the Gardons' office and adjacent home, respectively, without arousing suspicion--and my mother turned in a true bravura performance. She dressed up as a peasant woman, with ethnic skirt and babushka, and identified herself to the maid answering the Gardons' doorbell in her best country brogue as a former servant who was on a visit from the provinces and wanted

to say hello to the Mistress. Mrs. Gardon came out, puzzled, and after the initial surprise she immediately understood the situation. She took in the "old servant" to talk, and it was agreed that I was to come to a side door of the plant at 3:00 A.M. the same night to be smuggled in. I came, was met by Mr. Gardon as agreed, and was taken to the loft of an abandoned toolshed, approachable only through a removable long ladder from the outside. I climbed up, set myself up in a corner in as cozy a fashion as possible, and went to sleep.

The problem was, the logistics of the whole hiding operation was not thought out in sufficient detail. I was equipped with warm clothing, sleeping bag, food and water as if I were going on a boy scout excursion but even such elementary requirements as a means to relieve myself without fouling up my quarters were not available. By afternoon of the first day I was getting distinctly uncomfortable and could hardly wait for the yard below the entrance opening to become sufficiently abandoned for me to be able to urinate down in a huge arc--had anyone observed, it would have been quite a sight. Late at night, I heard commotion: Mr. Gardon was coming with the ladder to spirit me down for a spell of rest. At last I had opportunity to refresh myself and seldom has a cup of hot tea with some sandwiches hit the spot more perfectly than the one I had in the Gardons' living room that night. We also had opportunity to talk over this whole situation. The toilet problem was easily solved with bucket and chamber pot, but other grave problems remained. It could not be overlooked, even assuming all the good will in the world, that the whole arrangement was a frightful imposition on the host family and fraught with terrible dangers for everyone. The existence of the loft was not easily concealable and in case of a thorough search I was as good as trapped up there. The question of benefit/risk had to be asked, and I suggested to the Gardons to get in touch with one of my closest buddies in the labor service, Ervin Fenyö, to get news about the situation there. Then I returned to the loft for another uneventful night and day.

Next evening when I was again spirited down, my buddy Ervin, ever the Grand Master of AWOL, was already there. The news he brought about the circumstances at company quarters was not alarming. Life was going on pretty much as before. Our company commanding officer, Lt. Dósa, was heard to make noises about doing what he could to save his men from deportation. Many of the labor servicemen who stayed out during the first day or two of the Arrow Cross takeover were coming back, and Ervin strongly recommended that course of action for me also. General confusion was still thorough enough so that, if I returned promptly, my absence would not even be noticed. It was not a difficult decision to accept this advice, to the obvious immense relief of the Gardons. We were treated to a sumptuous "farewell" supper, following which Martha Gardon, daughter of the house and a budding concert pianist, gave us a memorable rendition of Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata in as perfect an instance of escapist entertainment as I ever had the chance to listen to. Afterward, Ervin and I walked back to company quarters, climbed back in through the customary AWOL route, and continued with the labor service.

In the following days, all civil order in Budapest, even the repressive kind in force during the summer, ceased completely. Armed bands of Arrow Cross hoodlums were roaming the streets freely, accosting passers-by at will, and trying to find out if they were disguised Jews--human life was cheap and there was no such thing as benefit of the doubt. Genital inspection of "suspicious-looking" males was carried out in the open street, with the most vulgar mockery and sneers imaginable, and any Gentile who was

circumcised for medical reasons had better carry airtight documentation of that fact on his person. Jewish houses and other dwellings that somehow came under suspicion were searched and re-searched for hidden persons and/or hidden valuables. It was just as well that I did not remain hidden in the Gardons' loft. I understand that the premises were searched several times and in all probability I would have been found, with dire consequences to myself as well as them. Jews generally learned how it felt to be hunted animals in open season, and even for the general populace it became an absurdly burdensome situation. Apprehensive as the Hungarians were about being overrun by Soviet troops, the general sentiment was growing to have it over with as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, the westward movement of the front in the area of Budapest was slow.

The diplomatic community stationed in Budapest, representatives of the few neutral countries left, looked on in anguish. There was no longer anyone left to whom to protest. Eichmann and the Hungarian Arrow Cross were obviously not interested. It was a young attaché at the Swedish Legation in Budapest, Raoul Wallenberg, who came up with the idea of making the persecuted, or as many of them as possible, into citizens or quasi-citizens of neutral countries and thus exempting them from local jurisdiction. The action first involved people having genuine Swedish connections, then extended to others who *knew* people with Swedish connections, and finally it encompassed anyone who could be reached and given a Swedish passport. As the numbers grew larger than available blank passport supplies at the legation, a hastily printed fancy certificate with a large Swedish coat of arms, plenty of rubber stamps, and official signatures was substituted, attesting that the bearer was a citizen, or a designated citizen, or otherwise under full protection of the Kingdom of Sweden (the wording on this point was deliberately diffuse) and demanding cooperation from all to whom it may concern, to honor this status until "repatriation" could be effectuated.

The amazing thing is that the scheme worked. The Germans had always retained respect for bureaucratic formalities and the certificates were impressive-looking. Even more importantly, Wallenberg himself learned to affect the arrogant military style with fast steps, speaking in the manner of barking commands, looking severely into the eyes of the interlocutor like a man who knows what he is doing and is not inclined to take a No for an answer. He could step up to an Arrow Cross gang about to search a Jewish house, hang the Swedish coat of arms over the yellow star at the entrance, and tell them in no uncertain terms that they had no business in this building because it was extraterritorial. Of course, none of the Arrow Cross had the faintest idea what that meant--all they could see was an authoritatively acting young man, apparently of some importance, speaking German, and few had the presence of mind to oppose him. Wallenberg could and did do the same when he saw, or heard of, Jews being arrested on the street, always making his case with dash, the element of surprise, and the air of authority. He used a conspicuously beflagged Swedish embassy car to follow the marchers on the Budapest-Vienna road, handed out as many protective passes as possible, and then set up a "road block" where people with the passes were ordered to step aside and wait for "special transport". Guards were brusquely informed that he was taking charge of these prisoners by order of the Ministry of Diplomacy, or General So-and-So, or some other imaginary office or person. Occasionally, a pack of foreign cigarettes or a can of meat was slipped to a guard to pacify him. Hundreds, or according to some accounts thousands, of people were pulled out of the death marches and rescued this way during

the several hours it took to find someone with high enough authority to stop Wallenberg. Raoul Wallenberg's name soon became a legend among the Jews of Budapest.

The other legations soon followed suit. By the beginning of November, the Swiss, the Spanish, the Portuguese, and even the Holy See issued protective passes or official letters of varying wording and varying outward impressiveness but all stating that the bearer was under full protection of a neutral power and enjoyed extraterritoriality while sojourning in Hungary. Effectiveness of the passes was enormously increased if accompanied by appropriate bluff and bluster. Unfortunately, there was only one Wallenberg. Nonetheless, these documents frequently helped somewhat.

It happened that our entire labor service company, in view of some half of us being Catholic converts, received protection from the Holy See. Each of us was furnished with a letter on the official stationery of the Apostolic Nunciature of Budapest, on which a typewritten text listed name and personal data and stated that the person so identified was under protection of the Holy See. Each certificate was personally signed by Msgr. Angelo Rotta, Papal Nuncio, and stamped with an immense round seal displaying the Papal Crown, keys of St. Peter, and inscription in Latin. They looked good. Many of us resolved to carry the protective letter on our persons at all times, but others thought that too risky. At that point, even closed formations of labor servicemen moving on the street to or from work under guard were not immune from being stopped, harassed, and in some cases captured and carried off by Arrow Cross detachments. If an Arrow Cross man simply tore up a document presented to him, the loss seemed irreparable. Some of us assumed the expense of having notarized photocopies made of the protective letters and carried only these copies on our persons, with the original in a safe hiding place. This created some unforeseen complications when groups of our people were accosted by the Arrow Cross. The examining "officer", frequently barely literate, would notice that two kinds of protective documents were being handed to him and if he understood that some were originals and some were copies, he sometimes decided to honor only the originals on the ground that in the photocopying process, even if notarized, there might have been room for a Jewish swindle. Ironically, the opposite also happened on occasion and in one such incident I became personally involved.

Niggardly as I always was (and still am) with avoidable petty expenditures, I was among those who carried the protective letter on their persons in the original. One day the inevitable happened: a squad of us marching on the street returning from work, escorted by Corporal Cseh, was stopped by an Arrow Cross patrol and herded into the courtyard of a nearby building for "inspection". Everyone was ordered to empty their pockets. Corporal Cseh protested valiantly on our behalf and told the Arrow Cross men that we were under protection of the Holy See. A protective letter was produced which happened to be of the notarized copy variety, and handed over as proof of our protected status.

The Arrow Cross men were visibly impressed. They looked at the round seal of the Apostolic Nuncio in awe, conferred with each other in whisper, and one of them pointed approvingly to the second round seal on the document displaying the Hungarian State escutcheon of the Notary, under the typed footnote "A True Copy". The document was handed back and it seemed that we were going to be let off. However, one of the Arrow Cross men insisted on

checking everyone's protective letter individually. When my turn came the man noted that mine was not notarized.

"Why does yours not say "A True Copy?"

"Sir, it's not a copy at all. It's the original."

"I want none of your Jewish smartalecking. The documents of the others are endorsed by a Hungarian official and yours is not. You come with us." The same happened to the 3 or 4 other fellow labor servicemen who also carried the original and no protesting or attempting to explain did any good. We were taken to some sort of militia headquarters under constant prodding with loaded rifles and the whole situation was beginning to look scary. Fortunately, our company commanding officer was immediately alerted by Corporal Cseh and he successfully intervened with the higher military authorities. The same evening, after no more than a few worrisome hours, we were returned to our unit. Not everyone was so lucky. In another such case, 15 of our young fellow labor servicemen including some of the most delightful and popular kids in our platoon, were capriciously arrested in a similar scenario. Tragically, in that case the intervention came too late and the young men were summarily executed on treason charges. The group included George Komlós and Tom Lichtig, two close personal friends of mine. There was no public account of their sentencing and apparently no formal hearing at all. According to one story, an English-language paperback book found on one of the young men was a factor in the charges pressed against them. The book was the selected plays of George Bernard Shaw.

Tragi-comedy abounded in every aspect of daily life but one was no longer inclined to laugh. I can remember reading the Budapest newspapers at that time and shaking my head in dumbfounded amazement. The near-total illiteracy of the "journalists" and their surrealistic preoccupation with the reorganization of Hungarian life after the glorious conclusion of the war against the Judeo-Capitalist Bolsheviks had to be seen to be believed. I can remember the purported family tree charts of Churchill and Roosevelt, showing the Jewish element in their ancestry; Roosevelt's real name was supposed to have been Rosenfeld, changed in order to mislead the naïve American voter. Other questions discussed in all seriousness included, for instance, whether having intercourse with a Jew would defile the blood of an Aryan woman for all time, or was it possible to recover from this condition? If it wasn't (as it was suggested), what degree of Jewishness would subsequent offspring of the same woman have if the latter were fathered by a non-Jew? Alternately, what about the illegitimate son of an Aryan woman who got married to a Jew after the birth? Various "authorities" were interviewed to express opinions on these problems. Fancy pseudointellectual essays were printed on the deleterious effects of Jewish influence on the human condition. One phrase that sticks in my mind was in a piece on Jewish mentality, concluding with the statement: "...The two most preposterous expressions of Jewish insolence are Nudism and the Theory of Relativity."

Many of us were resolved to stick it out in the relative safety of our labor service quarters as long as possible but to go into hiding and await the arrival of the Russians when and if the attempt was made to deport us. As it turned out, these resolves were for the most part naïve. Our persecutors, moronic as they were as human beings, were not altogether fools when it came to methodology of the hunt. On the morning of November 27, 1944, we were awakened by a totally strange armed crew. Our usual military cadre

was summarily relieved in the middle of the night and a new commanding officer, completely unknown to all of us, ordered us to "get ready for transfer to a new workplace". We found all carefully prepared escape routes through climbable walls or abandoned windows blocked by gun-toting sentries. Under heavy guard we were marched to a suburban freight train depot and loaded there, under mixed German/Arrow-Cross-Hungarian supervision, into railroad cattle cars. Some of us had visions of the Papal Nuncio arriving at the depot in all splendor and Wallenberg-style fury, denouncing the transgression of authority by the wagon loaders and ordering us back to our quarters. These were futile dreams. Nobody arrived, and anyone foolish enough to protest with protective pass in hand got beaten with rifle butts. About 100 persons were packed into a wagon--barely enough room for our knapsacks on the floor and for us to sit on top of them. A bucket of water and an empty bucket to serve as toilet were tossed into each car and the wagons sealed from the outside. The denouement of our encounter with Nazi persecution was finally at hand.

C H A P T E R   F I V E

-----  
 N A Z I   P E R S E C U T I O N :   T H E   E N D   P H A S E  
 -----

BY NOVEMBER 1944 the war had entered its terminal phase. Allied armies were standing on Germany's borders on all sides, cutting off her mineral and agricultural resources needed to wage war. I wonder if there was any sober person left in Europe who at that time still honestly believed in German victory. The only question was, will the Western powers enter Germany and Central Europe first, or the Russians?

It was against this background that the last great German counter-offensive was launched. Amazingly, it was directed against the Western allies in the Ardennes mountains. The "Battle of the Bulge" as it was later called, cost 125,000 German casualties and it slowed down the advance of the Western allies by about a month, while the Russian advance in the East progressed essentially unchecked. But for the Battle of the Bulge, there would have been only one Germany in the post-war years and the political map of Europe would have looked very different.

Historians have been trying to fathom Hitler's motive for this decision ever since. It has been suggested that perhaps he counted on the British and the Americans, pressed by the military situation, to agree to a separate cease-fire and subsequent joint attack on the Russians, but I am unable to impute that much naïveté even to Hitler. More likely, he considered Soviet occupation, rather than occupation by the Western powers, to be the appropriate punishment of the German nation for losing the war. Mesmerized by Hitler, the Germans were rushing to their own ruin like a horde of crazed lemmings. Unfortunately, figuratively speaking, they were still herding the Jews before themselves on the road to destruction.

Deportation

According to an old saying, it is better to ride poorly than to walk well, and I suppose it was a good break that some cattle cars were found for our deportation rather than being herded on foot like the civilian deportees. Evidently, the demoralizing effect on the general population who had to witness the ordeal was too great, to say nothing of the potential for Wallenberg-style disruptions. A train trip was clearly less disruptive as far as the authorities were concerned and for us it was miserable enough.

We remained locked up in that cattle car for three full days, during which we negotiated altogether 150 miles. Most of the time our train was standing, shunted to a siderail, while the main track was used for military traffic. Every few hours our train would make a small advance and then stand again, mostly at the edge or outskirts of freight depots. Through a little barred window in our wagon, one of us could peek out and observe the scene. During the stops the train was patrolled by Arrow Cross sentries who would chase away any passers-by who sometimes stopped and viewed our train with interest. By the middle of the second day we ran out of water and some of our look-outs would loudly plead for water; we could hear similar voices

from the other wagons as well. These pleas were completely ignored by the guards. Once an old woman approached the train with a jug of water, obviously intent on offering it to us but she was not allowed to do it. Another time we saw a priest looking at the train, and talking to one of the guards. Some hopes soared; maybe he is an emissary of the Papal Nuncio, coming to assert our protected status! Nothing of the sort happened. After exchanging a few words with the guard, the priest walked away.

Worse than the water shortage, as far as I was concerned, was the stench from the toilet bucket. I happened to be sitting pretty close to it. Several of us tried to devise a way to empty the bucket through the barred window but that was not physically possible. Pleading with the guards regarding this or any other question was completely fruitless. Perhaps they had orders not to converse with us because all of them, station after station, simply pretended not to hear. By the third day, patience was wearing thin and tempers were beginning to flare. At that point, we had spent two nights in the wagon with some dozing in a sitting position at best but no real sleep, and we had been without water for 24 hours. The toilet bucket was overflowing and when the train started or stopped, its contents sloshed wildly into the laps of people around it. At some point the toilet was "declared closed" and we exhorted each other to be disciplined and hold our bladders and intestines as befits a real man. Needless to say, these efforts had highly variable success and the inside of our wagon was beginning to assume a truly abysmal character.

We crossed the Hungarian-German border at dusk of the third day and at the first German station, Zurndorf, the train stopped, wagons were opened, and we were ordered to get out, with mess kits. From a large field kitchen receptacle, some kind of soup or slop was being dispensed. The station loudspeaker blared music, and at some point a voice actually bid us "welcome" in German to labor service in the Reich, in one of the more bizarre incongruities within my memory. German soldiers of some regular army unit were staffing the food distribution and doing the guard duty. They were businesslike, not particularly unfriendly, and they answered questions although they did not know much regarding our destination. They allowed people to relieve themselves at a nearby slagheap and we were allowed to empty the toilet bucket and refill the water bucket. The contrast with the boorish attitude of the Hungarian Arrow Cross guards at previous stops was strong, and several of us were reminded of Prince Metternich's contemptuous hundred-year-old dictum that "Asia begins at the Leitha river" [i.e., the Austro-Hungarian border].

Whether the food given to us was good or bad I don't even remember. Most of us were not hungry; we all had some food with us in the wagon that was shared freely, and I even had a spoonful or two of such delicacies as fruit preserves and marmalade from fellow deportees who wanted to use up these supplies in the assumption that they might be taken from us. From about day two in the wagon, the hygienic conditions alone were enough to discourage hunger. Nonetheless we all ate, not knowing what would come next.

After a pause of perhaps an hour at Zurndorf, we were reloaded into the railroad cars. My turn at the window came and I noted that we were branching off the Budapest-Vienna railroad line in a southerly direction. We passed the town of Neusiedl-am-See and by about 10 P.M. we arrived at a major railroad station that turned out to be Sopron, Hungary! We had re-crossed the border into Hungary. The wagons were opened again, we were

ordered to get out with all gear, and organized into marching columns. There were thousands of us; the "Tapirs" (young members of our labor service company in Budapest) made an effort to stay together but that was not always possible as the German guards herded the people into formation. We must have constituted a marching column a mile long as we trotted through the city and countryside under heavy guard, for about 2 hours. We reached the village of Fertörákos, a place I had known from a childhood excursion. Fertörákos is a picturesque little village of a few hundred inhabitants, with whitewashed houses surrounded by pretty green hills and vineyards. A swampy-reedy area to the east leads into the Neusiedler (Fertö) Lake that in that direction has no distinct shoreline. The area is famous as a waterbird sanctuary. The populace is mostly vintners, farmers, dairy producers, and virtually every house in the village had a cowshed attached to it, as well as a barn in the rear. It was into these barns that we were distributed now, about 30 persons to a barn, and told to rest.

After 3 days in the wagon and a stiff 2-hour march, that was not hard to do. The barns had straw piled in a corner and we just crashed on it as we were, near total exhaustion. It was already about midnight. Next morning at daybreak, groups of German officials in khaki uniforms with swastika armbands went from barn to barn to raise us, taking a headcount, and appointing in each barn a "Jupo" (apparently, abbreviation for Juden-Polizei, i.e. Jew-Police) who was to be the conduit of commands for each group and responsible for his men. Our belongings were examined and anything regarded as superfluous was taken away, including second jackets or overcoats; second pairs of shoes; more than one extra set of underwear; more than one blanket; and of course all money and valuables. My pocketknife was considered in the latter category and confiscated. Some clothing or blankets were redistributed to deportees whose equipment was judged deficient, in a Robin Hood-esque gesture of "social justice". Then, the Jupos were summoned to an orientation meeting.

I looked around our group of deportees; eight of the 30 were young men of our labor service company in Budapest, "Tapirs". The others were as mixed a group of people as imaginable, ranging in age from 20 to 60 and in social standing from dignified urban professionals to veritable tramps. Although all of us were rounded up in Budapest, not all were Budapesters. There were a few traditional religious Jews from the East and I witnessed, for the first time in my life, the astonishing spectacle of an angry man talking person-to-person to his God. One of these colorful religious characters stepped forward, looked up to heavens with legs astride, and lifted his fist in a furious, menacing gesture.

"Hey you up there" he shouted. "Do you hear me? What is this again?! Have you not had enough yet?" He repeated louder, with his voice breaking into a sob. "Have you not had enough yet?! What have we done? What kind of God are you? When is this going to end?!" He broke down in an uncontrollable fit of sobbing while his companions restrained and consoled him.

Among the others in our group were two middle-aged lawyers; two young engineers; a high school teacher of mathematics; a waiter from a working-class eatery; several more or less nondescript characters; and two highly vulgar young men conspicuous for shabby appearance and lack of personal hygiene even among the lot of us. Obviously, at that point, after 3 days in the railroad cars, no one of us was exactly "presentable". We were eagerly awaiting word from our returning "Jupo" regarding our further fate.

We learned that we were at our intended destination and would stay in the barns as presently distributed while doing fortification work in the fields as directed. We were going to get "sufficient alimentation" and there was to be no maltreatment as long as we worked honestly. All attempt at contact with the local populace was strictly forbidden, all "unnecessary" movement within the village was strictly forbidden, and even addressing our uniformed guards without being spoken to first was strictly forbidden. We were to communicate any concerns we had only through the Jupo. As for trying to escape, we could forget it--the village was said to be surrounded by troops who would shoot stragglers on sight.

The afternoon of November 30 was spent getting organized. Personnel counts were made and repeated, crews for staffing the kitchen, tool depot, sick bay were assigned. It occurred to me that getting such a job might be a relatively good deal but by the time I had a chance to volunteer it was too late--these spots were filled quickly, and mostly with "wheeler-dealers" who could somehow curry favor with the authorities. We were allowed to make our habitation in the barns as comfortable as possible. At about 30 people to a barn, the available space was not overcrowded and loose straw was plentiful. However, other amenities were lacking, including toilet facilities or any access to water. The 8 "Tapirs" in our group attempted to stay together and we established ourselves in a relatively secluded corner. We found out that a larger group of Tapirs was housed in the neighboring barn. Later we also learned that every village in the general area: Balf, Harka, Kópháza, Nagycenk, and several others along the German-Hungarian border were filled to capacity in a similar fashion with Jewish deportees from Budapest. We as a group received mention 20 years later at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem as the 50,000 "Schanz-Juden" [Trench-Jews] who were collected at Eichmann's orders in Budapest for building the "Südostwall" [South-east wall] for the defense of Vienna, and housed and worked there under "inhumane conditions". As will be seen, that was put quite mildly.

It should be mentioned that escape from this situation was not impossible but it required clever timing, self-confidence, and luck. There were a few of us who managed to escape already in Budapest, during the march to the railroad depot. What it took was readiness to exploit the rare moments when the guards were distracted, and ability to blend into the street scene afterward. A friend of mine who marched right in front of me, Andrew Györi, could do just that: at one point he suddenly dropped his knapsack, stepped out of the marching column and speedily turned into a side street. By the time I resolved to follow suit the opportunity was gone. According to rumors, later confirmed, two Tapirs, Ervin Mohay and Peter Ambrus, escaped from a sealed railroad car by being able to dismantle a floorboard and slip through while the train was moving. Finally, and most joltingly to me personally, my buddy Ervin Fenyö disappeared from Fertőrákos during our first day there, and without confiding his plans to me. The eight Tapirs in our barn were down to seven, and I had the wistful duty of presiding over the distribution of his belongings left behind. True to his reputation as the quintessential wheeler-dealer, we found such rare treasures in his knapsack as real coffee beans and real sticks of vanilla--great rarities in Europe in the 6th year of the war. Doubtless he carried them as a form of currency, and left them behind because the opportunity to bolt must have come too suddenly.

It is worth noting that all the above mentioned escapees made it back to their folks to Budapest, went into hiding, and survived the war. Ervin Fenyő, for instance, had the nerve to stop an eastbound military convoy of German army units, introduce himself as a Hungarian Hitler-youth-leader trying to get back to Budapest, and ask for a lift. He was given one and he figured correctly that as rider in a German military vehicle, he was not likely to be challenged at roadblocks. He arrived back in Budapest safely and parted from his German transportation hosts on most cordial terms. The possible timespan for this type of breakout was understandably short; word of the presence of all these hordes of Jewish slave laborers was spreading fast, and after a few days in the Fertőrákos barns our hygienic appearance alone was to become a giveaway. Furthermore, there was the question of "looking Jewish" in terms of contemporary caricaturing. Whether I had a "Turkish skull" or not, I was far from reassured on this point and I judged that an escape attempt for me was too risky. Perhaps I simply lacked the daring; it is a sad fact that I, like most others, succumbed to the primitive instinct of seeking safety in numbers and preferred to huddle together like so many terrified sheep.

#### Slave Labor on the Southeast Wall

We commenced our slave labor at daybreak on December 1, 1944 and continued without a single rest day to the end of March 1945. Sundays, holidays, including Christmas day, were full workdays like any other, from sunup to sundown. Our work was ditch digging; we started with a network of trenches for foot soldiers across the vineyard hills of the neighborhood, then proceeded to dig a huge tank trap in the plains, and finally a series of underground bunkers. To the best of my knowledge, these fortifications were never used. By the time the Russians reached the area in April 1945, the German army was in tumultuous retreat and the European war was all but over.

Work was strenuous, and getting more so in the course of the winter as the soil froze deeper and deeper. Supervision was relentless. A prescribed segment had to be completed by each group each day, but it may well be said that our slave drivers were more than just efficient. I remember especially one, a middle-aged man with a club foot, whom we nicknamed (in loose translation) "The Fruitcake" because he was a veritable madman. He walked with crutches but could move along with astonishing swiftness and he used his crutches as much for beating as for locomotion. When he worked himself into one of his rages he would literally foam at the mouth while emitting guttural roars like a bloodthirsty animal. There were many others who became notorious for their cruelty, and even the civilian inhabitants of the village were allowed to vent their frustration on us. I can remember the first week of digging the trenches through the vineyards when an infuriated civilian, obviously owner of the vineyard, rushed up. He was yelling, cussing, lashing out left and right with a stick, and cursing us for ruining his property. Our uniformed guard was standing close by and looked on the scene with a chuckle. No attempt was made to stop the raging owner, but if anyone stopped digging in response to his outbursts he was severely beaten by the guard. If he resumed digging, he was beaten by the owner. This continued with various victims for maybe 15 minutes, to the obvious amusement of the guard. Finally, the owner walked away angrily, muttering more verbal abuse to himself.

Just exactly who our guards were was initially unclear. The uniforms were neither Army nor SS; all were khaki with red swastika armband but there

were variances in cut and cap form. First we thought that these signified rank but there did not seem to be a coherent system. Eventually, the guards turned out to be just members of the Vienna Nazi Party specifically recruited for this job and grabbing whatever uniforms happened to be available in the Party basement. In time, these were augmented by the "ethnic SS" (SS troops recruited in the occupied countries from supposedly German stock but frequently speaking only broken German) and by young kids in Hitler-Jugend uniforms. The village commandant's name in Fertörákos was Hübner. He was a harsh, cruel, utterly pitiless man who looked upon us as so many animals, completely expendable. Most of his deputies were of similar ilk. Throughout our 4-month stay in Fertörákos, I know of virtually no instance of informal conversation or other fraternization between any guard personnel and deportee. In fact, we were not even allowed to offer military honors. From the labor service in the Hungarian Army, we were accustomed to snap to attention when talked to, with head held high and hand lifted to the cap in military salute. Such demeanor only brought beatings, or at best contemptuous reprimands, from our new supervisors. The required posture when talked to was to remove cap and crouch--sort of in theatrical imitation of a Shylock or other medieval usurer in front of his feudal lord.

As far as our slave drivers were concerned, we were a nameless horde. No personal records of any sort were kept, only headcounts. In addition to muster every morning, there were also nightly checks at which the guards would go from barn to barn with flashlights, shouting and cursing while making the count, and kicking bodies on the ground back and forth as if we were cornsacks. A few times monthly we were ordered to get up in the middle of the night and submit to surprise searches. At least one of these searches was clearly "unofficial": a few young hoodlums from the village got themselves a rifle or two, put on some swastika armbands, and came to loot. Any relatively attractive piece of attire such as an overcoat or pair of shoes in good condition was simply taken away. There was no place to go and complain. Once again, we were like trapped game in open season.

We had virtually no contact with the villagers. Obviously, our mere presence was a frightful imposition on them. Their general attitude was to try to ignore us. Irrational displays of hostility as from the vineyard owner were uncommon, but any show of compassion or attempt at help would have been impractical on account of our numbers alone. The count of slave laborers exceeded the regular population of the village by about a factor of 10. I can remember bartering the coffee beans and vanilla sticks from the Fenyő legacy for a couple of pieces of corn cakes during the first week or so; later during the winter when the weather had turned bitter cold, we received permission to go into the cowshed in groups of 10 for an hour each evening, to soak up a little warmth from the cow. That was the extent of our contact with our "landlords". To my knowledge, not one of us was ever invited to step inside human living quarters.

On Christmas Eve I went to midnight mass to the Fertörákos village church. In view of war regulations, the midnight mass was held on the evening of December 24, and although deportees were not supposed to move around freely, this rule was not strictly enforced and there was no problem reaching the church. Quite frankly, it was not religious fervor that drove me there. It was a distraction, and there was always the vague hope that maybe a villager would be touched by the Christmas spirit and ask me in, and/or give me something to eat. Something like a dozen other deportees also came, probably driven by the same sentiment although there were a few native

Christians among us as well. We stood in the back of the church that was filled to capacity. After the service, we lingered. The villagers ignored us as if we were invisible. They wished merry Christmas to each other and went home, without so much as looking at us. Next day, Christmas, was a regular working day with regular rations. Not even an extra crumb of bread was given to celebrate the holiday.

Among our physical deprivations, hunger was the most severe. Our "adequate alimentionation" consisted of a clear hot broth in the morning (probably little more than the dishwater from rinsing the kettles after the main meal of the previous night) and a slop in the evening, consisting of some legumes, beets, and whatever greens happened to be available; and once or twice a week, some horsemeat. Also in the evening, we received our bread ration of one loaf (about 1½ lbs.) for every three men. There was no lunch, but we did have a 30-minute noon break at work and whoever had anything to eat, could eat it.

Obviously, there is no point to waste even a word on food quality. As for quantity, my best retrospective estimate is that we had a total of maybe 7-800 calories on most days; perhaps up to 1,000 on the days with the horsemeat. This was less than 1/3 of the normal requirement of the body with the kind of heavy labor we were doing. Serious starvation set in at about 2 weeks after our arrival in Fertőrákos. Whatever food or barter objects we could rescue through the searches lasted a few days, and it took approximately 10 days for the glycogen reserves of the liver and the lipid reserves of the fat pads in the normal human body to become depleted. By mid-December, hunger was overwhelming and for a normal civilized human essentially indescribable. Fortunately for modern Mankind, we no longer know under normal conditions what real hunger is. When one says today colloquially, "I am so starved I could eat a horse" what we really mean is that we have appetite. Much later in life I had opportunity to read Knut Hamsun's celebrated novel, "Hunger", supposedly the best literary description of this condition. I had to conclude that Knut Hamsun did not know what real hunger was, either. He was writing about appetite, only a little more sustained than normal. Physiologically, appetite means hypoglycemia (dropping blood sugar) that activates special neuronal centers to trigger interest in food. Even if the hypoglycemia causes compensatory vasodilatation of the cranial vessels, giving one a headache, that is still essentially only "appetite". *Hunger* is a different sensation. It develops only during sustained starvation lasting long enough for all body reserves to be used up and it is no longer characterized by hypoglycemia. The feeling of "appetite" is gone; even the headache is gone. In their place comes a gnawing, self-wasting feeling that perhaps originates from the body burning up its own structural elements for fuel. Muscular lassitude sets in; normal movements become an effort; thoughts completely revolve around food with such intensity that it becomes difficult to focus on anything else. When old friends met on the streets or alleyways of Fertőrákos after work, the typical reply to a "Hi, how are ya?" was "Hungry." Conversation or reminiscences were exclusively about food, and the sexual fantasies of a normal young man were completely replaced by fantasies about food.

I personally was constantly on the prowl every evening for food. There were occasional scraps on rubbish heaps here and there but opportunities to find anything substantial were few and far between. I have recollection of maybe half-a-dozen times during our 4-month stay in Fertőrákos when I could steal a whole beet or carrot through a half-open kitchen window or

help myself surreptitiously to an extra messcup-ful of the evening slop when the guards were looking the other way. Sometimes it was possible to snatch an ear or two of the hardened corn strung up in happier days to decorate the courtyard gateways of the village. Once, just once, when I was loitering in the courtyard where the guards' mess was located, looking for maybe some consumables in the garbage, one of the guards stepped out, looked around, and beckoned to me. My first impulse was to run; being where I was, was in itself prohibited. But something in his demeanor made me approach, with my messcup held out. The guard, not otherwise known for friendliness to the deportees, must have had an upset stomach. He poured what appeared to be his own dinner into my messcup--a nice portion of baked beans! There was also an unbelievable 4-inch piece of sausage on his plate, and it first looked like he was going to retain the sausage; the donation was spectacularly magnificent even without it. But in the end he added the sausage to my cup! I couldn't believe my eyes. I muttered some words of thanks and ran--honestly, my first impulse was to rush back to our barn and share my riches with my Tapir friends. But our barn was relatively far, and walking through the village with a steaming messcup in hand offered poor prospects for making it without being robbed en route. Also, the temptation of a full portion of delicious food, the first before me for at least two months (this episode occurred towards the end of January), was too strong. I sat down at the first suitable dark corner and ate the dinner to the last grain, sausage and all. It was the one and only time in Fertörákos that I retired with a full stomach. Characteristically, when I recounted this event to my friends with whom I wanted to share my luck, nobody believed me. The general reaction was that I had become so overwrought mentally that I could no longer differentiate between fantasies and reality.

The next biggest problem was housing and hygiene. As luck would have it, the winter of 1944/45 in Central Europe was a harsh one. No one who did not live through it is likely to understand what it means to spend a whole winter, 24 hours of every day, virtually outdoors--ambient temperatures in the barn were not significantly different from the outside, and the drafty door at best offered some protection from the snowdrifts and winter gales but did not mitigate the bitter cold. By mid-December it became established routine to put on every piece of clothing we had: second sets of underwear if any, all shirts, pullovers, coat, etc. for the night, to wrap ourselves into our blankets as tightly as possible, and then dig into the straw. Even so, it was not normally possible to keep warm. At the height of the winter, the extra sets of underwear were better left on even for the day. During most of our stay in Fertörákos, everyone had his entire wardrobe constantly on his body, and we were still shivering.

Fertörákos and the surrounding communities are or were in a fairly prosperous and advanced area of the country. All houses had indoor plumbing and there was no village well. Any public troughs or water receptacles froze by mid-December and stayed frozen until mid-March. That meant that we had absolutely no regular access to water; not even for drinking, let alone washing or laundry. Curiously, thirst was not a problem, at least for me. I was occasionally aware of some other deportees furiously fighting over a cup of water but that sort of tormenting thirst did not affect me; the pint or so of hot liquid we received every morning must have taken care of my moisture requirement. At winter temperatures, with the layers of clothing we kept on at all times, evaporation through sweat was evidently minimal. On the other hand, I shall have to leave it to the imagination how the

deportees began to look and smell after a while, and what kind of psychological effect this had on the villagers and even on ourselves.

The luxury of indoor plumbing in Fertörákos had another dire consequence for us. There were no outhouses in the whole village. We could have dug a latrine with the tools with which we worked in a few hours, but that kind of time wastage was not allowed. For relieving ourselves, we were told to go into the fields or preferably into the reedy-swampy area off the lake. Fouling up the village was of course not allowed but as time went on, it became impossible to enforce this rule. For one thing, sleeping in the barns at subfreezing temperatures gave virtually everybody an irritable bladder and we had to get up several times a night to urinate; obviously, to walk away from the village each time was not a practical proposition. Some of us invented the expedient of urinating at night into our own messcups--the cups could be rinsed out next morning with snow, or so we thought. Unfortunately, on particularly cold nights the contents of the messcups would freeze and some of us did have pretty nightmarish problems if the messcups could not be made available in time to receive the morning soup.

We had to share our night quarters in the barns with the usual rodent population of the farm. Obviously, in the Fertörákos ambiance, we had lost any fastidiousness very quickly and having rats run around on top of us at night was largely ignored. There was little danger of being bitten by the animals because of the abundant wraps in which we slept. However, another very serious problem developed: the rats were after our food, and since bread distribution was in the evenings, any intent of having a bite to eat at the lunch break next day involved saving some bread through the night. These bread caches were frequently found and devoured by the rats. Metal boxes would have been the only efficient solution to the problem but any such object was not available in Fertörákos. Knapsacks, coat pockets, improvised wrappings, or anything put under our head in the straw was found and chewed through by the rats in no time. The one method offering some protection was the "hanging bag" method in which the bread was placed in a bag and suspended by a string in such a way that it was inaccessible from all sides. However, rats are clever creatures; and it happened that they chewed through the string at the point of suspension and then attacked the fallen bag. We suspected that human rats may have been sometimes part of this problem but no such suspicion could ever be substantiated. At any rate, by Christmas or so starvation was so intense that no one had the fortitude to refrain from eating up the entire bread ration the moment we got it, and this whole problem lost relevance.

Dividing our bread loaves into three equal parts was a considerable problem of solid geometry and the most exciting time of the day. The method we finally agreed upon was a T-shaped division where at least two of the pieces could be made obviously equal. The task of cutting was rotated among individuals in each group of three and naturally the others had the privilege of first and second choice. It is just as well that we did not have scales or we may have gotten into murderous squabbles over every fraction of a gram.

A scourge equal in severity to hunger, or according to some worse than hunger, was louse infestation. How this started was pretty obvious if one looked at the pathetic tramp-like characters in our own ranks. I first thought that some straw must have gotten inside my clothing that gave me that sharp, itching/stinging sensation. The psychological horror of finding

the first louse was soon superseded by intense physical misery. Conditions in Fertörákos were perfect for the wildfire-like spreading of this plague and by about New Year there was no deportee free from this affliction; by mid-January it reached totally absurd proportions. Any piece of garment temporarily removed from our bodies gave the impression of a disturbed ant heap.

Lice are sluggish creatures, in sharp contrast to bedbugs and fleas. The latter parasites were already known to most of us from the Budapest tenements, including our own military laborer quarters. Bedbugs and fleas attempt to stay alive by fleeing when disturbed, and they have evolved into spectacularly efficient runners and jumpers, respectively. In contrast, lice are virtual "sitting ducks" when found and their only weapon for species survival is *numbers*. The life cycle of a louse generation is perhaps 10 days and one impregnated female lays hundreds of eggs, typically on and under the inside seams of clothing. So, within a time span of one month, a single louse pair can produce literally millions of offspring. To fight a louse infestation without recourse to radical measures (steam sterilization of all clothing) can become a losing battle even if one has better opportunities and more energy to strip and hunt than we had in Fertörákos. By mid-January, immense louse populations existed separately between each layer of clothing we had on, and they fed on our bodies in shifts, so to speak. An unrelenting and totally maddening itch all over the body all the time became an inevitable part of life. The physical bearing of the deportees changed; hunching with the shoulders and continually moving the body so as to provide some scratching effect of the skin from the clothes one wore, became the typical posture. It can be said that we had reached the rock bottom of human existence in truly Dante'esque terms.

Lice are highly temperature-sensitive creatures and they can function only at the precise temperature of the normal human body. This had good and bad consequences for us, so to speak. The "good" consequence was that at the intense cold in the middle of the winter, the temperature gradient between our layers of clothing and sometimes the chilliness of our skins was sufficient to freeze the lice into temporary inaction. At the work site, the guards would typically light a campfire and sit around it to warm themselves while we worked; the more humane among them would allow a deportee or two to come to the fire in turns for a few minutes, in order to warm up a bit. As one approached the fire one could feel the stiffened lice in one's clothing to quicken and seek the skin. Having to choose between a bit of warmth and some temporary freedom from louse bites was one of the truly hellish torments we had to suffer in Fertörákos.

The "bad" consequence of the heat sensitivity of lice is that they do not tolerate fever. If the body temperature of the host rises just a few degrees, they go and seek "greener pastures". That means that they carry the pathogens from the sick to the not yet sick as if it were a purposeful effort at spreading disease. Epidemics in louse-ridden populations spread with frightening rapidity. In the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen, some 15,000 inmates died of typhus in the last 3 days of the war so that even burying them became a technical impossibility. The conditions at the surrender of that camp provided the occupying troops with some of the ghastliest scenes of the war. But for some relatively fortunate breaks in our general misfortune, we could have suffered the same fate in Fertörákos, and we were not too far from it at the time of our liberation.

It is noteworthy that, for all these appalling conditions, we were not at that point technically in a concentration camp. We were not surrounded by barbed wire and anyone who had the guts, the strength, and the minimal luck of not bumping accidentally into guard personnel, could have just walked away. The problem was, there was no place to go. The surrounding villages were all full of deportees just like Fertörákos. The slave labor contingents from the various villages sometimes met at work when we had adjacent segments of the tank trap to complete. Conditions were obviously the same throughout, and the attitudes of guard personnel and of the villagers were also the same throughout. Sopron, the sizeable town a couple of hiking hours away from Fertörákos, became the Capital of Hungary after the government fled from Budapest and was now crawling with the Arrow Cross, whom we knew or suspected to be worse, or at least stupider, than the Germans. We just did not have enough trust that we could survive the war in hiding, and adventurousness and self-confidence were obviously at a minimum. The truth be told, we were simply too hungry to be able to think beyond our next meal.

On cold, clear mornings during the winter we could frequently see Allied airplanes flying in formation overhead, and sometimes even hear the thunder of bomb attacks on distant targets, probably Vienna. On one occasion we were amazed to see something descending from the planes towards us--small, floating, diffuse objects that were clearly not bombs. Great excitement swept through some of the deportees. It seemed that the planes were dropping something specifically for us: perhaps food? The religious started to talk about manna from Heaven. Unfortunately, the objects turned out to be thin metal foils like Christmas tree tinsel, and completely inedible. It was a letdown, but at the same time also a deep puzzle. Could this be some sort of a coded message that we were supposed to understand? Various wild theories were discussed. Since at the time the very existence of radar was a military secret (although possessed by both sides), we could not have guessed that the metal tinsel was floated down to confuse the radar of ground defenses. All we could see was that we were apparently abandoned by all, and our agony was without foreseeable end.

Our labor service in the Hungarian Army, while not free from what one could designate as the mental cruelty of the age, had been a true picnic in comparison. The spirit of a 20-year old is resilient and there had been plenty to laugh about in the labor service; but all levity ceased in Fertörákos. Every day became a new misery and a challenge to survival. People became snappish, impatient, uncomradely, and even old friendships became sorely tried. We "Tapirs", the 7 young fellows from our old labor service company, attempted to stick together which drew some hostility from the other deportees in the barn. Particularly contemptuous was one of the vagabond characters, Pinchas Rosenberg, who once overheard that some of us were college students and he let us have it every time one of us committed some *faux pas* resulting from inexperience with the tough life--such as allowing bread to be stolen by the rats, or urine to freeze in the messcup, or not knowing how to kill lice between the thumbnails. At any such misconduct he would nudge his companion with a contemptuous gesture at us:

"There is higher schooling for you! Higher school indeed! Three stories high!" [Magas iskola! Három emelet magas!]

We accepted this phrase after the war as a general ironic slogan in the Tapir vocabulary, designating the value of education.

Some other characters in our barn also turned out to be memorable. Mucki the waiter was about the most pathetic. He firmly believed that he, who spent his life serving food to others, was simply *entitled* to special consideration. When his turn came in the chow line, he would insist on a double portion and when the food dispenser looked at him uncomprehendingly, he would add, by way of explanation,

"I am a waiter."

One can imagine the reaction of surrounding fellow deportees and more than once Mucki would be kicked away in less than gentle fashion, but he never learned. The same scene would be played the next day, and the next, until Mucki the waiter became something of a contemptible celebrity. I can remember him sitting with his empty messcup that he could not get refilled, crying bitterly. "How can people do this to a waiter?"

One of the engineers, Dénes Szendrő, also stands out in my memory. He hummed or whistled through his teeth incessantly the same two-line melody, some nursery tune. He continued with this without pause day after day, night after night, until he drove everybody around him crazy. One can imagine that in Fertőrákos tempers were short and this kind of problem could lead to shouting matches or even fist-fights.

Another pathetic character in our barn was Mr. Szántó, the mathematics teacher. He was the first to "throw in the towel", so to speak, and to abandon himself spiritually. To say that he was uncommunicative would be an understatement. Every evening between chow and retirement he stood at a specific spot in the barnyard, virtually motionless except for the continuous subtle contortions of the louse-ridden individual, like a human scarecrow. He would speak to no one, answer no one, and at any insistent conversationalist he would bark furiously: "Can't you leave me alone?! Don't you see I am immersed in my thoughts?!" No one knew what those thoughts were; perhaps they were mathematical. However, any attempt at discussing mathematics with him met with the same reception.

Not particularly communicative were the religious characters, either. They kept to themselves; after the memorable display at our arrival we did not witness in Fertőrákos any more personal conversations with God. Interestingly, there was no problem with the kosherness of food. Some in our barn hoped that they would perhaps get an extra portion of food now and then from rations the religious refused to eat, but that did not happen. The "Hasids" had their rabbi somewhere in the village who ruled that under the circumstances whatever food we got was automatically kosher. The dietary laws of the Talmud have an emergency waiver clause somewhere and the rabbi was wise enough to invoke it. The same applied to work on the Sabbath as well as the inability to pray in the accustomed fashion.

Mr. Zalán, the lawyer, was our first "Jupo". It was his responsibility to see that we got up at a signal from the village church bell in the morning; he had us line up for the daily headcount and march-off to work, from which he himself was not exempt. Mr. Zalán believed that an exaggeratedly courtly behavior was the correct answer to the very un-courtly conditions in which we lived. He invariably addressed every one of us as "Sir", and he used bizarrely incongruous expressions for the necessary communications between us. For instance, his way of awakening us in the morning went something like this:

"Gentlemen, I beg your permission. It is my very unpleasant duty to inform you that another day is dawning. Please forgive my boldness if I suggest that you deign to get up, and I hope that in your wisdom you will generously comply with this most humble request."

Similar speeches were given at chow time and at retirement time or whenever there was anything to say. Unfortunately, this style did not work too well with our supervisors and we saw him severely beaten several times because he used too fancy or complicated language when making official reports. Mr. Zalán who was close to 60 became our first starvation casualty. By the end of January one could virtually see the strength draining from him, with his face becoming gaunt, his eyes bulging, a walking skeleton. One evening in the cowshed he lost control of his bowels and started defecating into his trousers and soiling everything and everybody around him in what turned out to be a terminal diarrhea. People around him, including me, were very indignant. It wasn't a matter of squeamishness; by that time we were well past any such sentiment. But incidents like this could jeopardize our permission to spend time in the cowshed. To angry questions, "What are you doing?! Can't you control yourself?!", Mr. Zalán answered, with copious tears rolling down his hollow cheek:

"This is the end...I have no strength left...my muscles are not responding." He broke down in a sob and had to be carried out from the cowshed. An hour later he was dead.

As far as our guards were concerned, the death of a deportee was no big deal. At just about that time (end of January) this became utterly commonplace occurrence in the village, with 10-15 persons dying every day, typically in the same fashion as Mr. Zalán. A grave-digging detail was established with responsibility to bury the dead. There were no formalities or even marking, of course. Generally, the elderly succumbed first but in Fertörákos we also suffered the first two Tapir casualties--George Torday and Laci Papp. Curiously, in normal times, they were thought of as among the stronger and tougher young men in the company. By contrast, many of the "weaklings" survived.

After the death of Mr. Zalán, a new Jupo was appointed in our barn, also from the older contingent, who himself died a few weeks later. During our stay in Fertörákos, we went through three Jupos, and several other deportees in our barn expired also, including poor Mucki the waiter.

We had occasional opportunities to meet people from the other barns and one day, much to our mutual surprise, I encountered Mr. Ötvös, Julia's father. He was captured in Budapest shortly after his wife and daughter were marched away. He knew nothing of their whereabouts. I had a darling picture of Julia with me--he wanted it but I was loath to part with it, and for a while we arranged to meet daily after work to have a joint look. Mr. Ötvös was not in particularly good shape and I understand he perished at some point before the liberation.

Ironically, there was a "sick bay" in Fertörákos, but it was the saddest of sad farces. Its only merit was that it gave freedom from ditch digging work to the 3 or 4 doctors running it. As for equipment or supplies, they had *nothing*; no instruments, no medicines, and most grievously, no dressing or bandaging materials at all. Wounds or frostbites sustained at work, which

were not infrequent, had to be dressed with the patient's own torn shirtsleeves or kerchiefs. Of course, there was absolutely no facility to sterilize or even to launder them. Wound infections were common. The doctors were allowed to write a limited number (I guess about 10) "sick passes" daily and anyone who felt too sick to go to work could try to get one in the morning. If the quota was reached, the remaining patients had to go to work no matter how sick. Obviously, one had to be nearly dead to get a sick pass.

My own health was relatively good. I suppose my relentless hunt for scraps of food and the dogged struggle against lice kept my nose just above water, figuratively speaking. Already in December I had my head shaved as a preventive measure against having the louse infestation spread to my hair. The "operation" was an ordeal. With a Tapir friend, George Teltsch, we performed it on each other with cold water and an impossibly blunt razor blade.

An ailment of mine that first surfaced in Fertörákos and stayed with me for life is "sciatica", the strange come-and-go neuralgia in the legs. I remember experiencing it first, when marching to work on a very cold winter morning. A potentially more serious problem developed in March, when I suddenly broke out in jaundice. My urine became dark brown and my stool pale yellow. Distinct yellowing of the whites of my eyes could be seen and I developed a persistent bitter taste in my mouth. Of course no one of the deportees felt "well" at that point, jaundice or no jaundice, and I can't say that I had any identifiable malaise clearly attributable to a liver problem. I did report to the sick bay but the doctors told me that sick passes had to be reserved for the much more sick and advised me to keep reporting for work. One of them added ironically that I should stay away from red meats and coffee. It seems that there was no epidemic of infectious hepatitis in Fertörákos and my case was an isolated occurrence. A day or two prior I had snatched a messcup-ful of raw slop from the kitchen receptacle which I ate on the spot, uncooked as it was. I am still convinced that I had some kind of obstructive jaundice due to mechanical backup of bile pigments into the circulation, rather than an inflammatory condition. Nonetheless, because of this history I have a lifelong disqualification to serve as blood donor. Incidentally, the jaundice subsided in about a week with no residual problem of which I am aware.

Other than random beatings at work, I was not personally maltreated in Fertörákos. The time I came closest to serious harm was one evening after work, when I was "going to the bathroom" in the fields, squatting with pants down, about 12 or 15 feet away from the highway, i.e. maybe a little too close according to the vague rules. I suddenly saw a horse-drawn sled approaching on the highway, with one of the passengers being none other than Commandant Hübner himself! I ducked, attempted to turn away in the midst of my operation, but it was too late. He saw me; I heard his furious swearing about the lousy-shitty Jew-swine, and a pistol shot rang out. For an agonizing moment I wasn't sure whether I was hit or not. But I could get up unscathed; the sled was swiftly pulling away. He evidently missed or perhaps it was only meant to be a warning. I was apprehensive next morning about possible repercussions at the lineup but there were no further consequences.

A more momentous event occurred in early March, when one morning we were marched before work to an open field for a "general assembly". Commandant Hübner and his staff were standing on some improvised dais or

platform. Hübner gave a short speech to which most of us listened only half-heartedly. It was the one and only time that he addressed us directly rather than through the Jupos. It was something about discipline and order, and it developed that we were assembled for the purpose of witnessing executions. Some 20 or 25 deportees were lined up and shot before our eyes. Their alleged "crimes" were attempting to escape, insubordination at work, or other similar offenses. I followed the proceedings with blasé disinterest. I knew none of the victims personally and in the conditions in Fertörákos where as many were dying of hunger every day, the event was anticlimactic.

A few days later, the sensational news spread through the deportee community that Commandant Hübner was being relieved. Whether the relief was punitive or not, or had anything to do with the public executions, remained unknown. At any rate, a new commandant by the name of Ziegler arrived at about the end of the first week in March, and he turned out to be a personality totally different from Hübner. Much more humane, almost jovial in comparison, he was outraged by the hygienic conditions he found in Fertörákos. Among his first official acts was to arrange for an army delousing unit to be sent there. I suppose he must have used the very valid argument that this measure was absolutely necessary in order to protect the public health of the indigenous population of the village.

By mid-March, the delousing station, a large tent-like structure, was erected on the main square of Fertörákos. Many of us were eyeing it with ingrained distrust. Rumors that gas chambers in the eastern concentration camps were disguised as public showers were heard by everyone, and there were among the deportees prophets of doom who proclaimed loudly that the end had come; the "delousing station" was brought here to kill us all. They went around the village announcing their resolve that they could not be dragged into this contraption with six horses, and they attempted to organize public resistance so that, at least, "we die with dignity". Others were less sure. It happened that a group of Tapirs from the neighboring barn were ordered to become the servicing crew for the unit. After having received their own delousing treatment and having been instructed in the handling of the plumbing controls, they swore that there was nothing to worry about. In fact, the whole process was said to be a true delight. We were to undress in one compartment of the unit, putting all of our clothing in individual wire baskets; then proceed to the shower stalls where hot water would be running for 2 minutes then turned off for 3 minutes so that we could soap ourselves, with soap to be supplied. Then the hot water would be turned on again for 5 minutes for rinsing and relaxation under the shower. Finally, there would be 30 minutes resting time in a well-heated end compartment while our belongings were sent through the steam sterilizer and drier. Eventually, we would be allowed to get dressed again, in our now louse-free clothing.

It really sounded too good to be true. I can remember the anxious cross-examination of Laci Gulyás, one of the servicing Tapirs who came to our barn to explain the procedure. Will the water be really pleasantly hot? How can we be sure that this is not a plot to scald us with boiling water, or freeze us with ice-cold water? Will the water really come on twice or will we be chased out into the cold naked and wet, all soaped up? What if there is a hidden poison tank somewhere and we will be suffocated in the end? Laci tried to reassure everyone as emphatically as possible. I can remember that I myself went to examine the tent from the outside and came back with the opinion that it appeared to be unsuitable to serve as gas

chamber. After numerous discussions all deportees were persuaded to accept the delousing treatment and during a time span of 2 or 3 days in the middle of March, the whole remaining slave worker population of Fertörákos was duly deloused. It was none too soon, and it was an unforgettable treat.

I can still remember every delicious moment of the hot shower and in fact I could not quite believe that it would be turned on twice as explained. I managed to soap and rinse during the first 2 minutes and then just stood there, enjoying the stream of hot water for the entire second period. Resting unclothed in a well-heated room for a full half-hour and free from the maddening parasites for the first time in 3 months, was also an unaccustomed delight. We got our rags returned steamed and laundered, and literally a new era had commenced in Fertörákos. It seemed that Ziegler, the new commandant, was a decent fellow. Even the weather had turned mild and with the Russian front reputedly getting closer by the day, we could see a glimmer of hope that the worst part of our ordeal might be over. Unfortunately, the hope was premature for the time being.

#### Death March No.1

The "New Era" in Fertörákos was short-lived. One day towards the end of March we were ordered to report to the morning lineup with all belongings, and the whole remaining slave worker population, much decimated by the attrition but still thousands of people, were organized into a marching column. We were herded northwest-bound on the highway and we proceeded through the villages of Mörbisch and Rust. It was an unpleasant early spring day, with constant drizzling rain alternating with lively downpours, and soon we all became thoroughly soaked, including our blankets carried on our shoulders. On the highway between Rust and St. Margarethen there is an open quarry and this quarry was to become our night's rest en route. The guards took position on the high edges surrounding the excavated area and the deportees were herded into the central depression. Just as we arrived, the rain started once more in earnest; our "campsite" was to be a choice between the rocky areas with an inch or two of standing water and the soft-soil areas converted into a sea of mud. It was a dismal choice that the continuing rain did not make any easier. On the part of the religious there were again angry remonstrations with God.

"Why the rain?! Can't you stop at least the rain?! Sadist monster!!" Fists were shaken heavenward. God remained silent and the rain continued.

I can remember that night in the St. Margarethen quarry as among the most miserable of my life. There was one choice area of rocky ground somewhat raised and therefore drained and I with a group of Tapir friends was trying to reach it, but so was another group from another direction. It was disputable who got there first and an ugly and possibly murderous fight was in the offing--it did not take a lot in those days to kill a man. All my life I had abhorred such confrontations. I suppose as a kid I was too skinny and too poor a fighter to prevail. I persuaded my companions to withdraw, and we staked out our place in the mud. In the end, it mattered little; the rain continued all night and it was thoroughly miserable for everyone. As an added disaster there was no hot evening meal. The field kitchen was said to have gotten lost or broken down--we did get double bread rations as we left Fertörákos, supposedly to last for two days, but most of us devoured it the moment we got it and those who did not were now struggling with a soaked, crumbling mass.

Next morning at daybreak the rain stopped, the field kitchen arrived, and as we were herded into formation once more, totally soaked, caked with mud, and chilled to the bone, at least we could have a hot meal. All day was taken up by relentless march. We passed by the pilgrimage church of Loretto. The converted among us kept expecting somehow a helping hand from the Catholic Church--a few of us still had the papal protective pass on our persons. Perhaps we would encounter a priest or nun to whom one could slip such a document and plead for assistance. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to do that. The church and adjacent ecclesiastical structures remained closed and silent. Our murderous march continued.

I had a vague awareness of the general geography of the area and expected to be marched through the town of Eisenstadt [Kismarton], ancient capital of the Esterházy where Haydn once wrote his beautiful music. However, our march was routed around Eisenstadt. We were herded on forest paths winding through the Leitha Gebirge range. Much of the hike was uphill, and because of the pace demanded by our guards, extremely exhausting. I can remember that the scenery was quite pretty in the early spring, with some flowers in bloom already--it reminded me of Sunday outings in happier times but the comparison was unbecoming. I heard many an angry affirmation from fellow marchers:

"If I survive this, I'll be damned if I go on another pleasure hike in my life" or similar vows. I was not so sure about that, but I also had my first serious doubts about survival. As I was plodding forward, frequently with what seemed to be the last ounce of my strength, I was curiously but persistently reminded of a piano recital and poetry reading which Julia and I had attended just about a year earlier in Budapest. Liszt's "Todtentanz" [Danse Macabre] was on the program, as well as a ballade by François Villon, "L'Épithaphe" in the original medieval French as well as in a sensational new Hungarian translation by the young poet George Faludy that in the opinion of all literati captured the mood of the poem with great perfection. The haunting refrain,

"Nous sommes mors, âme ne nous harie  
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absoudre!"

[We are dead, let no soul harass us  
But pray to God that He may have mercy on us!]

was going through my mind again and again, sort of in the rhythm of our steps. Our march at that point did have features of the macabre and the question occurred to me whether it might not be a lot simpler just to step out, sit down, and let them shoot me. The fellow marcher just behind me, Francis Hirsch, a Tapir, must have sensed my thoughts because he called to me quietly:

"Andrew--they are waiting for you at home."

The comment gave me some renewed strength.

Towards evening we arrived at flat terrain, our wet and mud-caked belongings were beginning to dry out, and the march became somewhat easier. We were required to keep going until late in the night when we arrived at the railroad station of the town of Gramatneusiedl. There, we were loaded into a train.

To our surprise, the wagons into which we were loaded turned out to be not cattle cars but passenger cars, with regular benches. The first few entering the wagons crashed on the seats with a sigh of relief. After two days of most exhausting march, a night in between under open skies in pouring rain, and getting exactly one cupful of hot food en route, there was no one among us not near total exhaustion. Unfortunately, fellow deportees kept coming into the wagons even after the compartments were clearly full. People were being pushed in with rifle butts, and in the end we were packed so tightly that any movement became impossible. Some fellows were trying to climb into the luggage racks but came crashing back down, and we ended up a multi-layered, screaming, fighting mélange of humanity. Windows were unopenable, doors were locked from the outside, and the train started moving.

I was positioned on the floor, near a corner of a wooden seat that kept pushing into my ribs with every jolt of the train. Those on the benches had a constant problem with their legs; there was no room left to have them in a normal sitting position and to try to extend them over the heads of people on the floor caused constant altercations. We remembered with nostalgia the "luxury" of the cattle cars in which we were deported from Budapest 4 months earlier, where there were no benches to take up valuable space. On the other hand, we now had a toilet; it was perhaps five steps away from where I was sitting. Eventually tempers cooled down enough to establish enough mutual cooperation to allow people to reach the toilet in turns. When my turn came (first opportunity to use such a civilized device in 4 months) I tore up the protective letter from the Holy See that I still carried on my person, and used it as toilet paper. The act was dictated by genuine shortage of paper and desire to maintain some hygienic standards in this situation, but its grim symbolic significance did not escape me, even then.

We remained in the wagon for about 36 hours. We were routed through the outskirts of Vienna into a westerly direction, with frequent pauses. Daylight hours came and went. In the middle of the second night we arrived at a small-town station, with the terminal building clearly of old Imperial vintage. The train stood there in the dark. SS-sentries were patrolling the platforms. As dawn came, we could read the name of the station, a name that meant nothing to us at that point:

	M A U T H A U S E N	

"Raus! Los! Aussteigen! Los!" [Out! Move it! Out!]

SS-men were going from wagon to wagon, unlocking doors and pulling out deportees, many of whom were too cramped to be able to straighten out at once. Again, we were organized into marching columns and driven through the town. It was early morning, with the streets just starting to become peopled. Not much attention was paid to us; the town folk was obviously accustomed to the spectacle. We passed what appeared to be a freight yard with grotesquely emaciated workers in striped attire working in it under SS supervision. One of them attempted to call out something to us and was savagely beaten by his guard. Others just looked at us meaningfully.

On the outskirts of town we were herded to a steep uphill path where SS-men were standing on the sides every 10-15 yards with big sticks, and beating the deportees at random as they were passing, in a general effort to maintain pace, like harrying a herd of cattle. One of these SS-guards was obviously bent on having some fun. He yelled at each deportee passing him,

"Heil Hitler!"

The poor souls yelled at generally did not know what to do; most just looked terrified or babbled something incomprehensible whereupon the SS-man would beat them with his stick until out of reach, and then the next one would be yelled at mockingly,

"Heil Hitler!"

and the scenario repeated itself. I watched this happening with the 2-3 marchers ahead of me. When my turn came, and he yelled at me "Heil Hitler!" I answered, sort of automatically, "Heil Hitler." Apparently, this was what the SS-man wanted to hear. He gestured in a mock-courtly manner that I could pass and he did not beat me. I must emphasize that my response was not pre-meditated strategy; with my mind wandering, near total exhaustion, I simply parroted the words I heard in mechanical fashion. It turned out to be a skin-saving measure. Some fellow deportees who witnessed the incident were resentful. One of the religious characters said to me contemptuously that he would rather be beaten than utter those loathsome words.

After maybe  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour of stiff uphill march we found ourselves in front of a formidable fortress gate. SS-sentries with machine guns were looking at us from crenellated watchtowers. The scene reminded me of the adventure movies about the French Foreign Legion in the 1930's, where the fortresses of Aboukir or Khartoum would look like this on the movie sets. Unfortunately, this was real. As we were herded through the gate, I was reminded of Dante's Gate of the Inferno, and I murmured, much to the dismay of Tapir companions around me,

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate"

[Abandon all hope ye who enter here].

#### Mauthausen Concentration Camp

Mauthausen Concentration Camp is now a Holocaust Memorial and I revisited the site in 1981. The field inside the first gate is now filled with commemorative sculptures and monuments, including one specifically erected to the Hungarian Jews who were imprisoned and/or perished there. Then, of course, the area was bare with the main entrance to the camp on the right and the notorious "death stairs" to the stone quarry on the left. We were driven forward between these two sides and entered a wire fence-enclosed area where 6 or 8 huge canvas tents were erected. We were distributed into these tents, where some straw was scattered on the ground with alleyways left in between. Each tent held well over a thousand deportees. The room allotted to each person was about 5 ft x 1 ft, i.e. not long enough to stretch out completely and not wide enough to lie with both shoulders on the ground. But it was a place to rest, which all of us needed at that point.

Sometime later in the day we were ordered to line up outside for a headcount or "Appell" which was to be daily routine in Mauthausen, lasting for hours. However, this was the only thing required of us. There was no work. Unfortunately, there was virtually no food, either. We received nothing at all on the day of our arrival in Mauthausen, making the number of consecutive fast days during our transfer 3. Food distribution, such as it was, started on the day after our arrival that I believe was April 1 or 2. There was one hot meal daily, a nondescript concoction served from garbage cans, neither soup nor slop, and ash gray in color. Its consistency was like a thin gruel, and there were occasional bits of beets or potato peelings floating in it. These, especially the latter, were considered great treasures and sometimes objects of furious arguments if one deportee happened to get ladled more of these than another. There was also bread distribution, but the number of people having to share one loaf was changing daily so that each day we were facing a new geometric problem. If my memory serves me right the bread ration in Mauthausen varied between 5 and 10 to a loaf with a trend towards decreasing portions. All in all, I estimate the total daily calories we received in Mauthausen at 200-300, or less than half of what we used to have in Fertörákos. Even with no work, the new "diet" constituted a considerable acceleration of our slow death sentence.

One can imagine the sagging spirit of the deportees. Our newly-found leisure was no great relief; it gave us more time to think and our thoughts were not encouraging. I remember that I was trying to make biochemical calculations about how long one could last with the kind of sustenance we were having, figuring the inevitable caloric expenditures of life functions as balanced against the daily intake. The deficit was of course substantial but I overestimated the caloric reserves we had and concluded that one should be able to last until mid-summer. In retrospect, I think that was a wildly optimistic estimate but under the circumstances that was just as well. It gave me and my buddies to whom I explained my calculations some hope.

Food was absolutely the only thing talked about; sometimes to the annoyance of some of us who felt that unrealistic fantasizing only made things worse. Someone somewhere in our tent had a cookbook which was torn apart into single pages. These pages circulated among the deportees and the eagerness with which people were tearing these pages from each others' hands, and reading the recipes with bulging eyes and watering mouths, can only be compared to the reaction of adolescents to pornography. In fact, the response of some were exactly as if the cookbook pages were pornography. I remember the outburst of one older fellow deportee, yelling at his neighbor for looking at one of these pages:

"Will you throw away that *filth*?! Have you not one grain of self-respect left?!"

An interesting sidelight into human psychology and the moralistic relations between desire and denial.

A grievous event occurred some five days after our arrival in Mauthausen. Another group of deportees arrived, and it turned out that the group included some Tapirs and others we had known in Fertörákos. It appears that after the railroad cars at the Gramatneusiedl station were filled to capacity, the remaining deportees were marched to a nearby Danube port and loaded there into a big freight barge. People were simply thrown into the

hold that previously carried coal, and locked in. It took nearly a week for the barge to be towed upstream to Mauthausen, during which time the hold was not opened, not even for air. Conditions inside were indescribable. Only about one-half of the barge "passengers" made it alive to the conclusion of their voyage and these survivors had death written all over their faces on arrival: the gaunt, grotesquely emaciated look with bulging eyes that we had first seen on Mr. Zalán, our first Jupe in Fertőrákos. There was a name for these terminal cases in Mauthausen: "Musulmans" [Moslems] and sometimes, for purposes of food distribution, they were already counted dead even before they actually breathed their last breath.

George Alberti was a fellow Tapir, widely regarded as among the smartest and most intelligent kids in our labor service company. He was a student of economics and a young man of unusual poise, quiet manners, and incisive mind. In normal times he would have been clearly destined for a brilliant career. He had the tragic misfortune of being included in the barge trip. He came to look for the rest of us after his arrival. His appearance was literally frightening. Some of us could recognize him only by his voice. He came to ask if anyone had a little spare food. The request was bizarre; he might as well have asked for the moon. The expression of mortal desperation on his face when we all told him we had nothing still haunts me. I understand that he was dead by next evening. In fact, not one of the barge riders made it alive to the liberation.

The daily routine in Mauthausen was monotonous. We had little contact with the uniformed SS; of course we could see them patrolling the periphery and manning the watchtowers, and occasionally a pair of them would walk through the tent camp, looking at the prisoners with haughty contempt and talking only to each other. Direct supervision of the deportees was left to the "Capo"-s; themselves prisoners but privileged ones from the main camp and much better nourished. From the way the Capos looked and acted, we judged them to be common criminals put in concentration camp for violent and antisocial behavior, perhaps after their regular jail sentences had been served. Whether the name Capo originated from the Italian ["Chief"] or was an abbreviation for Camp Police, remained unclear.

Soon after sunrise every day, the Capos would run through the alleyways in the tents, lashing out left and right with sticks, yelling:

"Los! Aufstehen! Zum Appell! Los!" [Get up! Lineup! Move it!]

We were herded out to the area in front of the tents, lined up in columns, and a headcount took place. The tents were checked for the dead and the dying and the bodies were carted away. Those too weak to go out to the Appell were taken to the "hospital". We never heard of them again. The headcount itself frequently took hours; the Capos conducting it would get confused, start over, and often the SS-officer writing down the tallies would demand a recount. We were supposed to stand at attention during all this. At the end of the Appell we could march past the field kitchen station and receive our ladleful of the gray Mauthausen gruel, dispensed from black 25-gallon garbage cans with "KLM" stenciled on them in white (No offense to the Royal Dutch Airlines; the letters stood for Konzentrations Lager Mauthausen). Following that, we could eat our meals and remain outside if desired or go back to our places in the tents. For our bodily needs, there was a large open latrine just a few yards away from the tents. Bread distribution was in the evenings; the Capos would bring the loaves in baskets and every so

manieth person (a variable count daily) would get a loaf. Division was up to us. There was no regular access to water and curiously enough it was not missed, at least as far as I was concerned.

A week or so after our arrival in Mauthausen we all became louse-infested again. The straw appeared to be the source of the parasites because we all got them virtually at once rather than gradually in a person-to-person fashion. At that point, the lice were perceived as no big deal. Even though in Mauthausen in April there would have been much better opportunity for hunting and fighting back than in Fertörákos, few of us bothered. It was too much trouble; I myself figured that as long as the caloric content of body juices sucked by the parasites did not exceed the caloric expenditure of undressing and going through items of clothing while shivering all the while, the hunt was not worth doing. Some of us, by the same token, also neglected regular visits to the latrine but that was something that I personally never neglected. Perhaps because the starvation deaths were typically initiated by terminal diarrhea, I concluded that regular bowel movements were essential for survival and I always managed to drag myself to the latrine once a day, even if it took what seemed the last ounce of my energy.

Otherwise, however, I moved around little. The outside area, surrounded as it was by an electric fence with watchtowers every 20-25 yards in which SS-guards were playing with their machine guns, sometimes taking aim at a deportee who approached too closely, was not exactly inviting and there was zero chance for finding any food scraps. The kitchen was in the main compound, outside of our enclosure. So, I generally preferred to sit on my blanket and became increasingly withdrawn into myself.

At some point in Mauthausen, I got a surprise visitor. My second uncle (or, according to American usage, second cousin once removed) Miklós Neuwirth, Alice's stepfather, heard that the labor service company in which I served was housed in that particular tent and he came to look for me. He had also been in the labor service in Budapest, was captured in the same manner and at about the same time as ourselves, and was doing fortification work in another village on the South-East Wall until transported to Mauthausen. Conditions in his village must have been a bit better than in Fertörákos because he appeared still quite vigorous in comparison to people in our group. He said to me, "Hey, kiddo. Don't just sit there. Come on out and have a sniff of fresh air!"

I wasn't interested. Upon repeated urging and friendly reminder that we were still living, I replied, "I am living only inwardly."

Uncle Miklós shook his head and walked away sadly. As it happened, we both survived the Holocaust and later we had opportunity to reminisce about this encounter. He said he was convinced that I was a "goner" and would not live to see the end of the war. It was the first half of April 1945. The Russians were already in Vienna, the Americans in Hannover, Kassel, and Würzburg. The Third Reich was in its death throes but in Mauthausen we did not know that. Camp life went on as usual.

We did see Allied airplanes flying overhead, sometimes so low that one could see the silhouette of the pilot in the cockpit as they roared by. These were obviously reconnaissance flights but the only thing that interested us was, would they throw down food? If they did, could we get to it fast enough

before the Capos rushed in to take it away? Nothing of the sort ever happened. Hunger also went on as usual.

#### Death March No.2

Sometime in mid-April, after just two weeks of sojourn in Mauthausen, we were ordered one morning to report to the Appell with full gear. We were marched out of the camp the same route we were marched in; we passed the main camp on one side and the quarry on the other side without having set foot in either one. We were led downhill the same path we came up, and through the town, but instead of going to the railroad station we were made to cross the Danube bridge.

Constant attrition of prisoners on this march became commonplace. Pistol shots rang out every few minutes as marchers unable to keep up were dispatched. A particularly moving memory involves a set of identical twins among the Tapirs, Peter and Thomas Major.

The Major twins were everybody's favorites at our labor service company. In the old times, they were distinguished for an excellent sense of humor and they enjoyed being confused with each other. They were popular because of their kindly, comradely disposition towards everyone and they regarded each other virtually as extensions of their own bodies. In the column moving out of Mauthausen, they were marching at maybe 4 or 5 ranks behind each other with myself somewhere in between. Both Major kids were well into the Musulman state and required a little help from fellow marchers on each side to keep up. As we progressed, this help had to become essentially total support, i.e. carrying them by the arms, which could be done only for so long--the buddies providing the assistance were only half-a-notch above the same state themselves. Eventually, Peter had to be let down and another pistol shot rang out. He was the one marching behind.

Thomas, who was marching, or rather being carried, a few ranks forward wanted to know how his brother was doing and made efforts to look back or call back, which the rest of us were trying to prevent. We reassured him, Peter was fine and you'll meet at the rest spot. For now, let's get on with the march--and we dragged him on.

On the Danube bridge (a railroad bridge with some planking for foot traffic but virtually no security railing) Thomas collapsed also and was shot into the river. The time differential between the death of the twins was not 20 minutes and Thomas did not know, at least from us, that his brother had just died when he himself met his end.

On the other side of the Danube we entered the town of Enns and I can remember a particularly grisly display as we crossed town. On the lampposts of the bridge over the Enns River, which flows into the Danube at that point, there were 3 human corpses dangling. There were signs underneath, warning the population that this would be the fate of all deserters and "defeatists". In retrospect, I wonder what it took to be labeled a defeatist in mid-April 1945, or what the point of this whole ghastly display was. I suppose it should have cheered us up, showing that if the Germans were doing this to their own people, the end could not be far off. However, most of us remained unmoved. All objects or events were examined only from one angle: did they present potential for food? If not, they were of no interest.

Our first night's rest en route was just outside the town of Markt St. Florian, in an open field next to the big ecclesiastical complex of the St. Florian Stift. Again, the proximity of the church buildings engendered expectation, disappointment, and indignation. Where is the Mother Church? Where is Humanity? Where is the conscience of the world? Will anyone come and give us a crumb to keep us alive? Nobody came. Many deportees, and I cannot estimate the number even among our own Tapir group, did not live to see the morning.

The next day was more marching, more desperation, more fellow deportees who collapsed and "were put out of their misery". I plodded on, almost like an automaton--

"Nous sommes mors, âme ne nous harie  
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absoudre!"

The lines of Villon were going through my mind with almost feverish intensity. In fact, I have memory of little else for the entire day. We halted in a forest outside the village of Weisskirchen for the night. The daily distance covered on this march was about 20 miles; perhaps not much by normal hiking standards but a cruel effort for the condition we were in. Exhaustion was so brutal that for some, the craving for rest began to compete with the craving for food. Yet, those of us who could, marched on.

By the middle of the third day we reached the town of Wels. It was the intent of our guards to avoid crossing inhabited areas and much of our march was through field paths or forest trails, but where there were rivers to cross, the entering of towns was inevitable. We crossed the Traun river on the bridge at Wels and we were being marched through one of the narrow downtown streets when a tavern keeper, looking at the lot of us with horrified compassion, brought out from his kitchen a big pot of steaming food and started ladling it to deportees as they passed in front of his door. The excitement caused was indescribable, but it was also quite clear that any obvious disruption of our ranks would cause the miracle to evaporate at once. Messcups had to be held out surreptitiously, in order to conceal the operation from the guards who were continuously prodding us with shouts and rifle butts from the other side.

Three or four marchers ahead of me collected their portions. Two more ranks and it was to be my turn--I could already smell the dish: some sort of sauerkraut, with potato pieces in it! My messcup was on the ready. Alas, at that moment, an SS-man caught wind of the operation, rushed over with loud curses and abuses, and chased the tavern keeper with his pot away. The apparition vanished as suddenly as it had materialized a few moments earlier. The march went on, and I felt very, very let down.

### Gunskirchen

About 5 miles outside the town of Wels we were herded off the highway into the bush, and before long we stood before a barbed wire gate leading to a cleared area. Large buildings constructed of rough wood planking stood in the clearing. The buildings were crude, one-story, and internally undivided. This was the "Gunskirchen branch" of Mauthausen Concentration Camp. The village of Gunskirchen was about a mile away on the other side of the road. Just exactly why we were marched here in the last days of the war remained a good question. Various theories were discussed after the

liberation, such as decentralization of prisoners in order to forestall a general uprising; or lack of adequate security in the tent camp outside the masonry walls of Mauthausen. A more sinister suggestion was that the wooden barracks were easier to put to the torch, with all inmates locked in, than the tents.

The question of why we were kept alive at all, if that be a correct designation of the condition we were in, was itself a good one but that became answered during the Nuremberg trials and related post-war developments. Heinrich Himmler, "Reichsführer" of the SS, wanted live hostages as bargaining chips (he was quoted as commenting to someone that Jews still alive in the spring of 1945 were his "best investment"). In fact, the SS were supposed to have had new orders from the top to treat us "humanely". The problem was, as discipline and communication deteriorated in the last days of the war, subordinate leaders began to have their own designs with us and to the rank-and-file SS this whole "new orientation" came all too suddenly and made too little sense in the light of previous indoctrinations and practices. Compliance with the new directives was therefore unwilling and ineffectual and in the life of camp inmates not much had changed.

Life in Gunskirchen had two important differences from life in Mauthausen. The first and most grievous was space. The total floor area of the wooden barracks was not half of that of the Mauthausen tents and we were already overcrowded in the latter. In spite of considerable attrition since Mauthausen, our overcrowding now reached totally absurd proportions. There was barely enough room to sit. Furious fights, shouts, screams, curses all night long every night, as deportees were trying to find a position in which to rest, is my most vivid memory of our Gunskirchen camp life. To make a bad situation worse, the proliferation of lice was again reaching Fertörákos intensity and we now had the added torment of not enough elbowroom left to scratch in peace. As deportees were dozing off at night, they would fall on each other left and right; arms would become typically tangled or buried under others, and trying to retrieve them for the purpose of scratching caused more fights, more curses, more pandemonium as deportees heaped upon each other screamed at each other, demanding to be left alone.

The second difference in comparison to Mauthausen was no Capos. This turned out to be a mixed blessing. We were freed from the cruel, capricious beatings as these characters ran through the tents like the riders of the Apocalypse lashing out left and right. But, of course, there were no alleyways left in the Gunskirchen barracks, anyway. The doors of each building were opened at certain points each day and an SS-man would shout in:

"Los! Herauskommen! Los! Raus! [Out with you! Move it!]

and we would stagger out for Appell, or for chow line, or to go to the latrine. These practices and facilities were similar to those in Mauthausen and our alimentation was also about what it had been in Mauthausen although the per capita bread ration was getting smaller and the gruel thinner. Another important difference was that bringing the food was now up to us. Groups had to be formed in each area and the food fetching assignment rotated within each group. A crew of 3 deportees with one accompanying armed SS-man was to go daily to the kitchen compound, about a hundred yards distant. Two of us carried the canister of the gruel and one the sack of bread. About a hundred deportees were served by each such crew.

There was generally no loitering allowed outside the barracks but one could go to the latrine on an individual permission basis. The latrine was a long trench with low wooden railing on one side on which to sit. Maybe 20 or 25 people could use the latrine at one time, and there was only one such facility in the entire camp, for all the thousands of inmates still imprisoned there. Immense lines formed for the latrine all day long, and to go to the latrine was an exhausting, gruesome, and sometimes horrifying ordeal. The hours-long lineup was of course in itself tiresome and if inmates in the line collapsed with uncontrollable terminal diarrhea (a common occurrence), the others in line had to clean up the mess. If a diarrhea was non-terminal or if a deportee was simply unable to hold his bowels any longer, he was allowed to collect his excrement in a sort of improvised paper bag but still had to remain in line with his bag, and wait for his turn at the latrine to deposit the bag. Truly bizarre scenarios developed sometimes as these bags wetted through, fell apart, and the deportee would be savagely beaten by the guard for "messing up the camp". Relieving oneself elsewhere was strictly forbidden on pain of being shot on the spot, but for urinating the rule was generally not enforced. Many deportees elected to neglect going regularly to the latrine. With the kind of diet we were having, there was seldom any urgency for bowel movement until the terminal diarrheas set in, and going to the latrine was simply too much trouble. Even myself, who in Mauthausen still adhered to a strict self-imposed discipline of daily latrine visits whether I felt the need or not, relented somewhat in Gunskirchen and decided that going every other day would have to do.

Our treatment by the SS-guard was generally harsh, down to the very last day. The camp commander was an SS-lieutenant whose name I don't know but I imagine that I could still recognize him today. He treated us as his personal property and there were rumors after the liberation that he actually sent emissaries to the approaching Allied troops, purporting to have orders from his superiors to put the whole camp to the torch with ourselves locked in before surrender, and offering our lives in exchange for his and his men's. Whether or not there was any truth to these rumors and what was the outcome of the alleged negotiations, if any, I have no way of knowing. I do remember an Appell at which he addressed the inmates and said something about how we had better behave or he was going to do what used to be done in Auschwitz (whatever that was). It was the first time that I had heard the name Auschwitz mentioned; in Hungary we never knew the real name of "Waldsee" where rural Jews were being taken. Nonetheless, the name when heard stuck in my memory because it reminded me, pun-like, of "auch schwitzen" [also sweating] that was exactly what we were doing at the time.

An absolutely nightmarish development occurred about a week after our arrival in Gunskirchen when another group of deportees, mostly young kids of the 14-16 age group, were forced into our barrack. The newcomers literally formed a second layer on top of us; there was nowhere else to go. We had just shaken ourselves down into some semblance of order with everybody having a staked-out spot, and arrangements worked out with neighbors for mutual stretching out at various times. All this was now thrown over. The newcomers grabbed room where they could find it, and they could fight for it vigorously. They turned out to be Polish kids transferred from an eastern concentration camp. Generally, they were in a somewhat better physical shape than ourselves and much more experienced in concentration camp life. Most of them had been inmates for the entire duration of the war, i.e. 5-6 years, and they had grown up with the mentality of the jungle ("blatniks" in camp parlance).

Communication between us and them was limited and unfriendly. A few of the "blatniks" climbed up into the rafters and established themselves up there; occasionally, they urinated down on the top of us in complete disregard as to whom it might hit. I can remember the night after arrival of this group as the quintessential inferno of concentration camp life. Everybody was screaming at the top of their voices all night long; the noise level in the barrack was deafening. Everybody was fighting, pushing, hitting, in a desperate effort to get another square inch of floor space. Occasional warm showers were raining down from the rafters as the young deportees up above relieved themselves. There was nobody in our barrack that night who could get a moment of sleep. Sleeplessness was added to our other miseries.

Accelerated attrition was the only relief. Bodies could be removed every morning and dragged to a communal grave pit filled with chlorinated lime, and thrown in there. I could not begin to give a count of daily dead in Gunskirchen but in a few days after arrival of the "Blatnik" group the impossible overcrowding had eased up somewhat. I think typhus was spreading in the camp like wildfire. People might have also killed each other for the sake of a square foot of extra space. There were rumors of cannibalism being practiced in one of the barracks but I can swear that no such thing was done in our group.

One of the most poignant memories I have of Gunskirchen concerns Willie Köves, a fellow Tapir generally known as The Bulldog. The Bulldog was a "tough guy"; he gloried in hard work, in having contempt for danger, and during our labor service in Budapest he always volunteered for, and carried out successfully, the toughest assignments. For these reasons, but also because of a funny physical resemblance, he acquired the nickname "Bulldog". The Bulldog happened to be one of my immediate neighbors in Gunskirchen and it was becoming increasingly obvious that he was losing ground fast. He was well into the Musulman state and gradually he became crazy. In the last days, he was yelling at the top of his voice at everybody incessantly, accusing his buddies of stealing his rations, of sucking his blood, of encroaching on his space. This went on all day, all night, and eventually lapsed into incomprehensible babble. He had big heavy shoes on his feet and kept pushing one of them into my groin. I tried to kick it away and it came down on me again; I tried to free myself from under it and it fell on me from a third direction. I was furious. I shook him by the shoulders--

"Hey, Willie, will you leave me alone?!"

Only inarticulate sounds came as answer; it was not even babble but a strange slurping sound uttered with every breath he took. This continued for several hours in the night. Eventually, he quieted down. His legs were still bothering me and they kept falling back as I tried to kick them away. When morning came I realized that Willie the Bulldog was dead.

It was April 30, 1945; Willie's death coincided to the day with the suicide of Adolf Hitler in his Berlin bunker.

C H A P T E R   S I X

---

L I B E R A T I O N

THE "GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG" of the Third Reich was at hand. The meeting of American and Soviet troops on the Elbe had already taken place; Berlin, Hamburg, Munich had fallen; indeed, the alpine/subalpine areas of Austria and Bavaria were about the only places left where Nazi rule still continued. In the concentration camp, we heard rumors or speculations that the Nazi bigwigs were preparing to retreat into an "Alpine Fortress" around Berchtesgaden and continue resistance indefinitely, with their support based on the underground slave labor of prisoners such as ourselves, while the rest of Europe was already at peace. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, the war would end "not with a bang but a whimper". We also speculated that if liberation came it would be impossible for the victors to just turn us loose. The risk to public health would be too great; probably we would be confined to a quarantine. The general prayer of the deportees in those days was, "let the quarantine come." However, if the fears about the "Alpine Fortress" had any validity, advent of the quarantine seemed far off, and in the meantime our misery continued with no end in sight.

The Last Days in Gunskirchen

According to some sources I consulted after the war, the concentration camps of the Mauthausen group were supposed to have passed from administration by the SS to administration by the International Red Cross, or at least have become subject to supervision by the International Red Cross, sometime near the end of April 1945. Inside the camp, there was certainly no dramatic indication of that. The SS appeared to be in charge as before, and their presence was as oppressive as before. However, after about April 30 there were no regular Appell calls any more. Whether or not it was still forbidden to loiter outside the barracks I cannot say for sure because as far as I was concerned to go out was too much trouble anyhow. For one thing, it was avoidable exertion; one had to be conservative with energy expenditures. Furthermore, it entailed the danger of losing space. After the death of Willie the Bulldog and a few others, some of us succeeded in staking out extra space (this could be indicated by the placement of one's blanket) --even if not quite enough for stretching out, it was a spot to put the torso horizontal for the night. This space had to be constantly defended against encroachments. Few of us would risk losing any part of it by leaving it unguarded, and fewer still had any spirit or strength left to do any explorations.

On or about May 1 there was a sensational development. The news spread in the barrack population that Red Cross food parcels were about to be distributed. The news was incredible; some of us angrily dismissed it as another instance of self-deception that would make one's real lot that much harder to bear. However, there seemed to be something to this rumor. At one point, we could actually see big brown cardboard boxes being handed into the barrack. Curiously, the excitement was not as great as one would have expected. In the Gunskirchen ambiance, it was difficult to get excited about anything. We were close to becoming vegetables. Just as in Fertörákos 5

months earlier we had progressed from "appetite" to real hunger, we had by now made a further step from hunger to a terminal lethargy where nothing mattered much any more. In Fertörákos, it was difficult to focus thoughts on anything but food; in Gunskirchen it was becoming difficult to focus thoughts on anything, *including* food. That at least was my own frame of mind and I followed the distribution of packages and the forming of groups that were to share a package with a sort of detached, remote interest.

After the necessary counts and group delineations were made, it developed that, in our barrack at least, 17 persons were to share one parcel. How honest this distribution was, we had no way of knowing. Of course, everyone took it for granted that the SS personnel, and perhaps the inmates in privileged positions as well, stole all they could. The portioning of the parcel among the 17 to which I belonged fell to Ben Braun, a fellow Tapir, and I was satisfied that my share of what was available to us was fair enough.

The parcel contained wonderful things, but one person's share was pathetic. Rice was counted out by the grain, with everyone getting 35 grains; each of us could have a small mouthful of a biscuit- or rusk-type dry bread; a tiny cube of margarine; a level teaspoonful of egg powder, another teaspoonful of flour. Some of the more enterprising among the deportees pooled portions and proceeded to cook something on improvised fires but myself and the people around me had no patience with any such scheme. We ate everything as it was handed out right away, including the flour, the raw rice, and the egg powder which I incidentally found delicious. The crowning glory was a piece of dark chocolate that was divided with the greatest possible care, one person receiving exactly two-thirds of a ripple. The whole contents of the parcel was devoured in no more than 10 minutes and quite frankly it made little difference in our well-being at that point. In fact, the unaccustomed foods engendered thirst and there was no access to water. Unprecedented as the treat was, we were too afraid of possible setbacks to put too much stock in this happening with respect to any impending turn in our fate. The dreary hopelessness of camp life continued. Sometime later that day, or perhaps next day, we heard the rumor of a radio report that the Führer had died a "hero's death" in the street fighting for Berlin. That, too, was seen by us as a remote event of dubious direct significance.

#### May 4, 1945

As this day, a Friday, dawned I was under the cloud of a great apprehension. It was my turn to get the meal at the camp kitchen for our entire group, and the task was an arduous one. Some former designees had faltered under the load, were beaten by the accompanying SS-man, and of course if any part of the contents of the canister got spilled, one had to contend with the wrath of fellow deportees. All morning long I was engaged in mental exercises on how to manage the task with least probability for an accident. Finally, when the time came and I, with the other members of the meal carrying team, stumbled out and assembled in front of our barrack, there was unexpected complication. The SS-man who was supposed to take us to the kitchen compound was nowhere to be seen. We waited; eventually one of us went back in, saying, "it must be too early or something." There were angry shouts from the deportees in our group. They weren't interested in explanations, they wanted their meal. We huddled outside for a while and finally decided to go to the kitchen without the guard.

As we were walking on the path, suddenly there was a volley of machine gun fire from closest proximity, or so it sounded. My two companions hit the ground instantly, as an automatic reflex move indoctrinated in military training. I remained upright and looked on in wonderment. My indoctrinated reflex, if any, was not functioning. I could not see the source of the shooting, and in any case my life at that point did not seem to be all that precious. If I were hit, so what?? It would only put an end to my suffering. In fact, I was amazed by the reaction of my companions. Eventually they struggled back to their feet, unharmed, and we continued. There was not much talk about the possible significance of the event. One of them said that he hoped we were not going to be shot when we arrived at the kitchen without our customary escort.

At the kitchen compound we found our numbered canister, already filled with the gray gruel, and we received our bread ration in a sack. No comment was made regarding our missing escort. We could commence the difficult trip back to our barrack with the load. It was a struggle but we managed; eventually we could plunk down the canister, unspilled, in front of the barrack door and we called in that the chowline can form. Dispensing the meal, including the ladling of the gruel and distributing the bread loaves equitably, was also our responsibility.

During the ladling of the gruel a new complication developed. The thin gray stuff usually had floating bits of solid food in it that was an important part of our sustenance: rarely, potato peelings and more frequently, slices of beet or turnip (the kind originally grown as cattle feed). Attempts were made at first to count out or otherwise ascertain the equal distribution of these food bits but these schemes turned out to be impractical. Eventually, there was agreement to leave the fair portioning of the gruel contents to chance. The ladle handler was to stir the pot before each dispensing and bring up each ladleful from the bottom. This way, everyone usually ended up with 2-3-4 slices of turnip and an occasional piece (not every day) of potato peeling. Over the long run, the portions were equalized. But on this day, the first several persons in line found no solid piece in their gruel at all! There was grumbling, and mean looks directed at us food carriers. It was clear that we were being suspected of having stolen the contents of the gruel. What with no official escort, the suspicion seemed plausible. Fortunately at a certain point the crisis was resolved: one deportee ended up with a whole uncut turnip, the size of an apple, in his messcup. Evidently, the kitchen crew somehow forgot to cut up the beet into slices as usual. According to the vague rules we had, the chance recipient of gruel contents was entitled to keep what he got even if it happened to be more than someone else's, and now the lucky possessor of the whole beet was prepared to defend his entitlement. Naturally, that did not seem fair to the rest. People were trying to explain to him that the rules did not apply to this case because a mistake had been made in the kitchen and this beet was meant for the whole group. The chance possessor would hear none of this; rules were rules and he was on the short end of them often enough. An angry confrontation was in the offing and just as voices were being raised and the mood was turning ugly, a camp inmate "fat cat", one of those with a special assignment that kept him in a privileged position, appeared at our barrack. He usually showed no compassion for his less fortunate fellow deportees and was not particularly popular with the camp population. That made his appearance, and his attempt to address us, that much more unusual. His speech went something like this:

"Dearest brothers. My heart overflows with emotion as I have the incomparable privilege of bringing you the news that the glorious liberating troops have arrived."

There was another sentence or two of flowery rhetoric that we heard without comprehension. Whose brothers? What heart? Why was the privilege incomparable? What was this clown babbling about when we were in the midst of immensely important negotiations about the beet? We continued our attempts to resolve the argument; eventually it took restraining the chance recipient while the beet was taken from him, sliced up, and distributed. As "finder's fee" he got double portion. We consumed our meal and I was sitting on my blanket, trying to collect my thoughts. Something was clearly afoot, and it was not about the beet. The barrack was abuzz with noise. At some point, someone called from the door,

"If there is anyone here who can speak English, please come forward."

That finally rang a bell in my brain. I could speak English; I had studied it for years and once I even had an English-language guided tour of the Doge's Palace in Venice--that certainly seemed centuries ago now. Nonetheless, maybe this announcement applied to me. I struggled forward and stepped out of the barrack.

What I found outside was chaotic. I could not find the person who called in for an English speaker; deportees were running about like ants in a disturbed ant heap and an immense crowd was gathering in front of the supply depot next to the kitchen compound. Everyone was screaming at the top of their voices. My attention was suddenly riveted by the SS-guards lined up in formation, with the lieutenant camp commander standing in front of them, facing them, and barking out commands in an uncharacteristically quiet, subdued voice. There were maybe 40 SS-men in the formation. I had never seen them together before, and now the thought flashed through my mind--had this handful of men held all the thousands of us imprisoned all this time?!

In response to commands, the SS-men took their rifles from their shoulders, held them in the right hand, removed magazines with bullet cartridges and held them separately in the left hand. The lieutenant held a stick in his right hand which on second look turned out to be a rolled-up white flag. He turned around, gave a final command, and the column started marching, himself in the lead. I followed on the side, fascinated, like a street urchin would follow the soldiers at a changing of the guard ceremony. We marched out through the barbed wire gate which was wide open, and on the path through the bush leading to the highway. One of the SS-men called out to me in what was intended to be a jovial tone:

"The war is over, we can all go home."

I was only half-comprehending what was going on and registered the scene through a veil of infantile emotions. My main concern was that I, too, must have some weapon in my hand. I stopped at a bush, broke off a straight-looking branch, attempted to hold it in the same way the SS-men held their rifles, and trotted after them in child-like satisfaction. They were now a few yards ahead of me and as I reached the highway I could just see them marching off to the left (direction of Lambach). There I stood, all alone. What now?

A military vehicle was approaching from the right (direction of Wels) and I could see two helmeted soldiers in the front seat. My first reaction was a flash of panic. Germans! Now I was going to get shot. But as the car got closer something seemed different: the swastika emblem was missing and I noticed a five-pointed white star on the vehicle. It flashed through my mind that the five-pointed star was a Soviet emblem--it was repeated in Nazi propaganda often enough that the similarity of the six-pointed Jewish star to the five-pointed Soviet star proved without a doubt that all Jews were Communists at heart. Somehow, however, that did not seem to be quite fitting, either. After all, I came out here because I could speak English.

While these thoughts were rushing through my mind, the vehicle slowed down and stopped beside me. Two helmeted soldiers were looking at me in wide-eyed consternation. I asked, in English:

"Are you English?"

"No", one of the soldiers answered. "We are American."

It was at that point that the fog in my head suddenly lifted and I finally comprehended that something truly tremendous was happening. At the same time, the answer struck me as absurd quibbling. From my perspective, there was no difference between English and American. In later remembrances I frequently re-created this moment of my life and the surging feeling I had, that gave me the sensation of being suddenly lifted from Hell to a high place but still vaguely unsure as to just exactly where I was. There, as it were, I would spot a glorious apparition and ask, "Are you the Archangel Gabriel?" and the creature would answer nonchalantly: "No way! Not on your life! I am the Archangel Michael."

Whichever archangel it was, it was clear that I had arrived in Heaven and as this recognition shot through my brain I lost whatever composure I had. I started to babble in greatest excitement, desperately trying to recall English words, and explain to the soldiers that a few hundred yards inside the bush there was a big concentration camp where thousands of deportees, mostly Jews, were being imprisoned.

"Are they locked in?" One of the soldiers asked.

I did not understand the expression "locked in". I looked puzzled; the soldier saw my problem and indicated with his hand the movement of turning a key.

"What I mean is confined, closed inside, not free to come out" the soldier said, all the while playing charades with his wrist. I finally understood.

"Oh, no, people are out, all over the place."

"Well, fine, then. Don't worry. Some guys will come and take care of you." The soldier turned to his steering wheel and was about to drive on. I reacted with panic. There was still something important I had to say.

"Have you got some food?" I can still remember my proud satisfaction that I could remember the English word for "food".

The soldiers looked around in their vehicle; they tapped the pockets of their tunics. One produced a little cellophane bag of saltine crackers and a cardboard pack of "Chesterfield" cigarettes; the other found a little can of condensed milk, "Alpenmilch-Bärenmarke", a local product, in the back of the car. They gave these to me, patted me on the shoulder, and said:

"Take it easy. Things are going to be OK from now on." And they drove away.

I stood there with my riches, somewhat dumbfounded. I tore open the little cellophane bag and as I was wolfing down the crackers I realized that I had no means of opening the milk can. I tried the stick I had, to no avail; I was about to look for a suitable stone when another vehicle, similar to the former one, was approaching. I was growing bold and I waved to them, signaling them to stop. Two soldiers were again looking at me with amazed interest.

"Hello. I am a prisoner from the concentration camp here."

They said something in reply that I did not understand but it did not matter. There was friendliness in their eyes. I pointed to my milk can, showing that I was trying to open it. The soldier grinned.

"No problem." He reached into his pocket for a sharp instrument and poked two holes into my can. I drank the sweet condensed milk with rapturous eagerness while the soldiers were asking questions. The delicious sweet fluid was spreading through my insides like a soothing liniment. I said a few words about thousands of prisoners like myself in the barracks, with no room to lie down, no food to eat. The soldiers listened with wide-eyed amazement. They rummaged through their car looking for things to give me; I ended up with two little packs of cigarettes: one was again Chesterfield, the other, Lucky Strike. They did not have food and when they saw a flicker of disappointment in my eye, one of them said,

"Hop in, come with us. We'll take care of you." He turned back to make room for me on the rear seat. At this point, I committed one of the great stupidities of my life. I turned down the invitation.

"I can't. I have my belongings in the camp." My "belongings" at that point were the beaten-up messcup that also doubled as chamber pot in Fertőrákos; and a blanket that was crawling with lice. Both were possessions of enormous importance in my mind because in past weeks they were matters of life and death. Without a messcup, there was no food collection. Some deportees on the death marches abandoned their blanket because it was too much to carry but then perished from exposure during the night. I was not free yet from these preconceptions. One of the friendly soldiers even said,

"Don't worry about your belongings. We'll get you what you need."

I was adamant; I said, "I also have my friends here."

The soldier grinned. "Well, good luck to you then."

No sooner did they drive on, when a third vehicle came and it also stopped. I did not realize it yet but I was quite a sight. More than a week later in an army doctor's office my body weight was 82 lbs. (37 kg); it must

have been a lot less then. The soldiers in the third car looked at me; we talked. I saw an immense half-a-loaf of white peasant bread and a brick of butter on the rear seat of their car. I could not take my eyes off those and when the soldiers saw that, they gave me the bread and butter without me even asking. I also got two more little packs of cigarettes, and more friendly pats on my back.

My arms were full of all these wonderful things; my heart was full of the obvious kindness and friendly words of the American soldiers. I was eager to share all this with my Tapir friends. I started on the path back to the camp and I met another inmate en route, someone I did not know personally. We exchanged a few words in Hungarian, congratulated each other on having lived to this day. The man had a turnip, the kind we were fighting about just an hour or two earlier in the camp. He said he got it in the supply depot but also warned me not to go near there now; it was pandemonium and a dozen camp inmates had been trampled to death there already. He eyed my riches with obvious fascination. I broke off a piece of the peasant bread, spread some butter on it and gave it to him. I broke off another piece for myself; we sat down and ate. I told him about the wonderful Americans on the highway and assured him that our sufferings were over. The man was excited by my cigarette packages; I had no fewer than 5 of them, each holding 4 cigarettes. Two were Chesterfield, two Lucky Strike, one Old Gold. I was myself a nonsmoker but there were smokers among the Tapirs, one of whom, John Stricker, used to say that he was missing cigarettes as much as food. I rejoiced over the thought of being able to bring these to them. Also, these colorful little packages with their English inscriptions were a token of the American presence. I was not willing to part with these but my companion offered a deal. He was willing to swap his turnip for my cigarettes. We bargained; in the end I exchanged two of the packs (those I possessed in duplicate) for the turnip and I proceeded back to the camp. As it turned out later, the deal was a laugh. American cigarettes became a currency in the occupied territories of Europe and one little pack of these was worth a sumptuous four-course meal. The exchange was the second act of stupidity I committed that day, but I still had a good part of the bread loaf and butter; the can of condensed milk with some drops still in it; three various packs of cigarettes; and now the beet.

My companion was not kidding about pandemonium at the supply depot. A huge screaming crowd was still milling around there and as I was hurrying to our barrack, I tried my best to avoid groups of loitering inmates. My treasures could be yanked away from me. I managed to arrive unmolested and I was taken aback by the dreary lethargy of the Tapirs still in the barrack. They were sitting on their blankets as lackadaisically as I was an hour earlier. To say that a lot had happened in that hour would be an understatement. I was in a different world; excited, exuberant, enthusiastic. Although the bits of food and the wonderful sweet condensed milk undoubtedly helped, it was mainly the friendly treatment by the Americans that made me feel human again.

I tried to communicate my excitement to my friends and I recounted my experiences on the highway, moment-for-moment and I distributed the cigarette packs to the smokers. We all partook of the bread, butter, and beet. Some others trickled back from the supply depot with messcups of flour, sugar, and a millet-like cereal seed all of which, they said, was spread out knee-deep on the ground, spilled out from torn-open bags. Numerous human corpses lay around, trampled to death in the rush. Blood, grime, and human

excrements were mixed in with the spilled grains here and there. It was said to be a frightful mess and we all agreed to steer clear although we did eat what was already brought and collected, according to assurances, in "clean" areas.

It was time to talk over what we were going to do. I told my friends that one of the Americans I spoke to on the highway said that officials would come and take care of us; after some discussion we agreed to wait for that. It was getting dark anyhow and we decided to rest.

Almost half of the barrack population was gone and there was the unaccustomed privilege of enough room to stretch out, turn over, and, most importantly, to scratch in peace. As I was enjoying these luxuries I tried to think over what had happened in this most eventful day. Bringing the camp meal and the argument about the beet; then, the SS-guards marching away in an act of surrender; finally, my encounter with the Americans. Exhausted as I was, there was no way that sleep would come to my eyes. I noted that a few fellow Tapirs had the same problem and by about 9 P.M. a few of us got up, had a second conference, and decided that there had to be more to liberation than just having enough room to scratch. We were going to walk into the town of Wels and see what was going on there. Four of us: Victor Moller, Laci Szegedi, George Teltsch, and myself concluded a Grand Alliance, swore to support each other to the death, chose (for reasons that are no longer clear to me) the word "hammer" as our password, and set out in the night to find the highway.

The area was spooky in the dark; we ran into the barbed wire fence a few times but finally found the gate, still open, and proceeded on the path. The ambiance was distinctly uncanny and I had to reassure my companions that once we were on the highway things would be different. The Americans in little military vehicles would be passing every few minutes; there would be kind words, food, and we even might get a ride. It was dawning on me that it was a mistake to have declined to go with them. I was resolved not to make that mistake again.

We reached the highway, and its total abandonment was an unpleasant surprise. There were no Americans or other traffic of any kind; in fact no living soul to be seen and no light, except a red glow on the northwestern horizon from what appeared to be burning buildings. Rifle shots and machine gun fire could be heard in the distance. We had a quick consultation on what to do; Victor found all this too scary and wanted to turn back, but the rest of us were resolved to press forward. We could remember from our last death march about 3 weeks ago that the town of Wels was only about an hour or two away.

En route, we encountered a big dark hulk on the roadside that turned out to be an abandoned German tank. We explored it, mainly in the hope of finding some food; but there was none and after a few minutes of clambering in and on it, we continued our hike. Before long, the outlines of the town of Wels became visible. Just in front of the first houses there was a railroad crossing and we spotted a military sentry, clearly outlined against the light of a solitary lamppost, walking up and down along the rail tracks.

We ducked down on the roadside, crawled forward a bit and watched. It was uncertain whether the soldier was German or American. I could remember that the American vehicles in the afternoon were coming from the direction

of Wels but it was conceivable that the Germans temporarily reoccupied the place in the changing fortunes of the war. We were not inclined to take unnecessary risks at that point. However, as the sentry walked back and forth, we could observe him under the glare of the lamppost and he was a black man! Happily, we jumped forward and walked up to him. George as well as Victor understood some English but it was conceded that I was the most proficient among us and I became the spokesman for our group. I said hello, introduced ourselves as liberated inmates from the concentration camp, and asked for instructions about what to do. The black soldier pointed to a large low building about a hundred yards to the right; the "Alpenjägerkaserne" [Mountain Troop Barracks] according to the inscription on the façade. He said we could spend the night there and get in touch with the authorities tomorrow. He grinned, and sent us on with the friendly comment,

"Take it easy." This was a new expression for me which I learned with delight, because things were indeed getting easy to take, in comparison to what we had been accustomed to.

As we walked to the Alpenjägerkaserne we became aware of a commotion across the street, in a little shack that was apparently a small grocery store. About a dozen people, obviously fellow inmates from Gunskirchen, were milling around in the store. We approached and I noted three American soldiers in the door, trying gently to push out the crowd. In the new, delightful, secure feeling that all Americans were friends, I called out, "Hello." One of the soldiers turned to me, with a pleasurable surprise on his face.

"You guys can speak English?"

"Yes, a little."

"Terrific. Would you please explain to these people that there is *nothing* here; the store has already been looted. We've been fighting the war all day long and we are dead tired. We came in here trying to catch a little sleep; would they please get the hell out and let us rest?"

The soldier made a funny face of mock desperation. I stepped up, feeling my full importance as spokesman for the U.S. Army, and translated the soldier's words. The deportees listened and slowly trickled out. The main point in the communication, namely that there was nothing left in the store which was worth taking, was plain enough anyway. As we ourselves parted, I quickly scanned the place and spotted in one corner two-pound paper bags labeled "Linzer Sand"; and on one of the higher shelves, bottles of "Maggi" soup flavoring. I was familiar with the latter in cube form but this was liquid; as for the Linzer Sand, I figured maybe it's some sort of baking powder or flour to make Linzer Torte with. I quickly took a bag and a bottle and wished the soldiers good night. They thanked me for my help, patted us on the back, and ushered us out.

At the Alpenjägerkaserne across the street, there were no admission formalities. The place was deserted by its former occupants. There were fellow deportees lingering in the courtyard who told us that we could go and find an empty room and rest. There were glowing remains of a campfire in the courtyard. We walked around, looked into every room; in maybe half of them there were people from the camp, lying on straw sacks, talking, or trying to sleep. We found a suitable empty room with four straw sacks but

were too keyed up to go to sleep, so we walked around more, looking for food. One of us spotted in a corner a big sack of what appeared to be oats. We decided to go down to the campfire and maybe we could do something with the various consumables we had. Alas, the "Linzer Sand" turned out to be scouring powder. The "Maggi" liquid was highly concentrated, the kind of which a few drops are intended to flavor a whole pot of soup; and then, there were the oats. The obvious thing to try was oat soup with the Maggi, which could be warmed on the embers. That's exactly what we did, but the concoction turned out to be awful. The oat grains swelled in the liquid but they retained their pointed ends and they were impossible to chew without getting them in the teeth so that they stuck out and pricked the tongue (how horses manage it is still a complete mystery to me). The Maggi liquid was impossibly salty and after a few spoonfuls we all agreed, with a laugh, that the soup was inedible. I think it was the first good laugh we had enjoyed since Budapest. Our sense of humor was coming back; it was a delight to look at the world with optimism again. We knew we could look forward to genuinely edible, delicious things to eat the next day. Actually, we had fairly decent nutrition on that day already, certainly in comparison to what we had been accustomed to; but a chronically undernourished individual feels hungry even if his stomach is full.

We retired to our room and I was just about to turn in and try to sleep when I heard people calling into every room from the corridor:

"Is there anyone here who can speak both English and German?"

I sat up. "Yes" I said. "I can."

"Please come along. The Americans need a translator." I was led down to the guard room on the first floor where the following spectacle confronted me:

All four walls of the room were lined with German soldiers, facing the wall, with legs spread wide and arms held high. There were about 25 of them, mostly young. The uniforms appeared to be Wehrmacht [Army] rather than SS. Three Americans stood in the center of the room, two with machine guns on the ready. Any German who wiggled around too much or let an arm down for a moment got the barrel of a machine gun in his ribs. The third American appeared to be an officer, with a bar on his shoulder. He was conducting the interrogation. When I was presented to him as an interpreter, his grim features softened and he shook hands with me. He wanted to know what nationality I was and I told him, Hungarian with Jewish background, and that I was imprisoned in the concentration camp down the road. We chatted for a few moments; he asked where I learned English and complimented me on my linguistic ability. He offered me a cigarette which I accepted with thanks but declined to light it and put it in my pocket "for later use". Then we turned to the business at hand.

"Ask these bastards what unit they are from and what were their orders."

I translated, somewhat softening the style. "Der Offizier möchte wissen zu welcher Einheit Sie gehören und was waren Ihre Befehle."

One of the Germans answered in a shaky voice; in fact, his whole body was shaking with terror. The information was given, and I translated it into English. The interrogation continued, with me generally tempering the harsh

tone and omitting interspersed curses and threats. "Tell them to stop telling damn lies or I'll have their brains blown out" I translated into:

"Der Offizier will die Wahrheit hören sonst wird er böse" [The officer wants to hear the truth or he is going to get angry]. The Germans trembled; their information appeared to be eagerly forthcoming; and for some reason I had no strong craving for revenge. I almost felt sorry for them. My sentiments were a mix of personal delight, feelings of satisfaction, and amusement. The personal delight was that I counted as a "somebody" again; I was being helpful to the American Army and I was treated like a valued ally on equal footing, with handshakes and offers of cigarettes. This was by far the most important component of my mood and gave me an almost indescribable "high". The satisfaction was to see the tables turned at last, and having the Germans in a tough spot for a change. Finally, the amusement was tinged with contempt as I watched these Germans, formerly the strutting, arrogant overlords, now trembling for their lives with appalling cowardice. I was reminded of our own lineups in Fertörákos, Mauthausen, Gunskirchen, including the one when we had to witness executions, and I doubt that we, the contemptible, cowardly Jews according to their propaganda, ever presented such an undignified spectacle.

The interrogation went on for some 20 minutes, after which the officer dismissed me with another handshake, expression of thanks, and an appreciative comment,

"That went pretty good. We found out what we wanted."

I was delighted; the Americanism "pretty good" which I was to hear many times in the following weeks, stuck in my mind and I indeed felt "pretty good". I walked back to our room where my companions were already asleep. It was about midnight. I finally lay down and fell asleep also.

Thus ended May 4, 1945, unquestionably the most important, most exciting, and most exhilarating day of my life, even from the perspective of half-a-century.

#### First Days of Freedom

The attitude of the American soldier was the chief source of the joys of our liberation, almost more important than food. The pointed gentleness towards us deportees was a wonderful, soothing experience. It may have been more evident to me as an English speaker, but the general friendliness was plain enough to anyone and in stunning contrast to the treatment we were accustomed to from the Germans or Hungarians. There was no better illustration of this than the "plight" of the three soldiers in full battle gear in the grocery store, looking helplessly at a small horde of ragtag deportees and needing a *translator* to ask the people to please leave. It was clear that the soldiers were awed by the obvious suffering written in our faces and skeleton-like bodies and were unwilling to add a push, or even a harsh word, to our tribulations. This humaneness was the first, most profound, and most persistent impression I gained of the Americans and was a factor in my later decision that, if possible, I would want to become an American.

The civilian population of Wels and other conquered towns was cowed, anxious, and generally forthcoming enough with the former concentration camp

inmates although frequently with a sullen note. No demand of deportees was refused; indeed, it would have been dangerous to do so. The American troops occupying the area had already seen Buchenwald, some had seen Dachau, and now they had seen Mauthausen and its satellite camps. Compassion for the hordes of liberated prisoners in unspeakably miserable condition was strong and mingled with anger at the local populace for letting this sort of thing happen. It did not take much in those days for German civilians to be taken in for some unfriendly questioning. It is true that Wels is Austria rather than Germany proper but that distinction was not yet made and all German-speaking areas were treated as occupied enemy territory. The political decision to regard Austrians as victims of Nazi aggression rather than as willing and enthusiastic Nazi collaborators was made only later, and never had much justification from our point of view. We could always recognize most of our tormentors in Fertörákos, Mauthausen, and Gunskirchen as clearly Austrians by accent.

Now the populace was running scared. As liberated deportees roamed the city of Wels on the morning of May 5, they could walk into any shop or ring the bell of virtually any private home, and simply demand what they wanted. I can remember getting bread at a bakery, milk and butter at a dairy shop, even a jar of honey--all for the asking, and in some cases ahead of long lines of customers. We were gorging ourselves on food. Deportees retching miserably on street corners because their stomachs could not handle the sudden onslaught of unaccustomed nutriment was a common sight in Wels on that day, as was the scene of deportees recognizing, or thinking to recognize, SS-guards or other former tormentors among the civilian passers-by. Wild commotions, shoutings, scuffles occurred here and there, with American soldiers invariably taking the side of the deportees. Pointing out a man to an American soldier, saying "Nazi!" or "SS-swine!" was all it took to have that man arrested, handled roughly with rifle butts, and taken in for questioning. I can't say that it was not a secure, satisfying feeling but it was also clear that many of the accusations were the result of blind vengeance. I had seen with my own eyes that the SS-contingent of at least the Gunskirchen camp marched off in the direction of Lambach and I doubted that any of them would be walking the streets of Wels the next day.

As we viewed this situation we resolved to show some fairness and give a little credit where credit was due. We recalled the tavern owner who attempted to give us food as we were marched past his place some 3 weeks prior, and we went to find him. Location of the street where this happened was not difficult as it was next to the Traun bridge. But it turned out that his "Gasthaus" was closed; neighbors told us that he was taken away by the Gestapo some weeks before. It seemed that there might have been a connection between his humanitarian act and his fate. Even in the last days of the war, or perhaps particularly in the last days of the war when people with some foresight were beginning to run for cover, "disloyal acts" were not treated lightly by the retreating Nazis. I don't know to this day what happened to the "good Samaritan" tavern owner. Perhaps he was hung up from a lamppost like the dangling corpses we had seen in Enns.

During our wanderings through the town of Wels we happened to spot the local Nazi Party headquarters. It was wide open, totally abandoned, and apparently undisturbed. We walked in and made ourselves comfortable in the highly incongruous surroundings of swastika flags and huge portraits of the Führer. It was uplifting to realize that all this was now a matter of the past, no more than a bad dream. We rummaged through cabinets and drawers;

there was not much left in the place although in the basement we did find some shelves with canned food. I can remember opening a can of sweet green peas and eating it on the spot--it was heavenly. We continually exhorted each other not to overeat and end up in the same wretched misery as so many of our fellow deportees. The rule to follow was three square meals a day, no more and no less. It was awfully difficult to abide by that rule, now that we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of unimaginable abundance. That perception was of course purely relative. There was a great deal of whining in occupied Germany and Austria about the terrible famine in the last phases of the war and afterward. It was only in comparison to the concentration camp that we thought we were in the land of plenty.

After some rest on the comfortable lounge furniture in the party chief's office we sat down in the conference room to decide what to do next. One option was to stay put. The party headquarters was roomy enough for four people to live in and although it had no sleeping facilities we could have improvised something, and as we noted with a chuckle, it was not too likely that the original occupants would come to reclaim the premises. Another option was to seek out the pertinent American occupation authorities and let them put us into whatever transit camp or quarantine was to be established for the liberated deportees as a first step towards eventual repatriation. Finally, we could try to make it back to Hungary on our own.

Sentiment among us was overwhelming for this last option. We were burning with impatience to *go home* and on the basis of a wall map hanging in the conference room we could plot our homeward trek and divide it into daily portions. With Linz, Grein, Melk, Krems, etc. as nightly stops, we figured we could reach Vienna in about a week and from there Budapest in another week, or faster if we could snatch rides here and there. Another idea was to find a boat on the Danube and let the river carry us down to Budapest, with occasional shore alightings as needs dictated. We were full of enthusiasm and by mid-afternoon we left the party headquarters in a resolute, cheerful march in the direction of Hungary, which at that point meant the road to Linz. The town of Wels was beginning to swarm with former inmates of Gunskirchen, some of whom looked at our emphatic, purposeful march in wonderment. Questions were hurled at us,

"What's the hurry? Where do you think you are going?"

"To Budapest, of course" we answered proudly. "Where else?"

We were exuberant; but our enthusiasm doubtless had a quixotic touch. In retrospect, I could compare it to the last scene in Gershwin's opera, *Porgy and Bess*, where Porgy, the crippled beggar of Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, in order to reacquire his lost beloved, Bess, sets out in his little goat-drawn wagon for New York.

By nightfall we made it to Marchtrenk, the first village on the Linz road, some 5 miles out of Wels. It was time to look for night quarters and we turned into a farmstead at random and asked for something to eat and to be allowed to spend the night in the barn. We behaved in a pointedly polite and non-assertive fashion. There were of course fellow deportees who could not resist the temptation of lording it over the populace now that the tables were finally turned. Some locals were allegedly chased out of their own bedrooms with threats that they would be denounced to the Americans if they raised any objections. We were resolved to behave civilly and avoid cheap

vindictiveness. Also, quite frankly, we were still uncomfortable in genteel surroundings. In all the excitement of the day, there was no opportunity yet to devote attention to personal hygiene and to get rid of our louse-ridden clothing. We were content to sleep in the straw in the barn, Fertörákos fashion.

Next morning, for the only time in my life, I had some raw eggs for breakfast. I got them from our farm hostess in Marchtrenk fresh from the chicken coop and my appetite for them was too urgent to bother with cooking. I can't even remember what else we had to eat; everything was delicious, exciting. We continued our march on the road "to Budapest". The highway was busy with traffic of American military vehicles and as we waved cheerfully to the soldiers they grinned, waved back, and threw little gifts to us. By that time it must have been common knowledge in the American Army that the area was swarming with liberated concentration camp inmates and I suppose it was not difficult to recognize us as such, even from a distance. We were accumulating a growing hoard of cigarettes, candy bars, and canned food--each new item was a fresh pleasurable excitement and I can distinctly remember our delight as we learned the names of cigarette brands (Chesterfield, Lucky Strike, Old Gold, Philip Morris, Camel were the common ones); candy bar brands (Hershey's, Nestlé's, Almond Joy); and whole prepared dinners in cans, among which "Beef and Vegetable Stew" and "Beef and Vegetable Hash" were the most frequent.

Unfortunately, by noon or so George became sick. He was developing high fever and at some point he declared that he could not carry on. We took him to the nearest farmstead, obtained permission to go into the barn, and we laid him down there as comfortably as possible and sat around for a while, having lunch. According to the mutual support treaty under which we set out from the Gunskirchen camp, we were to stick together no matter what, and it was clear, at least to me, that we were not supposed to abandon him. But what was going to happen to our carefully laid out schedule? According to that schedule, we were supposed to reach Linz that day before nightfall. We had an animated discussion, with George himself encouraging us to go on, saying that he would manage somehow with the help of the Americans. Laci and Victor were also pressing to continue and with a bad conscience I finally gave in. We considered splitting into two pairs but as it happened, George and I were the two reasonably fluent English speakers and losing us both would have been very disadvantageous to the other two. As an act of atonement I insisted that in the partition of our supplies all arguable apportionments were resolved in George's favor. That included a little round flat can of "American Process Cheese" which for some reason we all considered particularly mouthwatering (I must confess that I am not exactly of the same opinion today) and regarding which there was the most lively argument. We even gave some packs of cigarettes to the farmer, asking him to look out for George and contact the Americans on his behalf if needed. We then said goodbye to George and continued on the road to Linz. Later we learned that George was transferred to the hospital of the refugee camp at Hörsching and was nursed back to health there. He had typhus.

By dusk the remaining three of us reached a little cluster of farmsteads called Hart, still about 3 miles outside of Linz. We stopped for dinner, to which one farmer contributed a nice hot substantial bean soup in exchange for a few cigarettes. Our meal was otherwise based on our own supplies. Victor wanted to stay for the night but Laci and I wanted to press on. We had a notion that our successful arrival in Budapest two weeks hence was contingent

on making it to Linz that particular day. "Making it to Linz" was defined as reaching at least the outer terminal of the streetcars. That turned out to be a naïveté; the city was in nearly total ruins from air raids and there was no active streetcar transportation at all.

About half-a-mile past Hart we reached another small settlement called Haag where a cluster of new apartment houses on the right appeared to have been taken over by the Americans. A little hut labeled "Military Police" was in front of the settlement and on the left there were scattered farmsteads. This was obviously the ideal place to halt and I walked into the military police post, introduced myself to the soldier on duty, and asked for help to find night quarters for the three of us. The soldier pointed to the nearest farmstead some 150 feet distant and advised us to seek a place there; he said to come back and report if there were any difficulties. We knocked at the farmhouse and obtained permission to stay in the barn readily enough. Laci and Victor were both pretty bushed from the day's march and went right to sleep. I went back to the military police post to report the successful accomplishment of our billeting.

At that point, a second soldier was also present who turned out to be the sergeant in charge of the military police unit. When I thanked the guard for our successful placement, the sergeant turned to me with very friendly interest, introduced himself as Irving Cohen from Brooklyn, and asked me questions of our concentration camp experience. As I started telling a few things, he interrupted,

"Wait. The guys ought to hear this."

He took me into the apartment complex, said something to the sentry at the door, and I was led up the staircase into a small bedroom where two soldiers were preparing to retire. Everybody looked at me with amazed interest. Sgt. Cohen introduced me all around, we shook hands, and they bid me to sit down on one of the beds. I was hesitant; I explained that I had no opportunity as yet to change from the rags I wore in the camp and that it was "very unhygienic".

"Oh, hell." One of the men answered. There was a friendly obscenity or two. "Don't worry about that. Make yourself comfortable and start talking."

As I launched into a narrative of our camp experience, the room filled with people, the corridor filled with people looking in, and soon I found myself talking to a crowd of 30-40 soldiers, crammed in and around the tiny bedroom, all listening to me in obvious fascination. It was my first long discourse in English and, except for some school recitations, my first "public talk" in any language. I recounted our slave labor at the "Southeast wall" of Vienna; the train trips; the death marches; the hunger, the lice, and the grotesque overcrowding in Gunskirchen with people dying like flies around me.

There could not have been a more sympathetic audience. If I stopped or stuttered, looking for words, people tried to help out eagerly, and they interspersed my talk with exclamations or comments like "Oh, the son-of-a-bitches" and similar. The friendly interest, the compassion, the complete emotional identification with our predicament, and the reassurance that they were here now precisely for the purpose to set these things right, was an

all-pervasive delight and gave me an indescribable sensation of "high". I still remember that talk to the American soldiers in that small over-crowded bedroom as one of the great moments of my life. When the listeners dispersed, Sgt. Cohen took me to a wardrobe in another bedroom that was full of men's civilian clothes. He asked me to select what I wanted and take a complete outfitting. It appeared that the clothes belonged to a former inhabitant of the place. They were summarily evicted from their homes when the Americans occupied the area. As I learned later, the apartment complex was known locally as the "Flaksiedlung" [Anti-aircraft artillery billets] because the staff of such a German defense unit, with their families, used to be housed there. These occupants were given just a few hours to move out and take their essentials with them; all else was left behind. Now the Flaksiedlung was inhabited by Tank Battalion No.748, attached to the 65th Infantry Division of the 3rd U.S. Army.

I was somewhat ill at ease at rummaging through someone else's clothes closet. I wondered if I might meet the owner one day who might recognize his own suit on me. When Sgt. Cohen saw my hesitation, he said,

"Don't worry about taking some damned German's property --they owe it to you. Anyway, all the adult males who lived here are now in prisoner-of-war camp and are having there one hell of a lot better time than what you went through." He heaped shirts, pants, jackets, and shoes onto my arms, while another soldier brought me a brown grocery bag.

"Here are a few goodies for you and your friends."

I was overwhelmed. Sgt. Cohen escorted me down and said goodbye, asking me to drop in next day at the Military Police hut to talk more. I could barely manage with my load back to the barn, where my companions were fast asleep. I went to sleep also, feeling once again on top of the world and thoroughly in love with every citizen of the United States of America.

#### Living on the Fat of the Land

Next morning I recounted my experience to Laci and Victor; the clothes I brought were enough for all three of us. The grocery bag with the "goodies" contained not only cigarettes, candy bars and assorted delicacies but also soap, toothpaste, razor. We decided to start civilized life then and there. There was a water trough next to the barn, fed from a creek, serving as cattle watering facility but suitable for washing also. We stripped and had a thorough wash from top to bottom, and got dressed in our new outfits. The old rags, which were crawling with lice, were thrown on a smoldering rubbish heap and burned. We felt born anew; we barely recognized each other and had a good laugh at some of the garment pieces that were not necessarily perfectly fitting but serviceable enough. We went down to the farmhouse to say good morning to our "landlords" and obtained some fresh milk there, with bread-and-butter for breakfast. We were just about ready to walk up to the military police post when we saw Sgt. Cohen and Pfc. Sol Bemben, another of the young men I met the previous night, walking towards us.

We greeted each other like old friends and I introduced my companions. The Americans complimented us on how much better we looked cleaned up; they brought us food, cigarettes, and a bunch of newspapers and magazines to read. They also complimented me personally on my impromptu performance of the night before, which they said was "quite a talk". I was basking in glory. According

to Pfc. Bemben, the whole company was discussing Nazi cruelties half the night and a lot of other people wanted to meet us.

We sat down for a chat and I told the Americans that our objective was to get back to Hungary as quickly as possible. I explained our "program" which we formulated at the Nazi party office in Wels and asked some help from the American Army to expedite this plan. The two Americans listened understandingly but they were dubious about the scheme and did not think it was practical. First of all, they said, most of the territory between Linz and Budapest was occupied by the Soviet Army; matters such as deportee exchange were not worked out as yet and very probably we would not be allowed to cross the occupation zone boundary at all. If we tried, we might be taken into unfriendly detention. Secondly, the war was officially still on; pockets of German resistance might exist here and there and we could run into trouble. Finally, roads were needed for official army traffic and groups of deportees roaming on them would only create a traffic hindrance and interfere with military objectives. They advised us very strongly to stay put for the time being. They would see to it that we had everything we needed and they urged us to have patience.

When I translated this communication to my companions, there was a discussion. Laci, particularly, was pressing to carry on, with or without the encouragement of the Americans. He was the most impatient among us to get home, perhaps because he spoke no English at all and felt a little left out in our socializing with the soldiers. Victor and I wished to stay for a while. By next morning, Laci was determined to split and we carried out another partition of our supplies. Laci took off, saying, we would meet in Budapest. We did, but as it happened, he was the last among us to arrive home. He became sick on the way and had to be hospitalized. He, too, had typhus.

So, by May 8 there were just two of us remaining in the Haag barn. By then I was on first-name terms with Irving and Sol and they wanted to see where we lived; we showed them the barn. They also wanted to talk to the owners of the farm, an elderly couple. Irving spoke some Yiddish which passed for more or less understandable quasi-German and he told the couple rather sternly that they would be held responsible for our lodging and board. He then told me in an aside that if they treated us right he would see that they received some food rations and cigarettes in payment.

We found out that the battalion had a former deportee in its own ranks, so to speak: a young kid speaking only Polish, whom they had picked up about a day or two before our liberation. It seemed that he might have belonged to the group of "blatniks" who were transferred to Gunskirchen and squeezed into the barracks there on top of us. He somehow managed to escape en route and went into hiding until the Americans arrived. He was now virtually integrated into the U.S. Army, in full G.I. outfit including tunic and helmet, and it took an experienced eye to realize that the insignia were missing and therefore his attire was not strictly a military uniform. He lived and ate with the Americans and had a regular army ID card as "Officers' Orderly Boy". I gathered that his duties in this capacity were extremely light. He spoke almost no English and no more than a smattering of German and communication with him was difficult, even for us. It seemed that he was generally a bit on the obtuse side and no wonder, since he apparently grew up in various concentration camps. The Americans found him virtually starved to death and nursed him back to life, without being able to

communicate with him, either. His experience and sufferings were only surmised from the condition in which he was found. That is why an English-speaking former camp inmate (myself) was such a popular sensation with the troops. It occurred to me that if I had accepted the invitation of the soldiers whom I had met on the road outside of Gunskirchen, I could be now an "Officers' Orderly Boy" also, and virtually belong to the American Army. The 3 days that had elapsed since then made a lot of difference. Liberated camp inmates were no longer a rare curiosity; if anything, they were becoming too common now and "deals" such as this kid got were no longer available. Nonetheless, we had no reason to complain. Soldiers of the battalion whom we befriended would frequently come down straight from their chow lines and bring us fresh hot coffee, delicious snacks, and such sensational gourmet dishes as chicken with rice or ham with pineapple. They had obvious pleasure at seeing our bright-eyed enthusiasm for these delicacies and were resolved to fatten us up a bit.

I was also delighted with the reading material we got. There were issues of the army newspaper, "The Stars and Stripes"; the Division had its own publication, "The 65th Halbert"; and even the Tank Battalion had its own mimeographed newsheet, "The Rhino Romps". I had my first encounter with that peculiar, and then exclusively American, art form, the comic strip: the series then running were Li'l Abner, Dick Tracy, and others. I can also remember an issue of LIFE magazine with General Eisenhower's face on the title page. The benign gaze of the commanding general contrasted strongly with the cold, cruel, martinet-like image that German or Hungarian officers were expected to cultivate. Another issue of LIFE that I can distinctly remember dealt with President Roosevelt's sudden death and the succession of President Truman about which I learned only then.

We heard that the document of unconditional surrender was about to be signed by the remaining German authorities and the European war was now officially over. May 9, 1945 was proclaimed as "V-E" [Victory in Europe] Day and the battalion staged a big celebration in the evening to which Victor and I were informally invited. Irving came down to get us; when the sentries looked at us in some puzzlement he just called to them, "They are OK" and we were let in. An improvised stage was erected in the back yard of the apartment complex; a music band was playing and there was a lot of buffoonery and horseplay, with the "actors" parodying their own commanding officers, the conquered Germans, and even us liberated concentration camp inmates trying to communicate in faulty English. There was uproarious hilarity, with the audience frequently calling out to the stage, "Pretty good! Take it easy! You son of a gun!" and similar shouts. Even though we frequently did not get the point of the skits, we were having a great time. Having been invited, being accepted as part of all this, was the main thing and gave us another great "high". After the performance there was beer for the enlisted men which we understood was an unusual treat and given only to celebrate victory. We walked around, congratulated everyone on winning the war, and thanked them for rescuing us. There was a lot of friendly backslapping and the V-E celebration was for me a most joyful and unforgettable event. However, we sensed that the soldiers were not completely relaxed; there was still apprehension about Japan and the men expected to be sent there sooner or later for more fighting.

On one of the following days, Victor also became sick. I can remember helping him, or rather virtually carrying him up to the Americans, looking for the doctor's office. We were taken to the Medical Officer, Capt.

Greenspan. He examined Victor and immediately arranged for his transfer to a camp hospital. He gave me an examination also. I was pronounced OK, if somewhat emaciated--it was at that point that my body weight was found to be 82 lbs. Captain Greenspan was a kind, confidence-inspiring doctor who inquired about my living arrangements and encouraged me to keep in touch and let him know if I needed anything or if there was any problem with my health. As it happened, there would have been opportunity to follow up on this. A few days later I also developed malaise, prostration, spiking fever and in retrospect I am certain that I had typhus. We all got infected in the last days in Gunskirchen (the disease has 1-2 week incubation time). I was loath to be taken to a hospital and even though I knew of course that such a hospital would be in no way comparable to what was mockingly known by that name in Mauthausen, I still abhorred the prospect. I felt that I was comfortable enough where I was as a private person, and I wanted no part of camp life again. I was resolved to conceal my sickness from the Americans. Fortunately, the fever attacks came in a fairly regular, predictable pattern in the afternoons and I could organize my daily activities accordingly, retiring when I knew that the fever was about to hit. In the mornings, I could still socialize with the Americans, walk into their compound, and even visit Capt. Greenspan's office now and then and ask for anti-headache and anti-diarrhea medications without disclosing that I was seriously sick. This situation lasted for 10-14 days and eventually I got better. Obviously, our liberation came just in time. If the disease had hit us while still in the camp, there can be no question that it would have meant the end of us.

Altogether, I continued as sole occupant of the Haag barn for some 6 weeks, i.e. longer than our stay in Mauthausen and Gunskirchen combined. Except for my sickness, or even in spite of my sickness, I remember it as a happy, carefree time, truly "living on the fat of the land". Although technically I was in the care of the farmer couple owning the barn, there was little need to fall back on their nurturing. I usually had some fresh milk in the morning, frequently right from the cow, "Kuh-warm" as the old lady called it, and there were a few occasions when I was invited to the family table for dinner. They also took care of my laundry. Otherwise, my life was revolving around the Americans. The battalion had its "tool truck" parked just a few steps from the barn and there were always a few soldiers within hailing distance, which was important to me especially during my sickness, in case I needed emergency help (I never did).

In the morning I could hear reveille from the battalion quarters. The cheerful little tune on the bugle inevitably reminded me of our reveille in Budapest on the jazz accordion. Frequently during the morning hours, I would join the soldiers who came down to the tool truck for some reason and we would sit in a circle, chatting about various things. My English was improving by leaps and bounds, and I acquired some Americanisms, including vulgarities. Of course, there were occasions when my linguistic talent hit snags. I can particularly remember a fellow, Cpl. Bates, who for a while had guard duty at the tool truck and whom I had a lot of trouble understanding. Once I asked him where he was from, and he told me, Masuria. That of course is the ancient name of an area in northern Poland and on its face did not seem too likely. I assumed that maybe that was the name of his village; I wanted to know the state. The corporal insisted that Masuria was the state. I still prided myself on my knowledge of geography and I just *knew* that there was no such U.S. state; the question was, how could I tell that to an American soldier who claimed to be from there? We continued our conversation, with me gently probing what part of the U.S.A. Masuria was in. As Cpl. Bates

mentioned the name of his state repeatedly, it started to sound more like Masoura than Masuria but only when he said that the new President, Harry Truman was also from that state did I realize that what the man meant was Missouri. I learned that this strange, loose way of pronouncing vowels was one of the characteristics of American speech and by almost unconscious imitation I attempted to incorporate it into my pronunciation also. Had I lived with the Americans longer, I might have succeeded better, but even so, some new acquaintances occasionally mistook me for a liberated G.I. prisoner of war.

I played chess with some soldiers; there was also a biology student with whom I could chat about science and another who was a classical music buff and enjoyed symphony theme guessing games. I found the general informality between the ranks remarkable. It was, in fact, my first encounter with democracy. That an enlisted man could chat with his own officer without snapping to attention, that they would freely socialize, share food and cigarettes, and now extend this friendly, cordial approach even to me, was a fascinating experience. I can remember that one day someone brought down a coffee maker to the tool truck and after the coffee was brewed it was dispensed in paper cups. Some six or eight of us were sitting in a circle. I was offered a cup when my turn came in the sitting order; it was really nothing more than routine courtesy but I perceived it then as a great gesture of acceptance and "belonging". Inevitably, I made comparisons with the way any favors were bestowed on us in Fertörákos or in the labor service in Budapest. Even apart from the savagery of the last several months, we were simply no longer accustomed to being treated with human dignity. The sudden rise from the state of a despised animal to one of normal respectability was a sensation impossible to describe; in order to know what it feels like, one must live through it. When in the post-war years I looked back at my experiences as a whole, sometimes I felt that it was worth going through all the miseries and sufferings for the sake of it.

The usual accompaniment of socialization and show of cordiality among the Americans was the offering of cigarettes to each other, and to me. That put me under considerable psychological pressure to start smoking. Curiously, I made it through adolescence without having smoked a single cigarette. I suppose I had the right friends and there was no irresistible temptation. Now, however, accepting cigarettes without lighting up at least sometimes was becoming awkward. So, I had my life's first cigarette, an Old Gold, sometime around mid-May 1945, at age 20½. I was careful not to inhale and I had no beginners' problems with smoking. I continued as a very light smoker (3-12 cigarettes per day) for the next 24 years; I finally quit at age 44 when my boss Dr. Vorwald had his stroke. I estimate my total cigarette consumption as about 10 "pack-years" and since 20 years have passed in the meantime, I am satisfied now that my risk of developing cigarette-connected diseases (circulatory problems, emphysema, lung cancer) is not significantly higher than that of a life-long nonsmoker.

Of course, I had opportunity to explore the surrounding area. Downtown Linz was about an hour's walk away and was in a sad shape. The area around the railroad station, including the grounds of the "Herman Göring Werke" (a military machinery and munitions factory) was blown to smithereens. One had to negotiate a path between mountains of rubbish to get to the center of town and there was not much left there, either. Vehicular traffic was exclusively American; the local populace was subdued, unassertive, beaten. There were posters affixed at virtually every corner with a proclamation

of General Eisenhower in English as well as in German, dissolving all former offices, magistrates, or authorities, and placing all governing power exclusively in the hands of the U.S. Army. There was a long list of prohibited acts. The population was warned to obey all orders of military personnel without delay or hesitation, on pain of immediate severe punishment.

There was a soup kitchen operating on the main square of Linz where anyone could get a hot meal with no questions asked. Long lines formed before the soup kitchen at certain times. It was staffed by the locals but it operated on U.S. Army supplies. I sampled the soup kitchen once or twice when in town as a matter of convenience; I found the fare quite tasty and a far cry from what we used to get in the concentration camps. In chatting with the locals I found out that I was a "Kazettler" in local parlance, from Ka-Zett [KZ] that was the popular abbreviation for the concentration camps in the Third Reich. At that point in time, everyone knew, and admitted that they knew, that terrible things were done to the prisoners in these camps although of course the common people pleaded that there was nothing that they could have done about it. That position I found quite credible and acceptable, but I do take a dim view of protestations originating later, claiming that no one knew what the concentration camps were for, or even that they existed.

There were not many former "Kazettlers" living in Linz proper. The big "DP" (displaced person) camp where most former inmates of Mauthausen, Gunskirchen, Gusen, and the other concentration camps of the area were staying was in Hörsching. Scattered "DP"-s lived in the villages of Leonding and Pasching. John Horváth, a Tapir friend of mine, lived at the farmstead at Hart (arriving a day or two after our transit there), and I lived at the farmstead at Haag. For living "privately", speaking some English was a virtual requirement but even the camp residents at Hörsching had adequate accommodation and rations as well as considerable freedoms.

At some point I felt the need to have some legitimation on my person to show to sentries or guards who sometimes stopped passers-by. As I gradually regained my normal weight and reacquired a civilized appearance, it was becoming less obvious that I was a liberated concentration camp inmate. My friends at the tank battalion said that they had no authority to give me such a document and advised me to report to the "CIC" (Counter-Intelligence Corps) of the Army with such a matter. The CIC had an office at the division headquarters in Linz and one day I walked in there and presented my request. It turned out that the idea was unusual and there was no established form, or established procedure, to do what I had asked. After repeated urging and explanation as to why I wanted to have such a document, the officer in charge asked for my name and wrote out in pencil, on a piece of plain paper, the following:

"Louis Revez, Hungarian deportee liberated  
from Nazi concentration camp, is OK.

CIC"

He tore off the note and handed it to me. I was nonplussed. That was not my idea of an identity document; besides having my first name omitted, my last name misspelled, it had no official appearance, no rubber stamp, not even a signature. Informality was fine, but this was going a bit too far. Yet, that was what I got and I gathered that it was pointless to insist on something more formal. I walked out with some bewilderment. The interesting

thing is that the note worked. Actually, anyone who could explain in understandable English who he was did not need any ID documentation. On the few occasions when I had an opportunity to show the note to sentries on bridges or railroad crossings, it was looked at and the guard would nod approvingly and hand it back to me with a friendly "O-Kay".

I had one sole experience of unfriendly treatment by an American soldier. It was in Linz, where one day I spotted on the street an unoccupied jeep with a map spread out on the front seat. Maps always held an irresistible attraction for me and I stopped and peered at the map with interest. It had some routes marked in colored ink. Suddenly an American soldier materialized from an adjacent building, yelling at me and grabbing me by the collar.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?! Who gave you permission to look at that map?! Forward--March!!" He rattled with his machine gun, jammed it in my back, and marched me several blocks to the divisional headquarters. I tried to explain that I meant no harm but the soldier would not listen. He took me to the CIC office with which I was already familiar from my earlier visit. The soldier presented me, still with the machine gun pointed at me, as a "spy caught red-handed in the act". The officer in charge turned to me with some questions in broken German.

Finally I had opportunity to respond, in English, and explain who I was, with some indignation. I presented the little paper I got in that same office some weeks earlier. The officer examined it with raised eyebrows and asked who wrote it for me; I described the person and said that he did not seem to be present just now. Then, I had to explain what I was doing near the jeep and what information I was trying to get from the map. I answered that I was just a passer-by and that I was very fond of geography and loved to look at maps. I could see a suppressed smile on the officer's face and it was clear that he did not think that I was a dangerous spy. He looked sternly at me, warned me not to do that sort of thing again. Any unauthorized study of military maps was a serious offense and I would be in trouble if I were caught at it again. He then returned my little paper to me and dismissed me. All in all, I think that my "case" was handled sensibly and in a manner worthy of the U.S. Army. I hate to think what would have been the outcome of such an incident with the Hungarian, German, or even Soviet armed forces.

On one occasion I was asked to do some work for an American soldier. Someone in the tank battalion acquired a horse and housed it in another barn not far from mine. He came to me one day, asking me to scrub his horse for him, and offered me "decent compensation". Of course I accepted the job; I told him I would be glad to do it without compensation but he insisted he would pay me. I was not exactly experienced with horses and I believe it was my first time ever to get close to such a beast. Fortunately, the horse was peaceful and patient and the assignment was completed without mishap. In the end, I was paid a food can or two and some cigarettes; the sort of thing my friends would bring me daily anyway. As a matter of fact, the influx of these items considerably exceeded my consumption and I was accumulating a growing hoard of these goodies that I kept in a big plastic bag hidden in the barn. I was planning to take these supplies eventually to Budapest. One day, the calamity happened: my bag was stolen. The loss comprised hundreds of cigarettes, dozens of C-ration cans, whole K-ration boxes, candy bars. I had no clue as to who did it and was of course very upset. My friends at the battalion tried to console me, brought me things with which to start a new collection, and offered to keep my bag locked up

in the tool truck. Before long, I had a collection as large as, if not larger than, what was lost.

An item that came up for discussion time and again with Sol, Irving, and my other friends was the question of my return to Hungary. As the armistice came into effect and conditions on the roads became normalized, the original objections were losing validity and I kept bugging them for some help in getting me home. I had some pretty naïve notions that if they packed me in a jeep and set out eastbound, nobody would stop them and they could drop me off and be back in little more than a day. I must say that they listened to me patiently but the answer was invariably that it could not be done. They did promise to see that I got into the first official transport if and when one was organized, and by the end of June I got word that if I wanted to be included in an early repatriation group I must move, at least briefly, into a "Displaced Persons" camp. That was a difficult decision. I loved my free-lance life and the daily contact with my American friends. Fortunately, a small camp, essentially for the privileged, was being organized in Leonding, only a couple of miles away from where I lived. The inhabitants of that camp were supposed to be among the first to be repatriated to Hungary, according to an agreement just concluded with the Russians.

#### Leonding DP Camp

By July 1 I officially moved into the Leonding camp. It was not really a "camp" but a very comfortable country house formerly belonging to one of the Nazi bigwigs. Leonding was a sort of sacred domain for the Nazis because Adolf Hitler's father used to live there and there were still some distant cousins of the "Führer" (the Schicklgruber clan) living in the area.

Life in the Leonding "camp" was comfortable. There were about 50 of us staying there, about 3-4 to a room and for the first time since May 1944 I slept in a real bed. We got a welcome-package full of toiletries and personal hygiene items, including a small box of DDT powder. The kitchen served breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day and we had of course complete freedom of movement. The camp office assembled the record of all residents and finally we received what I was trying to get from the CIC: official ID cards. It is a document I still have. It has my correct name and personal data, an index finger print, and the statement that I had been held prisoner in various Nazi labor gangs or concentration camps since May 8, 1944 and liberated from Mauthausen on May 5, 1945. It is signed by 2nd Lt. J.F. Olivin, U.S. Army, who was nominal camp commander of the DP Lager Leonding but he had little contact with us and I have no recollection of him at all.

The main thing I remember of our Leonding sojourn, which lasted just one week, is that I functioned as a sort of unofficial camp medic. One evening one of the young fellow residents got very sick with high fever, and as we stood around trying to figure out what to do, I decided that I had better get hold of Captain Greenspan. There were no telephones and the only thing I could do was to go there in person and try to fetch him. I did, posthaste, and about an hour later I was at Capt. Greenspan's quarters at the Haag "Flaksiedlung", just as he was preparing to retire. He listened to me, got dressed again, got his bag, commandeered a jeep, and drove with me to Leonding. It was for me a memorable ride; I was impressed by the prompt, cordial willingness of the captain to care for us as for his own. He chatted with me en route and I told him that before the German invasion I used to

be a college student in Budapest and that I wanted to become a chemist. We talked about antimicrobial therapy and he told me about the sensational new drug, Penicillin, which he hoped would cure my buddy.

Capt. Greenspan examined the sick youngster, dispensed medication, and charged me with the responsibility to see that he took it every 4 hours, even during the night. I felt very privileged and solemnly promised to do that. We escorted the captain back to his car and thanked him for his help.

There could not have been a more conscientious carrying out of the doctor's orders. I procured from the office an alarm clock, got up as needed, and gave the medicine to the patient every time exactly on time as prescribed. It was my way of showing appreciation for Captain Greenspan's friendship. The patient's identity I have forgotten--he was not a Tapir. In time, he got better. My attitude earned high respect among fellow campers; I noted that when I slept in a bit in the morning they tiptoed in and out of our room in order to allow me my well-earned rest.

After a week in the Leonding camp we received timetables for our repatriation and looked forward to our homebound trip with excitement.

C H A P T E R   S E V E N

---

T H E   E N D   O F   A N   E R A

THROUGH MY EXCELLENT "CONNECTIONS" I had succeeded in being placed into the very first repatriation group to Hungary. I was grateful to Irving and Sol and my other American friends for having gotten me into this transport but at the same time I parted from them with a heavy heart. It was exactly 9 weeks earlier that I had been liberated from the Guns kirchen camp and those 9 weeks were just about the happiest of my life. No doubt the contrast to the preceding misery played a part in this perception, but I also felt that I fitted in with the Americans well--perhaps better than with my fellow Hungarians, or at least some of them. Thus far, it had always been the non-congenial type who formed the ruling element in Hungarian national life and I was wondering how things would be under Russian occupation. The option of staying in a DP camp and waiting for emigration to America was open to me, and was discussed with some of my American friends. I was theoretically interested but only as a long-term plan. For now, I wanted to go back home and see my folks. In fact, I had no way of knowing whether they were alive or dead, and there was no possibility of exchanging messages. Wanting to go home at least as a first step was the overwhelming sentiment of nearly all of the former concentration camp inmates from Hungary and most of those who lingered in the American-run DP-camps for years were "displaced persons" by their own choosing; mostly Arrow Cross who escaped to the West with the retreating Germans and who now did not dare to go home and face the music. There was enough confusion in the post-war years that the distinction between these characters and the genuine deportees became blurred and it is a sad fact that many of these scoundrels eventually gained admittance as immigrants to the United States and other countries of the free world.

Homecoming

On Friday, July 6, 1945 early in the morning a bus came to our Leonding quarters to take us to the Hörsching railroad station. My belongings, which consisted of a few changes of underwear and a handsome collection of American cigarettes, candies, and canned goods, were packed in a duffle bag. We also had a box lunch from the camp kitchen. In Hörsching, we boarded a special train of regular passenger wagons--without overcrowding this time, with comfortable seats for everyone. There were maybe 500 of us, the bulk from the big DP camp in Hörsching. So far as I could see, there were no close friends.

Our train rolled past the memorable places of Marchtrenk, Wels, Guns kirchen, skirted the beautiful Traunsee, passed the famous spas of Bad Ischl, Bad Goisern, Bad Aussee, and eventually arrived at the military demarcation line between the American-held and Soviet-held parts of Austria. The train halted there for about an hour until the transfer formalities were completed. That was my first personal encounter with live Russian soldiers, and my first impression was not favorable. I can remember that I walked around a bit at the station in order to kill time. The platform I was on petered out at one point to a narrow, one-brick-wide catwalk between the tracks,

at about 2 ft height from the ground. I continued my idle stroll but soon saw two soldiers, an American and behind him a Russian, about 20 steps apart, approaching me. It was too far to turn back and I stopped, expecting the two walkers to maneuver around me. The American did exactly that, with a neat balancing act and a friendly grin. The Russian stopped, yelled something at me that I did not understand. I made myself as flat as possible and motioned him to pass. Instead, the Russian pushed me off the catwalk in a mean and arrogant manner. I fell to the ground and abraded my knee. No great harm was done, but the incident was an unfortunate introduction to the attitude of Soviet soldiers.

Our trip continued without further problem and by late afternoon we arrived at the first major Hungarian railroad station, Szombathely. That was the final destination of our special train; we were now on our own. Being on Hungarian soil again was in a way a sentimental sensation but I was also taken aback by the general shabbiness of the scene. That included the attire of the people, the state of the buildings, even in comparison to Linz or Wels; and the Russian sentries at the station, in comparison to the accustomed well-groomed appearance of the American soldiers. There was a big unruly crowd fighting for a turn at the ticket counter. I learned that a train was leaving for Budapest that very evening, and I decided to be on it, by hook or crook. I joined the fighting crowd and when I struggled to the window I asked for a ticket to Budapest but said that I could not pay for it as I had just arrived home from deportation. The clerk was bewildered; she finally said that she could not give me a ticket without payment but that I was at liberty to board the train anyway. I asked her to stamp the back of my DP-ID card with the round stamp of the railroad station as evidence that I was admitted to the train, which she did.

When the train came in, it was stormed by the waiting passengers. I was positioned unfavorably and by the time I reached the train it was already completely filled; yet, more people were boarding it anyway, climbing on top of the wagons or riding on the connecting rods between the wagons. The best I could do was to mount a step, hang on to the sidebars, and balance my duffle bag between my legs. It was a pretty absurd way to travel long distance, especially at night, and highly dangerous. Yet, there were dozens of people riding in similar or even more precarious positions. At just about nightfall, the train started rolling. We hangers-on were watching and exhorting each other not to fall asleep and fall off the train. I managed; but at one point my duffle bag slid out from under my feet and almost dropped. I had to perform the most hair-raising maneuvers on the speeding train in order to save it.

By dawn we arrived in the Budapest area and the train stopped at a suburban station, Kelenföld. There I made an unfortunate decision. In 20 minutes the train was to arrive at the Central Railroad Station [Keleti p.u.] of Budapest, only a 15 minutes walk from where we lived. I felt it inappropriate to stage my homecoming at 5:00 in the morning. Also, I was eager to take a look at the town after the war. In addition, I was quite uncomfortable hanging on to the doorrail; a good long walk in the mild, fresh summer morning looked tempting. All considerations favored the idea of getting off the train at Kelenföld and walking into the inner city on foot. That was a hike of 1½-2 hours, and that's what I decided to do.

The city presented a sad sight. More than half of the buildings were substantially damaged and there were completely destroyed areas on almost

every block. When I reached the Danube I could see that all the beautiful bridges, formerly the pride and joy of Budapesters, were blown up. The most exquisite of them, the Elizabeth Bridge, appeared to be a total loss; some others were temporarily restored by pontoon structures. As I approached one of the latter (my route required crossing the Danube), a Russian sentry guarding the bridge challenged me.

"Stoy!" [Stop!] He added another phrase I did not understand. I showed him my DP-ID card that he obviously could not read. He wanted to see what was in my duffle bag; when he saw the American cigarettes his face broadened into an ugly smile. I could see that there was going to be trouble and desperately tried to explain, in a mixture of Hungarian-German-English and lively gesturing, with my DP-ID card in hand, that I was a returning deportee and that I got these items from American soldiers upon being liberated from a Nazi concentration camp. How much he understood of all this, I don't know and in any case it did not seem to matter. He took my duffle bag and motioned that I could go--

"Davai! Pashli!" [Get on! March!]

I was almost in tears; having brought my treasures this far, and having virtually risked my life for them just an hour or two earlier on the train, it was a shame to be robbed of them now. The cigarettes alone were worth a small fortune in the underground economy of those days. I tried to argue with the soldier; I grabbed the bag whereupon he cocked his gun in a meaningful, menacing gesture. There was no living soul around in the early dawn and there was clearly no use protesting. In bitter disappointment I walked away, determined to make a report to the occupation authorities as soon as possible and try to reclaim my property. It was maddening to realize that I would have been spared all this, had I stayed on the train until it arrived at the main terminal.

A few blocks away I met a passerby, a young man of maybe 30, apparently going to work. I talked to him, recounted my mishap on the bridge and asked him where the Soviet commandatura or military police was, where I could make a complaint. The man looked at me as if I had dropped from the moon.

"Forget it, man, if you know what's good for you. You are lucky that he did not take the shirt off your back. Go to the military commandatura if you want to be put away without a trace as well". He walked away.

I was bewildered. After some deliberation I decided to do first things first: go home and see my folks. Then I would see what I could do about the lost bag. I kept going, homeward bound, and finally turned a corner from where our apartment house could be seen--if it was still there.

It was, even though it looked battered. I approached it with growing excitement and with my heart in my throat. In the meantime, dawn had turned into morning and the streets filled with people; some streetcars were running. As I walked through the doorway of our old apartment house I paused for a moment in front of the list of tenants. I found my father's name in the accustomed spot. That was encouraging, but it was still possible that people had not bothered yet to make corrections even though some of the old tenants might be no longer there. I climbed the stairs and could see on our apartment door my father's nameplate and a small lace curtain over the window. In a flash I realized that this meant that they were there! If the

apartment were abandoned, there would be no lace curtain--if someone else lived there, they would have taken my father's nameplate off the door. I rang the doorbell. It was exactly 7:00 in the morning on July 7, 1945.

My uncle Endre came to see who was calling, in a nightshirt. He opened the window and peered out. I said,

"Hello, Uncle Endre."

He looked at me for a moment like I was a ghost; then ran back into the apartment and I heard him calling:

"Bözsi! [my mother's name]. Come quick!"

Within ten seconds there was a milling, noisy crowd, all in pajamas or nightgowns, in the vestibule. My mother, my father, aunts, uncles, cousins--the entire family, it seemed, shouting, crying, laughing, rattling the locked door; it took maybe a minute before the key was found and I was let in.

I can leave my mother's first hug and the whole family's stormy welcome to anyone's imagination. Since I was among the very first of the deportees to be repatriated, my arrival was a great sensation. As word spread in our circle of acquaintances that "Andrew is back" there was a stream of congratulants and well-wishers calling all week long. I must have told episodes from the slave labor and concentration camp life, and of my life among the Americans, dozens of times and I was physically examined almost with incredulity: did I really have all my arms and legs, and in good working order? It was a miracle. Hope soared that my appearance was perhaps a harbinger of the happy return of all the deportees in the family--a hope that eventually turned out to be too optimistic.

When in the course of my narrations I came to the point of the Russian soldier confiscating my duffle bag right here in Budapest, robbing me of all the handsome gifts I had for the family, and asked for advice on what to do about it, people just shook their heads. Nobody saw any point in pursuing the matter. When I pressed the issue, saying that I certainly should make a report, my father finally said, with his accustomed firmness:

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. Damn the cigarettes, and damn the candy bars. You are home, and that's what matters; we are going to leave good enough alone."

It took some days or weeks for me to find out, bit by bit, as to what exactly had happened in Budapest since my deportation.

#### The Siege and Occupation of Budapest

Nazi terror in Budapest was not even at its height yet when I was deported on November 27, 1944; in subsequent weeks it grew worse. The Germans and their Arrow Cross supporters were preparing resistance to the last man in the up-coming siege of the city. "Undependable" elements were eliminated. The hunt for hidden Jews intensified; the "Jewish houses" scattered in the city were abolished and all remaining Jewish inhabitants were herded into a concentrated, walled ghetto. The transfer gave the Arrow Cross another opportunity to scrutinize this wretched mass of humanity and to pick out

those who looked like fugitives from deportation. Additional contingents of slave laborers were shipped to the West until mid-December. Only the exempted, the sick, and those under 14 or over 60 were left behind, and housed in the ghetto under pretty miserable conditions with inadequate access to food, fuel, and even water. Raiding parties of the Arrow Cross made forays into the ghetto at random and made capricious arrests for "treason". The neutral diplomats (Swiss, Swedish, Spanish, Portuguese) were struggling to keep their protected subjects out of the ghetto. Diplomatic recognition of the Arrow Cross regime was pending with these countries; final decision on this matter was wisely deferred in order to extract maximum leverage from this situation with respect to getting the protective passes honored. Thus, these measures had some success to the very end. At one point there was a dramatic personal confrontation between SS-Colonel Eichmann and Swedish Legation Secretary Wallenberg--the two openly and sardonically recognized that they were working with all their powers to achieve opposite ends.

The Soviet Army gradually approached the city and proceeded to surround it. The Arrow Cross government fled to Sopron. Eichmann and his staff withdrew to the West in virtually the last motorcade leaving the city. A German military garrison and whatever Hungarian troops could be garnered to defend Bridgehead Budapest remained. A Soviet parliamentary delegation approaching the defense perimeter of the city under a flag of truce, offering terms of surrender, was savagely gunned down.

The siege of Budapest began on Christmas Eve and lasted on the Pest side until January 18 and on the Buda side until February 13. These were nightmare days for the entire population. People lived underground in air raid shelters or cellars while the struggle on the ground progressed from block to block, or sometimes from house to house. Terrible destruction was visited on the city. All bridges across the Danube between Buda and Pest were blown up. To the very last hours before the total Russian takeover, there was still bizarre preoccupation with the Jews--they were still hunted, rounded up, and murdered. Burial was no longer feasible and the preferred method of execution became shooting on the ice of the Danube, so that corpses would float downriver and out of city jurisdiction. Some victims managed to feign being hit, fell into the water voluntarily, and swam thousands of feet in the icy water to safety. When the Arrow Cross got wise to these attempts at survival, they developed the practice of manacled three Jews together by the wrists; this method allowed economy with the diminishing supplies of ammunition as well since only the center person had to be shot. He or she would drag the others with him or her to their icy deaths.

It may be difficult to believe that such cruelties really happened in large numbers but unfortunately there is ample evidence to prove them. The victims can be counted in the thousands. The exact psychology of this bestiality remains to be studied but it seems clear that a certain "va banque" [go for broke] mentality had taken over among the Nazis; the objective at that point became to eliminate as many damning witnesses as possible. This went on until virtually the last moment before the city changed hands.

Everyone to whom I talked experienced the arrival of the first Russian soldier while sitting in the cellar or air raid shelter. The combat soldiers appeared with gun in hand, they inquired about hidden Germans if any, and if there were none they went on, without harassing the civilians. With subsequent waves of Soviet soldiers it was a different story. Even allowing for a certain anti-Russian bias in the Hungarian mentality dating back to

1849 and reinforced in 1919, the conclusion remains inescapable that not since the sacking of Rome in 455 A.D. by the Vandals (which conferred on the name of this people the meaning it today has) was a city subjected to the kind of experience Budapest had in 1945. Granted that the Russians were infuriated at the Hungarians for having remained the last belligerent allies of the Germans at a time when Italy, Bulgaria, and even Rumania had thrown in the towel; and even granted the final outrage of the massacre of the Russian parliamentary envoys; it still remains a fact that the savagery of the occupying troops was an astonishing and horrifying experience even for the Jews. I heard that Jews liberated from the Theresienstadt concentration camp in the morning were captured by the "liberating troops" the very same afternoon and sent to prisoner-of-war camps in the Soviet Union where they remained for months or years, under conditions not much better than under the Nazis. In Budapest, Jews in the ghetto were subjected to exactly the same treatment as all other inhabitants; everyone in Hungary was The Enemy, but even as enemy they were treated not exactly according to the Geneva protocols.

Looting was universal. Curiously, one of the great passions of the Soviet soldiers turned out to be watches. "Davai chasy" [gimme your watch] was just about the first Russian phrase the population of Budapest learned. These little instruments fascinated the Soviet soldiers who apparently had never encountered such miraculous gadgets at home. Few understood that the watches had to be wound up in order to keep them running. Some allegedly had both arms lined with watches from wrist to shoulder--if one stopped, they just robbed a new one. Horror stories were also told of the behavior of Russian troops quartered in civilian dwellings. They were said to be utterly inexperienced with civilized plumbing devices; typically, they mistook the toilet bowl for a facility to wash in, and the bathtub for a latrine. They would use them as such and then comment contemptuously on the poor suitability of "bourgeois" fixtures for adequate hygiene. Floods were caused by soldiers ripping out faucets from walls with intent to take them home as war booty --evidently, they thought that by sticking them in the wall at home, they would have running water also.

In addition to naïvetés of this kind, there was also a great deal of senseless destruction, especially in the homes considered by the Soviets as "upper class". Art objects were indiscriminately destroyed. Featherbeds were invariably ripped open, perhaps in search for hidden valuables; but if some sticky garbage was laughingly thrown over them afterwards, that was doubtless just malicious fun. Stories of this sort abounded in the city when I came home and conveyed an extremely depressing picture, especially in comparison to my experience of liberation by the Americans. I began to realize that insisting on returning to Hungary might have been a mistake.

A separate and very disheartening chapter of the Soviet occupation of Hungary was the experience of the women. Together with "Davai chasy", the other Russian phrases learned by the population in the first days of the occupation were "Idy suda barishnya" [come, girl] and "Malinky robot" [just a little work]. The "little work" invariably meant whorehouse services to whole scores of soldiers, frequently under appallingly coarse conditions. Hiding, or arranging for some sort of disguise as males or as oldsters were typically tried by the women of Budapest, with variable success. I gathered that it was not considered good form to inquire into these matters after the occupation and there are no dependable statistics available. According to some sources, there were hardly any young women in Hungary ("young" in

this context means ages 10-70) who could escape this fate. Husbands, fathers, or other males who attempted to protect their families were dealt with summarily. One of the tragic stories of this sort is about the Bishop Apor of Győr, who sheltered a few dozen frightened women in his Cathedral and attempted to interfere when the Russians came to get them. He was gunned down on the spot.

Many others were killed or taken into captivity for various capricious reasons. A case that had attracted international attention was that of Raoul Wallenberg, Swedish diplomat, and savior of Budapest Jews. In one of the most outrageous incidents affecting diplomats during the entire war, he was arrested and detained upon reporting to the first Russian command unit after the liberation. Sporadic accounts circulated for years afterward that he was seen in various Soviet prisoner camps but he was never released, in spite of the high visibility of the case and numerous official inquiries by Sweden. Since this must have become a considerable embarrassment to the Soviet Union at some point, the only likely explanation for the failure to free Wallenberg must have been that he had seen too much.

In the light of these stories it was becoming clear to me that my first encounters with Soviet occupation at the zone boundary in Austria and at the Danube bridge in Budapest were no unlucky flukes. If anything, they were a rather mild sampling of the attitude of the Russians towards the conquered as well as the liberated, and an accurate illustration of their total indifference regarding the distinction between the two. No wonder that the expression "liberation" soon acquired a bitter, sarcastic undertone in Hungary --all too often, it meant liberation not only from the murderous Arrow Cross, but from one's personal belongings and perhaps bodily integrity as well. Furthermore, these acts were not individual transgressions for which soldiers would be disciplined, but the general behavior officially encouraged or at least tolerated by the highest command. The guiding principle was that in war, the loser pays all and curiously the category of loser was extended to the formerly persecuted who were rooting for Allied victory all along. I had to consider it a near-miracle that remaining members of my family made it through the siege and occupation without major mishap.

The apartment house where my parents lived was (in fact still is) a large building of rather confusing layout, with 70-some individual units, some of which are accessible only through labyrinthine routings. This turned out to be an advantage. As already noted, the building was designated as a "Jewish house" in April 1944. By some subterfuge, my parents could remain there even when the concentrated ghetto was established in December 1944. A great boon was that the concierge of the building, Mr. Kövér, used to be a janitor at the insurance company where my father worked, and was a great admirer of his. It was mainly through his services that my parents, and even Uncle Gyula and Aunt Mariska living with them, were spared dangerous confrontations.

By wise foresight, my parents had relatively adequate supplies of basic food staples and fuel in reserve. After the liberation, our apartment became "The Lifeboat" for the entire family. In addition to Uncle Gyula and Aunt Mariska, other relatives were taken in. Uncle Endre and Aunt Fritzi with my little cousin Vera were hiding with Gentile friends during the Arrow Cross period but came to stay with my parents after the siege; Uncle Dezső had been in the labor service in Budapest but escaped deportation and also ended up in our apartment. So did cousin Erzsi who was in the foot-march contingent

to the West but managed to go astray in Győr. At some point even Mr. Kun, President of the Foncière Insurance Company and my father's boss, came to stay with my parents. It was thus that upon my homecoming I found virtually all of our relations living in our apartment, with each room being occupied by an entire family.

During all this time, there was of course no communication whatsoever between Budapest and the West, and no way to learn anything about the fate of the deportees. Red Cross information services were initiated only much later. This gave opportunity for some shady businesses to come into being, which claimed to have clandestine channels to garner news about survivors, and sold such "services" to an anxious public. I learned that my parents also subscribed to such a scheme sometime in June and were told that I was in a group of homecoming deportees, already on my way in Western Hungary. The scheme was of course a complete fraud, and an easy one to see through at that. Nonetheless, these "businesses" filled a psychological need. My mother said that she was not sorry to have wasted money on it. The news gave her hope and put her mind to ease for a few days.

#### Summary: Balance Sheet of the Holocaust.

Statistics about Jewish victims of Nazi persecution in Hungary are often confusing because the figures must be understood to apply to a shifting data base. In some postwar presentations aimed at discrediting the historic reality of the Holocaust (calling into question that it happened at all, at least in the form as testified to by surviving eyewitnesses) this has been cynically exploited, with intent to make the tragic claims sound ridiculous. "Out of 400,000 Hungarian Jews, 600,000 are said to have perished and yet, there are plenty around still" is the way I have heard it stated, and the record should be set straight here.

Hungary in its post-World War I borders had 8 million inhabitants, of whom 400,000 (5%) were Jews. About 250,000 lived in the Capital and 150,000 in the provinces. As territories lost in World War I were restored to Hungary (Southern Slovakia in 1938; Carpatho-Ruthenia in 1939; Northern Transylvania in 1940; Western Voivodina in 1941), each step added about 100,000 additional Jews to Hungarian jurisdiction so that, by the time the Germans occupied the country in the spring of 1944, there were in Hungary about 800,000 Jews out of a total population of 15 million. Jewish population of Budapest swelled to 300,000 and about 500,000 Jews were scattered in the provinces.

The extermination machinery worked with near-perfection in the provinces. Virtually the entire body of rural Jewry was captured, shipped to Auschwitz, and subjected to the Final Solution. Even the most liberal estimates do not put survivors of this group higher than 10%, about evenly divided between those that could go into successful hiding or secure some sort of exemption, and deportees who returned from Auschwitz due to a lucky fluke such as a needed skill or other special assignment. That makes the count of the total surviving rural Hungarian Jewry about 50,000 souls.

In Budapest, there were obstacles to the smooth functioning of the extermination machinery, as already noted. For the 300,000 Jews who lived in the Capital, the overall chances of survival were about 50%. About 100,000 survived in the Budapest ghetto, and/or with the international protective certificates, or in hiding; about 50,000 returned from the West. Of those

that perished, most were starved to death or otherwise lost by attrition in the concentration camps of Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, and their satellite camps, or en route to them. Among the 50,000 "Schanz-Juden" on the South-East Wall to whom I belonged, the number of survivors was put at 17,000. Among the woman deportees, most of whom ended up in the concentration camp of Ravensbrück, attrition was estimated as high as 75%, and not more than about 33,000 of the latter survived the war. In Budapest, the number of Jews hiding and found, or otherwise capriciously massacred by the Arrow Cross, was put at 18,000. This makes the total number of surviving Jews of Budapest about 150,000 souls.

The sum total of 200,000 Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust is thus based on a total pool of 800,000 souls while 600,000 perished. The latter figure comprises 10% of all European Jews exterminated by the Nazis. It is possible that, because of shifting borders, some of the Hungarian victims also showed up in the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, or Rumanian loss statistics and there are authorities who consider the total count of 6 million Holocaust victims as too high. I suppose, if it gives German sensitivities a solace to believe that the number of murdered Jews in Europe was only 5.5 million, one could leave it at that. Incidentally, when Herman Göring in his Nuremberg prison heard that 200,000 Hungarian Jews survived the Nazi regime, he is reported to have commented,

"What, these were allowed to get away?! Somebody again goofed off" [Da hat einer wieder nicht gespurt].

An individual account of the fates of my relatives and friends is a sad one. In the area of Sarkad, where my paternal relatives lived, the roundup and dispatch of Jews was particularly thorough and survivors among those whom I have met there in the summer of 1941 are rare. Old Aunt Fanny, Aunt Nina, the entire Vámos family including my pretty redhead cousin Eva, perished. Paul Héthelyi and his family were not counted as Jews and survived, and to my knowledge still live in Budapest. How it came that he could not rescue his own mother, stepfather and half-sister from deportation is something I do not know. Virtually all of the young men and women whom I had befriended there and hoped to see one day did not make it. There has not been even a returning eyewitness who could have given some details of the individual circumstances of their deaths.

The situation was similar among my maternal relatives in Érsekujvár which is now again Nové Zámky, Czechoslovakia. Some survivors to whom we talked after the war gave us some grisly details. My grandfather was deported in an overcrowded cattle wagon at age 83, and did not even make it to Auschwitz. He died, perhaps mercifully, en route. My aunt Ilona and baby cousin Adam were immediately "selected" for the gas chambers upon arrival. So were Uncle Max and Aunt Vilma from Topoľčany. My aunt (or second cousin once removed) Julia Neuwirth and her stepdaughter Alice were put into work details but became separated from each other. Aunt Julia survived, but Alice died of starvation in a manner that I know only too well. Uncle Dezső and Uncle Miklós survived; both were in the labor service in Budapest and the latter ended up in the same concentration camp as myself. Andrew Horváth's entire family was killed but he himself survived and now lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I visited him in 1972. Virtually all of my other friends and acquaintances in Érsekujvár were wiped out and the Jewish congregation of that town, of which my grandfather was once President, does not exist any more.

In Budapest, the most grievous loss of the family was my cousin or virtually sister Eva Fried. She was 17 when included in the death march to the West; she ended up in the concentration camp of Ravensbrück and starved to death there. My younger cousin Vera and her parents were successfully hidden by Gentile friends and survived the war, and so did cousin Erzsi who managed to escape from the death march and made her way back to Budapest. Her husband Laci Bihari was in the labor service on the eastern front and did not come back. For several years after the war there was still hope that maybe he ended up in a Soviet prisoner of war camp (that would have been entirely possible with the Russians who were totally indiscriminate in this respect) but that hope eventually faded. My cousin Mary the nurse and her husband, Dr. Miklós Roth (they got married sometime in 1944) were on the resident staff of the Jewish Hospital in Budapest during the siege and worked there day and night virtually without pause and distinguished themselves greatly for gallant service. Mary's parents Uncle Ernest and Aunt Janet also survived in the Budapest ghetto.

Among my Jewish schoolmates and friends, survival rate was roughly 50%, with many of the most delightful kids perishing. Among those lost was my life's first friend and playmate, Gabriel Deckner who was incidentally only half-Jewish. My first steady girlfriend, Agnes Kardos, was also killed. She lived in a suburb of Budapest, just two blocks outside city limits. Those two blocks had grave significance for they put her house in a different jurisdiction and she was deported already in June. Had she lived inside city limits, she would have been reprieved until November with a much better chance of survival. Innumerable other friends, friends' friends, acquaintances, and potential girlfriends "did not come back", which became the usual euphemism for people murdered in the Holocaust.

My last pre-deportation girlfriend and sweetheart Julia Ötvös, whose father I had met in Fertőrákos, survived. She came back from Ravensbrück a totally changed person. Her innocence, her delightful boisterousness and good humor had totally vanished. Instead, she became a bitter, humorless, almost misanthropic individual who responded to my attempts at renewal of our friendship with a contemptuous, almost coarse sneer. She asked a few questions about the last days of her father but said little of her own experiences. When I pressed for details, she said, sadly,

"You don't want to know. 'Nuff said."

I gathered from others that she became in Ravensbrück the mistress of an SS-man, or perhaps of several. I also gathered that as "privileged" camp inmate she was not particularly popular with fellow deportees. Regretfully, we parted ways. Later I learned that she became part of the Budapest demi-monde. At least in her delightful pre-deportation personality, I have to count her also a casualty of the Holocaust.

Three months after my homecoming I had my 21st birthday. In the meantime, the atomic bomb had been dropped, Japan surrendered, and World War II was finally entirely over. It was amazing to realize that at this young age I had already gone through adventures enough for a lifetime. But I have survived, and stood now at the threshold of a new era. What would life have in store for me now?

T H E E N D O F V O L U M E I



**BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:  
REMINISCENCES OF A TURBULENT YOUTH**

by

**ANDREW LOUIS REEVES**

**VOLUME II: THE PERIOD AFTER 1945.**

FIRST DRAFT, DECEMBER 1993

---

THIRD PRINTING (REVISED), JANUARY 2010

The Author:

Andrew L. Reeves, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus, Occup. & Environ. Health Sciences  
Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Address:

573 Pemberton  
Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230-1711  
Phone/Fax 313/822-4651  
e-mail [andrew.reeves@wayne.edu](mailto:andrew.reeves@wayne.edu)

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

---

<u>Chapter 8--The Communist Takeover of Hungary</u> .....	130
Student of Chemistry, At Last.....	130
The Economic Scene.....	124
The Social Scene.....	127
The Political Scene.....	130
Lomonosov, Lysenko, Lepeshinskaya.....	133
<u>Chapter 9--The First Attempt</u> .....	141
Preparations.....	141
Departure and Capture.....	144
Serving Time in the Miskolc Jail.....	147
<u>Chapter 10--Escape: The Second Attempt</u> .....	157
The Second Takeoff.....	157
Slovakian Adventure.....	159
The Forced Return to Hungary.....	165
<u>Chapter 11--Escape: The Third Attempt</u> .....	169
Intermezzo: Autumn in Budapest.....	170
The Ship Voyage.....	178
The Last Try.....	181
Arrival in Austria.....	188
<u>Chapter 12--Life as a Refugee</u> .....	192
Vienna.....	193
Salzburg.....	200
Munich.....	202
Bad Aibling.....	206
<u>Chapter 13--Marriage</u> .....	210
The Courtship.....	210
The Wedding.....	216
The Honeymoon.....	219
Married Life.....	222
<u>Chapter 14--Emigration</u> .....	230
The Aborted Attempts.....	231
The Final Dilemma.....	235
Farewell to Europe.....	242
America, Here We Come!.....	243
Summary: Retrospect and Prospect.....	247
THE END OF VOLUME II.....	249

C H A P T E R   E I G H T

-----  
 - T H E   C O M M U N I S T   T A K E O V E R   O F   H U N G A R Y

BUDAPEST WAS RECOVERING VERY SLOWLY from the ravages inflicted on her in the course of the siege and occupation during the last months of World War II. Hungary became one of those countries in which the Soviet Union and the Western Allies claimed "50%/50% interest" according to the secret protocols of Teheran (modified to 75%/25% at Yalta); but reality was closer to 100%/0%. The country was under the sole occupation of the Soviet Army and Anglo-American presence was limited to a handful of military personnel at the Allied Control Commission.

Soviet soldiers remained the terror of the streets of Budapest for many months after the end of the war. It remained common prudence for citizens to avoid going out after dark. Inevitable trips were best organized in large "convoys" which presented less inviting targets for marauding Soviet soldiers but, even then, arriving home stripped virtually naked was not unusual. This situation lasted throughout 1945 and 1946 and had a devastating effect on all efforts to establish some sort of settled relationship with the occupiers or to accept the presence of the Soviet Army in Hungary as "liberation".

Hungarian political life was beginning to emerge gradually from the chaos of the Arrow Cross period and Nazi occupation. The first post-war provisional government of Hungary was formed by an army general who defected to the Russians when he realized that all was lost, and general elections were planned for the fall of 1945--supposedly the first in Hungarian history that were to be free from the coercive influence of the ancient ruling classes. That may have been so, but they were certainly not free from whatever coercion the occupiers could exercise, favoring the reconstituted Hungarian Communist Party. It is remarkable that, in spite of this situation that included unlimited financial support for Communist propaganda and systematic harassment of non-Communist candidates, the Communist Party could muster only 17% of the vote. The "Independent Smallholders" who in spite of their name were not primarily a rural organization but a nationally based party as far to the right of the political spectrum as reasonably possible under the circumstances, got absolute majority with 57% of the vote. Nonetheless, under Russian pressure, a coalition government was formed in which the Communists managed to capture the all-important Portfolio of the Interior, which included jurisdiction over the national police force.

Student of Chemistry, at Last.

Naturally, my first personal priority was to pick up the thread of my education where I had left it when the Nazi difficulties started, and virtually my first trip after my homecoming was to the University where I made application for admission to the chemistry program. It was accepted without demur and since very fortunately I had no support problem (my father

was reappointed to his post at the Foncière Insurance Company with rank of Vice President), I could in September 1945 finally realize my dream of studying chemistry full time, and I sported my white lab coat on campus with such pride as if it were a badge of distinction.

My experience in chemical laboratory procedures, gained at the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company, was certainly useful and I can remember that during the first weeks in the freshman laboratory, my knowledge of how to regulate Bunsen burners, how to mount condensers, and other such elementary familiarity with basic operations made me the virtual equivalent of a teaching assistant vis-à-vis my fellow students. For a while, I could bask in the glory of being a recognized authority in these matters but my advantage eroded quickly. Intellectual competition at the University was formidable. A large proportion of freshmen were over-age who could not gain admission during the war for one reason or another and were now determined to catch up in a hurry. Total devotion to our studies was the norm. We virtually lived on campus, spending every free moment in the lab, or in the library. Unbounded enthusiasm for science as a profession and for laboratory work as a way of life was our general attitude and even our social gatherings were characterized by it. Liquor at parties was typically dispensed from burettes into beakers, and for one celebration I can remember building a fantasy apparatus from reaction flasks, strobe lights, timers, and other instrumentation which automatically rationed the liquor portions. In short, we had a ball. All chemistry students were one big family, with physics and biology students regarded as first cousins. Medical or engineering students were accepted as distant relations but the rest of the student body, indeed the rest of humankind, was looked upon with contemptuous disdain as poor devils who did not know what they were missing.

I have only good things to say about the technical excellence of the education we got, in spite of post-war shortages of all kinds. In fact, the shortages worked out almost to our advantage. Careless work, such as not recovering used solvents to the last drop, or accepting a low yield in recrystallizations, was considered immoral. Basic glass-blowing skills had to be acquired by everyone because laboratory glassware was irreplaceable; broken items had to be repaired in-house. Our teaching assistants and junior faculty worked with us from early morning until late at night every day, and a kind of camaraderie was established that would have been unlikely in normal times. The senior professors included two Nobel laureates (Szent-Györgyi and Békésy) and even the others (Gróh, Schulek, Buzágh, Mauritz) were treated like demi-gods and accorded the greatest professional respect. A colloquium ("conversation"; in reality an informal examination) with one of these professors was both a dreaded ordeal and a coveted privilege. The "conversation" frequently became quite searching but it was typically accompanied by a treat: the professors, through their international connections, frequently received gift parcels from Western colleagues which were freely shared and sometimes at the colloquia, real tea, coffee, fruit preserves, or other such rarities were served in a semi-informal setting while the professor inquired into what we had learned at the lectures and in the lab.

At one point, one of the professors received an ultracentrifuge as a gift from Western professional friends; another sacrificed a piece of his own family jewelry in order to have a platinum crucible made for the sophomore lab that was required for certain precision determinations. Needless to say, treasures of this sort were treated with an awe befitting the Holy Grail.

Western textbooks such as Treadwell's Analytical Chemistry or Karrer's Organic Chemistry were also great rarities and even current issues of the Journal of the American Chemical Society ("Am-Soc" in the local vernacular) were scarce and handled with utmost reverence. It can be said that what we lacked in modern instrumentation was more than made up by our eagerness to learn.

I was only a middling student during my undergraduate years. No doubt the prevailing keen competition that raised the averages to an unprecedented high was partially responsible for this, but I also think that I had spread myself too thin. In addition to the full chemistry curriculum, I also found it irresistible to enroll in more physics and biology classes than required and in geology/mineralogy I acquired a virtually complete second major. I even attended some medical school lectures. I was like a little kid in an intellectual candy store. In the end, I did get some mental indigestion and at the First Formal Examination in Chemistry (called "Rigorosum" from the medieval Latin) I only attained a B-.

Naturally, there were numerous pleasant social distractions and in the sophomore year I became one of the cofounders of the "Chrysoidin Club", a sort of chemical fraternity spoofing one of our professors who had discovered a new indicator dye: paraethoxy-chrysoidin which changed color both during acid/base titrations and redox titrations. According to the wisecracks we enjoyed in those days, it even changed color if the professor was on his way to the lab to "percolate" the students (i.e., administer informal quizzes). In December 1947 the Chrysoidin Club organized a magnificent campus-wide Christmas party at which a sensational opera parody, "Prince Rigor" was presented. Well-known arias and duets from various famous operas were strung together and sung to words that depicted the life story of a chemistry student at the University of Budapest. I was the piano accompanist, functioning as a sort of one-man orchestra for the "opera performance" (I also wrote, edited, and/or "orchestrated" most of the pieces). All professors and teaching assistants were duly lampooned and Prince Rigor became such a roaring success that by popular demand we presented it 4 times, including a "command performance" to the whole science faculty.

Until about 1947, I enjoyed life in Budapest. Economic hardships existed, but cultural life was flourishing. The Tátrai quartet and Annie Fischer reigned over the concert stage and Otto Klemperer was conductor of the Budapest Opera. I was an avid attendee at musical offerings and was particularly delighted to get to know some pieces suppressed during the Nazi period. I can specifically remember my surprise at the beauty of Mendelssohn's music--in the Nazi-controlled musical establishment during my teens he was of course banned and the commentators dismissed him as a third-rate composer whose significance was artificially inflated by the Jewish media. Theatrical life also revived and I saw for the first time on the stage plays by such authors as Berthold Brecht, Ferenc Molnár, or George Bernard Shaw.

#### The Economic Scene

World War II left even some of the winners (particularly Britain and the Soviet Union) in a tough shape economically; the condition of the losers was obviously worse. It was said that there was virtual famine in Germany although my personal experience at liberation from concentration camp did not confirm that. Naturally, I was viewing the situation from a somewhat

distorted angle. In Hungary, the food supply was relatively good. The country was always agriculturally self-sufficient and even after the ravages of the war the availability of produce was more or less adequate. Meat was harder to find, especially in the cities, and conscientious business executives, including Mr. Kun of the Foncière Insurance Company, commissioned company trucks to scan the countryside and to buy up food where it was available and to bring it back to Budapest for in-house resale to company employees. To the best of my memory, we suffered no serious food shortages and in fact I enjoyed my mother's cooking immensely, including dishes I used to disdain during childhood.

It was a different story with all manufactured goods. Industrial production came to a virtual standstill at the end of the war and the occupiers in fact dismantled and shipped to the Soviet Union all factory equipment that could be pried loose. I heard fascinating stories of how the Dr. Wander Pharmaceutical Company where I used to work was occupied, looted, and would have been completely put out of business except for the heroic efforts of Mr. Senkariuk who with a few trusted workers started up production of a few common drugs right after the siege and offered them for the Soviet Army for their own needs in order to be spared dismantling. Speaking Russian, as Mr. Senkariuk did, was of course a big help and Dr. Wander came to be one of the very few factories that survived the occupation with relatively little damage.

Otherwise, industrial products including textiles, household items, and even manufactured foods such as sugar became virtually unobtainable. Tailors, shoemakers, pot-and-pan repairers and other such craftsmen had an occupational boom as items that in other times would have been thrown away had to be refurbished for continued use. In the organic chemistry lab of the University, a virtual cottage industry sprang up, making sugar from potatoes by sulfuric acid hydrolysis. The "potato sugar" thus obtained was virtually the only sweetener available in Budapest for many months and created a brisk and lucrative business for us students.

Naturally, international commerce ceased altogether. Imported items, always a luxury in Hungary, became hazy remembrances from the distant past. I can remember that one of our favorite instructors in the freshman chemistry class, Dr. Szarvas, suffered an accident one day from an explosion of lab apparatus that required him to be hospitalized for a few days, with his eyes bandaged up. When a group of students went to visit him we debated what kind of small gift we could bring; with temporary deprivation of eyesight, anything that had to be looked at in order to be enjoyed was not a good choice and a classmate came up with the suggestion to bring him an orange. We all agreed that this was an inspired idea but one that turned out to be easier said than done. A couple of us spent the better part of a whole day looking for that orange all over Budapest; grocers, clerks in food stores, including the luxury variety, just shook their heads. One might just as well ask for a genuine moon rock in an American shopping mall today. When we finally found one, a rather smallish and scroungy specimen at that, in the dining room of an elegant hotel catering to diplomatic and other foreign visitors, the waiter refused to sell it saying it had to be reserved for their guests. It was only by appeal to the hotel manager, with virtual supplication and detailed explanation as to why we wanted such an eccentric item, that we could purchase that orange at a price that several of us had to share in order to get it together. In the end, it was worth it; I can still remember

the exalted smile on Dr. Szarvas's bandaged face as he stroke and smelled that piece of treasure when we presented it to him.

The most bizarre expression of the country's economic difficulties was a galloping inflation that the world has not seen the like before, or since. The old Hungarian currency, called pengö ("ringing"; from the sound silver coins made when thrown on the counter) enjoyed remarkable stability between the world wars at the approximate rate of 5 to the U.S. dollar. Purchase value of the pengö had started to go down already during World War II and this was accelerated after the occupation. When I came home from deportation in July 1945, fractional coins of any sort were no longer in circulation and small purchases such as a loaf of bread or a streetcar ticket were dozens of pengöes; by the fall this became hundreds and by the late winter of 1946, thousands. From that point on, inflation took a dizzying pace. Prices changed daily, then twice or even three times a day--workers got paid every day for the day and the first trip with the money had better be directly to the market because a few hours later, the same number of pengöes would buy less. I can well remember when my father slammed on the table his first earnings of one million pengöes--that fabled sum everybody had always dreamed of--now worth less than an honest day's work and losing value by the minute.

Obviously, the simple folk had some difficulty in sorting out the various sums with many zeroes and by mid-spring 1946, the unit of "milpengö" (one million pengöes) was introduced. The advantage was short-lived. A few weeks later prices were quoted in as many milpengöes as formerly pengöes. The next unit was the "B-pengö" (one billion pengöes, but it was the European billion [one million million] rather than the American billion [one thousand million]). The marketplace went crazy. Prices no longer merely doubled or tripled every few hours; it became simpler just to tag on an extra zero or two to the price previously displayed. Soon the produce sellers gave up finding their way in the world of immense numbers altogether and prices at market stalls were typically quoted as "three blue ones and two red ones" (i.e., banknotes). Others refused to accept money at all and barter became the fashionable transaction of the day. Anyone who had exchangeable commodities allowing easy subdivision (e.g., a bunch of nails) was in the best bargaining position. Society ladies sold their gold bracelets by the quarter inch. Western currencies, especially the U.S. dollar, were of course scarce and good as gold; as a matter of fact, since the price of pure gold was pegged at \$35 per ounce at the time, one gram of 18-carat gold was worth pretty close to \$1.00 and the two words became virtually synonymous. I can remember that, when in the freshman qualitative analysis class, the chemical reactions of the gold ion were discussed, one wag asked half-loud, "and what about the reactions of the dollar?" and the whole class broke out in laughter.

Eventually, a domestic yardstick of real value was needed and at some point the concept of "adópengö" [tax pengö] was introduced to reflect a stable value entity. The name derived from the fact that taxes were supposed to be paid in these "adópengöes"; the radio announced every morning as to how many pengöes, or milpengöes, or B-pengöes were one adópengö. By late spring 1946, adópengö (or A-pengö for short) denominations were printed as banknotes which made the monetary confusion complete. These A-pengöes (which were supposed to be worth a sliding equivalent of B-pengöes) began an inflationary spiral of their own, and soon nobody knew, or cared, what any sort of paper money was worth at all. All Hungarian currency of whatever denomination became just garbage. Workers and other employees were paid in produce; the streetcars and other public services were in effect free (they

cost so little that nobody carried small enough denominations to pay for them). It was under these circumstances that the new Hungarian currency called *forint* was introduced in the summer of 1946, and pegged at 11.75 to the U.S. dollar. During the last couple of weeks before the already announced changeover, a last crazy plunge of the pengö took place which at that point may have been deliberately fostered by the authorities. All former wealth was to be wiped out completely, so that the whole nation could start a new economic life from scratch. On Changeover Day (August 1, 1946) the conversion rate of pengö to forint was 400,000 quadrillion to one (with one quadrillion defined as  $10^{24}$ , so that the American name of the sum would be 400 *septillion*).

Suddenly, there was deflation; nobody had any new money and the barter economy continued for a few weeks. Dollars continued to be scarce and soon fetched on the black market 4-5 times their official rate. However, dealing with them was now made a felony, with many years in jail for "economic undermining of the new Hungarian currency". As wages and prices became re-defined in forint it became painfully clear to everyone what had been fairly obvious all along: namely, that the country was destitute and in the international community, Hungarians had become a nation of paupers.

### The Social Scene

One might think that the polarization of Hungarian society along religious lines that had existed before World War II would have eased up somewhat after the horrors of the Holocaust, and the few Jews who returned from the concentration camps would be received by their Gentile neighbors with a degree of compassion. Unfortunately, that was not generally the case. It would be perhaps unfair to say that most Gentiles wished that no Jews had come back at all, but certainly there was widespread insensitivity regarding the indignities and sufferings inflicted on them in the recent past, and impatience with too much dwelling on their maltreatment. "We all suffered" was the general sentiment even among well-meaning Gentiles, and among the less well-meaning there were actual outbreaks of new anti-Semitic riots, very much in the old Nazi tradition. To be sure, some of the returning deportees made up for their diminished numbers by deliberate visibility and angry demands for unconditional restitution of everything lost, and then some. The judicial trials of the captured Arrow Cross leaders and others with some public function during the war became a feeding frenzy at which the line between real responsibility and the mere failure to protest became blurred. Undoubtedly, there were many who richly deserved their death sentences but the public circus attending their execution was sometimes unseemly. Anyone could see that the seeds of continuing Jew/Gentile antagonism for another generation were being sown.

The shrillest demands for vengeance came from the Hungarian Communist Party, which postured as the only uncompromising champion of just retribution and "the fist of democracy". Jews were expected to join the party out of a sense of gratitude, but at the same time vigorous recruiting was being carried out among the former Arrow Cross adherents as well (only the small fry, of course) with promises that if they sign up, all will be forgiven. The Communist Party needed a big enrollment to show their masters in Moscow, and the pressure to join at certain workplaces or as a condition to get certain official favors, was extraordinary. In fact, the membership list of the Communist Party in these early years exceeded the vote count they received at the polls.

I had a number of personal problems to resolve. The first of these was to determine my own party affiliation--if not for actual joining, at least for voting. I was completely immune to the entreaties of the Communists. Not only did I have fundamental doubts about Marxism as an economic theory but I also found their boundless demagoguery and general endorsement of violence as a tool of statecraft, and the brazen denial of Russian atrocities which everybody knew were daily occurrences in the city, difficult to take. My father was a lifelong lukewarm Social Democrat that between the wars was an opposition party in the Hungarian parliament standing for social progress. In the present constellation they became a vacillating, ineffectual group that could not decide whether they supported or were opposed to the Communist programs and they too were a complete turnoff for me. The Smallholders did have some politicians who inspired confidence but they also harbored too many formerly Fascist elements and were generally identified with the pre-war status quo. I ended up voting for the "Citizens' Democratic Party", a small group of intellectuals that received a minuscule fraction of the vote and faded into complete insignificance.

Some of my relations did embrace Communism that created tensions in the family. Foremost among these was cousin Erzsi the orphan, and now also a widow, who used to work before the German occupation as office girl in various businesses. After the war, she became employed by the reorganized Hungarian movie industry. She had no professional credentials in the field but she was young, attractive, intelligent, willing to learn, and a Communist party member. After a dizzyingly fast professional ascent she became by 1947 (at age 29) the Director General of the Hungarian Cinematic Corporation and for a while she rubbed elbows with some of the top political leaders of the country. Perhaps it would have been inhuman to expect humility from her in this situation and she did have some rather acerbic exchanges with me and my father whenever she judged that we showed insufficient deference to her exalted societal position or if we persisted in criticizing the political system which brought her to such prominence.

My cousin Mary and her husband Dr. Miklós Roth also became involved with the Communists which caused me some bewilderment and disappointment because I had great professional respect for Miklós. It was difficult to judge whether these involvements were motivated by genuine ideological conviction, by "historic gratitude" for being liberated from the Nazis (a theme that was played to the hilt in the propaganda press, in spite of evidence that the Russians were totally indifferent towards Jewish suffering), or by sheer opportunism. Even though the Communists should have been an insignificant factor in Hungarian politics according to the election results, they were very clever in capturing influential positions in almost all fields and had of course the full underground support of the Soviet Army. Undeniable advantages could be gained in job seeking, promotion, or other such matters if one had the support of the Communists. Even my little cousin Vera, who clearly belonged to the most "bourgeois" branch of the family and was still only a high schooler, became involved with Communist youth organizations. I stood virtually alone in the family as the only "reactionary" of my generation and my only aid and comfort came from a second cousin on the maternal side, Judith Kartal and her fiancé János Tárai, both of whom were medical students and who could not only see through all the farcical contradictions of the Communist program but were also bold enough to say so with uncompromising candor.

A second personal problem awaiting resolution was the question of my religion. The available options were to renounce the conversion to Catholicism as done under duress and officially reconvert to Judaism; or one could just let the matter ride. For those who had religious or other strong emotional commitment to Judaism, the first option was the obvious choice but generally among the converted, the second option was also common. Religious affiliations of all sorts were generally frowned upon by the Communists and particularly the Roman Catholic Church became a frank rallying point for anti-Communist sentiment, due mainly to the firm and sometimes deliberately confrontational posture of Cardinal Mindszenty who left no doubt about where he stood with respect to the supposed blessings of the Russian occupation, or with respect to Communism as a system, or the direction in which he wished the country to move. Thus, to become an active Catholic became a political statement. For this reason, a number of former Jews, myself included, decided to remain Catholics and I continued to maintain some loose connection with the church establishment on campus. I even went to confession once or twice. The main thing I had to confess, and I did it honestly, was that in reality I remained an unbeliever and that my conversion to Catholicism 4 years earlier had been strictly opportunistic and my present effort to remain in the church was motivated not so much by fervent faith as by the desire to identify with the mainstream of the Hungarian nation and to put a distance between myself and those who sought to sell out the country to the Russians. Somewhat to my surprise, Father Tihanyi who heard my confession assured me that this was an entirely acceptable motivation under the circumstances; that faith was a divine gift for which one had to pray; and that he would do so on my behalf. In the meantime, I was welcome as a fellow Catholic. He dismissed me with his blessings and I must admit that I had found confession an uplifting experience. My emotional ties to Christianity strengthened somewhat, and in the spring of 1947 I actually underwent confirmation at the hands of Cardinal Mindszenty personally.

Some aspects of the social scene in town after the war were pretty peculiar. The handful of American and British soldiers at the Allied Control Commission became objects of keenest competition for the girls of Budapest, which stood in pointed contrast to the fear, hatred, and disgust triggered by the sight of a Soviet uniform. Voluntary liaisons between Hungarian women and Soviet soldiers were virtually unheard of while the Western allies enjoyed intense and sometimes all too obvious attention. The lowliest jobs at the billets of the latter soldiers that were open to local applicants such as chambermaid or dishwasher were furiously competed for by society maidens who otherwise would not have cared to be caught dead lifting a finger in the household. Going out with an American or British soldier--any American or British soldier, including yokels whose only sex appeal was the uniform they wore--was the dream of many a fashionable young lady in town. Although the soldiers could of course bring Western cigarettes, candies, and other such coveted rarities to their sweethearts, it should be noted in all fairness that material advantages of this sort were not the mainspring of the attention the Western allies enjoyed. There was a certain "class" in the mere association with the Anglo-Americans; it included the opportunity to practice English, to learn something about the Western world, and perhaps to be groomed for possible emigration--or at least to forget for the moment the depressing reality of Soviet occupation of one's own homeland. Some of these liaisons progressed to marriage that as a rule turned out to be short-lived and unhappy. One such case involved a very upper-middle class girl with whom I used to be quite friendly, although without romantic

involvement. Christine Szász was the daughter of a fashionable doctor who owned a high-priced sanatorium in Budapest. She was just about the most pampered young lady I knew and quite rank-conscious. She married in 1946 an English lance corporal attached to the Allied Control Commission in Budapest who in civilian life turned out to be valet to a squire in suburban London. His bride was expected to work as upstairs maid. Poor Christine escaped from this horror after about 3 months. Her ignominious return to Budapest was the gossip of the town for many weeks. There were other more or less similar cases right up to the end of Western military presence in Hungary in 1947.

My own associations with the opposite sex had a slow start after the war. It took several months after my liberation from concentration camp for my sex instinct to come back; in the beginning, all I cared for was food. Even after I started to look at girls again, few of them looked back. It was like the Mátra camp of my adolescence all over again and for the first two years after my homecoming I was pretty much without a serious romantic attachment. My first successful post-war courtship was in the summer of 1947 to a fellow chemistry student, Petronella Cholnoky, petite blonde granddaughter of a famous and celebrated geography professor whose popular books I used to read during my adolescence. I suppose that this connection was part of her sex appeal in my eyes. I must assume that being a Jewish survivor must have been part of my sex appeal in her eyes, because she was a Gentile girl resolved to break with her past and adjust to the new realities in Hungary. That was supposed to include rapprochement with the Communists and when it developed that I was not amenable in that respect, it eventually caused the undoing of our relationship. I was already well familiar with the frustration of not being able to get to first base with women, but this was my first experience of rejection from an already established courtship. I was monumentally hurt and for a while I had a hard time getting back into circulation. Petronella eventually married another Holocaust survivor who was also a Communist party member.

#### The Political Scene

The peace treaty signed with Hungary in 1947 re-established the pre-1938 national borders and was supposed to end the occupation of the country. Unfortunately, that meant only the departure of the Anglo-Americans. The Russians very cleverly reserved the right to maintain troops in Hungary on the pretext of having to secure their supply lines to the Soviet zone of Austria; in practice, there was little difference between this "securing" and outright occupation. The Soviet army command had no qualms about interfering with the political life of the country and always found a pretext to harass, detain, or even capture and abduct politicians who became uncomfortable for the Communists. Between 1947 and 1949 the Communist Party managed to capture total control of the Hungarian government, in spite of the fact that even in the rigged elections of 1947 (where Communist vote was artificially inflated by fraud with absentee ballots and the non-Communist vote artificially suppressed by wholesale disenfranchisement of known opponents) they could muster only 23 % of the vote. However, under Russian pressure, the composition of the government coalition was pre-agreed and not dependent on the vote count anyway. Insult was added to injury by having all this accompanied by continual lip service to, and insistent outward proclamation of, "democracy".

Enough has been written about the Communist takeover in Hungary to make a detailed recapitulation of events unnecessary here. Dismemberment of the Smallholders' Party according to the "Salami tactics" (elimination of dangerous opponents slice by slice); forced union with the Social Democrats while their unwilling leaders were lured out of the country on the pretext of a state visit to Moscow; and the toppling of a Prime Minister on charges that he was involved in a conspiracy against his own government (surely a unique event in world history) were the way stations on the road to the "People's Democracy". This term was invented after the war in order to provide nominal compliance with Stalin's pledge in Yalta to support "democratic governments" in the countries under Soviet occupation. Sociology textbooks were rewritten to contrast "bourgeois democracy" (i.e., democracy in the old sense) with "people's democracy" (i.e., fledgling Communism). The deception was so obvious, and the apparent gullibility of the Western allies in swallowing this charade so disheartening, that many of us lost confidence altogether in the ability of the Anglo-Americans to see through Communist subversion. The painful truth was, of course, that the Western Powers had quietly given up their interest in Eastern Europe and judged that with the many controversial points to be worked out with the Soviet Union as relations between the Allies deteriorated, the area was simply not worth making a strong stand for. Thus, by about 1948, Hungary became totally abandoned to the Soviet sphere.

The political takeover was of course accompanied by economic measures. The "nationalization" of all businesses down to the corner grocery store was carried out with a combination of cunning and ruthlessness. Cunning was required in order to prevent or minimize the pullout of assets by the owners in anticipation of such a move. Reassuring proclamations were published virtually daily as to how small businesses were the backbone of a "People's Democracy" and how they would be strengthened in order to provide the lifeblood of a progressive Socialist commerce. Then, one morning, Government agents would descend on the offices of small businesses simultaneously across the nation, accompanied by armed police, and announce instantaneous takeover on behalf of "the people". The owner was turned out as he was, with express prohibition to remove as much as a sheet of paper from the premises. If his jacket was hanging in the closet, that was included in the confiscation and, depending on the eagerness of participating officials, sometimes even his pockets were searched and private papers or small change taken from him. In a few very rare instances (mostly, if he was himself a party member with good connections) he may have been reinstated later as salaried manager of the business but more typically he was chased away like a strange dog. Any employee who showed compassion was him- or herself accused of being the "exploiter's bootlicker" and could look forward to trouble.

My new aunt Annus (Uncle Dezsö's second wife, a Holocaust widow whom he married in 1947) had a confidential position as secretary to one of the Communist bigwigs in the Ministry of Commerce and she seems to have had official knowledge of some of these machinations in their planning stage. She was herself a party member but more of an "idealistic" type. Naturally, she always maintained total silence regarding secrets of this sort (to do otherwise would have been suicidal) but she did allow once at a family gathering, with a deep sigh, that the most important prerequisite for a job like hers was having "a strong stomach".

Strong stomach as well as a bird's brain were required to swallow the incessant flow of propaganda gushing from all media which were of course

placed under the most rigorous central control. Glorification of the Soviet Union and personal adulation of Stalin reached truly religious proportions. At the same time, the Western Allies were more and more cast in the role of insidious devils who had secretly collaborated with the Fascists all along. All interest in the West, including the mere knowledge of the English language, became suspect. Russian, and Russian alone, was proclaimed to be the richest, most beautiful, and most important tongue of the world and it speedily became the only foreign language available in the schools. Comrade Stalin was not only the greatest statesman who ever lived, but also the greatest military genius, the greatest artist, the greatest scientist, and in all possible fields "the glorious teacher of all mankind." I can remember that for one of Stalin's birthdays in the late 1940-s the Champs-Élysées of Budapest, the Andrásy Avenue, was renamed Stalin Avenue with appropriate hoopla and a thoroughness that put even the Germans to shame. In the course of one night, all street signs, streetcar labels, individual house numbers along the entire length of the avenue, as well as all other references to the name of this street were abruptly changed; all city maps and postcards at all newsstands and bookstores were suddenly exchanged to pre-printed versions carrying the new name; telephone books were promptly replaced by a new edition carrying the new name. Within a time span of 24 hours, all evidence that the street was ever called anything else but Stalin Avenue vanished from the Earth.

Such amusing attempts at "retroactive reorientation" had many other examples but none was more bizarre than that surrounding the outbreak of the Stalin-Tito quarrel in 1948. Again, overnight, the "heroic freedom fighter and great leader of the fraternal Yugoslav people" became the "chain dog of the Imperialist warmongers". There was no transition, except perhaps blackout of all Yugoslav news from the papers for some days that few people noticed. When the new truth became established, it became dangerous even to own old newspapers or magazines still toeing the old line. Not only was Tito a traitor now, he always had been; he had secretly cooperated with the Nazis even during the war and was always an imperialist "chain-dog". These allegations were especially ironic in view of the fact that anyone past the age of 20 could personally remember which of the present Allies really cooperated with Germany during the first 2 years of the war. The Communist propagandists must have derived some sort of perverse pleasure from making preposterous claims that challenged the common sense of the people. It reminded one of the journalism of the Arrow Cross, and we suspected that many of the scribblers were in fact identical. But the upper echelon supervising the media was now clearly Russian. It happens that the expression "chain dog" [láncos kutya] is not idiomatic in the Hungarian language; it was a verbatim translation from the Russian. I can remember that when some language/literature majors at the University attempted to change that phrase on one of the posters displayed on campus to some other lowly sort of dog such as yard dog or lapdog, it was indignantly forbidden by the party organization. Tito was to be "chain dog" by orders from above, no more and no less. Every tampering with the official phrase was regarded as totally impermissible and a dangerous deviation from the party line. This sort of spiritual muzzle imposed on the entire nation was called "freedom", and everyone was required to love it.

Obviously, public repression of such intensity required an appropriately formidable enforcement arm and for this purpose the AVO (Állam Védelmi Osztály, i.e. Department of State Security) was created. By 1948, they became an immense, intimidating, all-pervasive presence in the

country's life. No concert, theater or movie show, or other public gathering existed without the suspicious, malignant, watchful eyes of these characters whose uniform made them barely distinguishable from Soviet army officers. They were also conspicuous in the market halls and stores, stretching their ears to hear any grumbling, complaint, or other hint at discontent from the public. Citizens could be taken in and held in custody for days or weeks for the mere criticism of market conditions or the quality of a Soviet movie, and were lucky if not formally charged with subversion. A terror had descended on the nation that was in many ways reminiscent of the Arrow Cross period, with the sole difference that Jews were not now singled out as victims. In fact, it was common knowledge that almost all top Communist leaders of the country were native Jews. That did not mean at all that the Jewish rank-and-file enjoyed any advantages but it certainly added a dimension to this problem that I personally found quite tragic.

A feature of the Communist takeover was the series of judicial proceedings modeled on the show trials of the 1930's in Moscow. The first of these in Hungary was of particular interest to me because my academic minor at the University was involved: geology. The MAORT trial in 1947 was directed against the executives of the Hungarian-American Petroleum Company (MAORT from its Hungarian initials) that owned some natural gas wells and minor oil wells in the southwest area of the country. I had even visited those on an academic excursion with the Geology Department once. The name of the company was derived from the fact that Standard Oil of New Jersey was the main foreign investor and used to be part owner; now of course the company was "nationalized". A management dispute arose regarding the productivity of these wells; the geologists counseled gradual and prudent exploitation in order to preserve the natural pressure. The Communists, apparently on Soviet orders, demanded immediate depletion of whatever was instantly available and did not care about long-range plans. The dispute escalated into a big show trial at which the company executives were accused, and eventually convicted, of sabotage, treason, and various economic crimes. The defendants included Prof. Simon Papp whom I knew personally as a first-rate scientist and gentleman of the old school. No scientific testimony was allowed in his defense and he was given a long jail sentence.

The trial of Cardinal Mindszenty in early 1948 was also of personal interest to me because Professor Baranyay, the Cistercian monk and law professor who got me into the University in 1943, was co-defendant as one of the Cardinal's "accomplices". The conduct of that trial is now public knowledge about which books have been written. These defendants also received long jail sentences for nothing more than daring to oppose Communism on a purely spiritual level.

These show trials culminated in 1949 with the case against László Rajk, the Communist Minister of the Interior and only Gentile in the highest government echelons. I had little sympathy for him although he was believed to have displayed a somewhat less abject subservience to the Russians than the other leading Communists and was credited with re-establishment of public safety in Budapest from marauding Soviet soldiers. He was found guilty of Titoist sympathies and executed.

By this time, all political parties except the "United Workers' Party" were dissolved. Belonging to the Party was no longer a question of political orientation; it was now to become a mark of societal distinction. A general "purge" was instituted at all party units and most of those who a few years

earlier had been enticed, cajoled, or coerced to sign up were now triumphantly thrown out as "class aliens". That was also the fate of most Social Democrats who were automatically taken over when their party "merged" with the Communists. New applicants had to spend a few years as "candidates" before admission to full membership in a ceremony that resembled the conferring of the knighthood. In 1949, the country could finally celebrate that ultimate triumph of a People's Democracy: general elections at which only one list of candidates was running, with not even the rank order of deputies within the party open to choice. Voting consisted of getting the printed ballot and dropping it into the ballot box without marking, in front of watchful official eyes. Not surprisingly, the vote was 99+ % in favor, and the "great victory of progressive and socialist forces" was noisily celebrated. The election formalities were concluded by dispatching a message of national homage to Comrade Stalin.

#### Lomonosov, Lysenko, Lepeshinskaya

In the Communist view, they were now confronted with the immense task of re-educating a whole nation in the values, attitudes, and mentality of a "People's Democracy". Characteristically, they went about this task with far more zeal than brains and the block meetings, plant assemblies, political seminars, and various other tools of mass indoctrination became burdensome even for those who would have been receptive to the underlying ideology. To be sure, attendance at these events was "voluntary"; but woe betide the hapless soul who attempted to extricate him- or herself for any reason. One announcement I personally heard said, with unintentional humor, "Everyone is required to attend voluntarily".

Typically, the day commenced 30 or 45 minutes before the start of work with the "journal club". Articles in the morning edition of the party paper were discussed article by article under the leadership of a party propagandist who "explained" the meaning of the news. Virtually every day, signature sheets were circulated with resolutions protesting the "Dollar-Imperialism" of the Americans, or the behavior of the French in Algeria, or whatever else happened to be on the front pages. As long as the United States had a monopoly of atomic power, furious denunciations were made of this inhumane weapon almost daily but these stopped abruptly when the Soviet Union successfully exploded its first atomic bomb. Frequently also, messages of homage were sent to Comrade Stalin, thanking him for this or that wise measure ensuring the well-being of all peoples on earth. Of course, one had no way of knowing whether these messages were ever in fact ever delivered to their supposed destinations or not; many suspected that they were not and that they just remained in AVO files to serve as ammunition for eventual charges of duplicity against the individual signers if they ever got into political trouble.

In addition to the early morning journal club, employees were "encouraged" to stay after work on most days, for one or sometimes two or more hours for classes in Marxism-Leninism, the History of the Soviet Communist Party, or the new Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic. These classes occasionally involved drawing or singing lessons because the new Hungarian coat of arms (which discarded all historic symbolism and differed from the Soviet coat of arms only in the most subtle minutiae) had to be learned, and the new revolutionary songs and new National Anthem had to be learned. I can remember when my father, at that time about 60, came home from one of these "singing seminars" fit to be tied. He and his whole

department were detained for hours after work to learn the new text of the "Internationale" (the Communist anthem). The Hungarian version of the old text had a line (referring to the Capitalist exploiters of the old order):

"Pusztuljon el ez a rablóbanda"  
[This bunch of gangsters must perish].

It was noted during street rallies and other festive occasions lately that this line was sung particularly loudly by the citizenry. The Communist bosses could understand a hint and felt it advisable to commission the re-writing of the entire text.

A typical story that made the underground rounds in Budapest in those days referred to an opera performance of Verdi's Aida. It should be noted that at the Budapest Opera House, works were traditionally sung in Hungarian translation and in the third act of this opera, when Aida is waiting for her lover on the banks of the Nile, her line,

"Qui Radamès verrà, che vorrà dirmi"

was rendered in Hungarian by approximately,

"Oh Radamès, where dost thou tarry?"

At this point, a voice in the audience called out half-loud,

"At the party seminar, of course--where else?"

According to the story, the whole theater broke out in such stormy laughter that the performance had to be stopped. The house lights went on, and the AVO sentries present did their best to identify the caller, unsuccessfully. They had to be content with taking into custody the dozen or so loudest laughers.

During the summers of 1946, 1947 and 1948 I worked as trainee in the research laboratory of the Chinoin Pharmaceutical Company, the country's biggest and most prestigious drug manufacturing firm. I obtained such a coveted vacation post through the good offices of Dr. André Weisz, my uncle Dezső's brother-in-law from his first marriage who, unlike his sister, survived the Holocaust and was now employed by Chinoin as chemical engineer. Through this summer employment I obtained not only highly valuable work experience but could also observe first-hand the conditions at an industrial workplace and how they changed from year to year as the Communists gained firmer and firmer control. Of course it occurred to me to go back to Dr. Wander and perhaps capitalize on my history of having been a worker there during the war and claim proletarian credentials on that basis. But on second thought that was not an attractive alternative. Any such posturing would have required more political reorientation than I was prepared to undergo. Moreover, Chinoin had a much better research laboratory. I worked in the latter place for 3 summers as assistant to Dr. Alexander Hoffmann, a noted organic chemist of highly respectable accomplishments, and developed good rapport with many fellow employees, including workers.

I was amazed to realize how little support Communism had in the Hungarian working class. The general attitude of the workers was hostile disdain. Virtually all party functionaries of the plant were screwed-up

leftist pseudo-intellectuals rather than genuine proletarians. At one point, a cute but rather silly worker girl whom I befriended, Judy Spóring, confided in me and said that as far as she was concerned, Communism would be OK--except for the insufferable propaganda which took everyone for fools. I chuckled; Judy was a super-simpleton and if she felt that she was being taken for a fool, at whom was the propaganda aimed? The question remained unanswered. In time, the whole populace became tired automatons who did not listen to the propaganda slogans anyway. If a glorious leader's name was mentioned, there was automatic rhythmic clapping; when the word "vote" was mentioned, everyone raised their hand. People learned to be spiritually elsewhere while seemingly enthusiastically attending a political rally.

Perhaps the most bizarre phenomenon in the industrial life of the country was the "Stakhanov" movement. By 1948, new performance standards were established in every line of work and workers guilty of laxity or slow pace were severely penalized; more so than under any Capitalist "exploiter" of the past. In fact, people were expected to "over-fulfill the norm" out of boundless enthusiasm for the new order. Stakhanov was the name of a miner in the Urals who sometime in the 1930's supposedly over-fulfilled his output standard by some 2000 (two thousand) per cent. In his honor, "Stakhanovite brigades" were established everywhere in the Soviet Union, and now in Hungary. The work of these Stakhanovite brigades was the most preposterous farce. Their accomplishment was not honest output; it was a theater performance at which unseen hands had done all the time-consuming preparations and the "Stakhanovites" just danced through their assignments putting in the finishing touches or hammer blows, and then claiming credit for the entire project with connivance of, or actually on orders from, the Party Secretariat. After the "accomplishment", they were fêted, decorated, given handsome bonuses. The other workers were supposedly challenged to higher productivity by this charade.

Of course, some Stakhanovites (who were typically pre-selected on the basis of proper proletarian credentials rather than good judgment) ate up this heady stuff and sometimes actually believed how wonderful they were. If the party bosses decided that one or another had grown too big for his britches, he was suddenly dropped from favor like a hot potato, and from one day to the next he might have found himself reassigned to the most miserable and lowly job. If he complained, he was ominously reminded that he was quite welcome to repeat his Stakhanovite feat *without* the clandestine assistance--and would be charged with defrauding the working class if unable to do so. Generally, pressuring people to do crooked things and then holding this over their heads was a favorite Communist ploy to keep people in line.

About concurrently with the re-definition of work quotas in the wake of the Stakhanov movement, the workers' income was cut in another way as well. Everyone was "encouraged" to buy "peace bonds" in the "suggested" amount of one month's wages, to be spread out as automatic payroll deductions. Anyone daring to question the scheme was by definition opposed to peace and therefore a secret hireling of the Imperialist warmongers. The bitter hatred and sullen resentment on the workers' faces was plainly visible as they were required to "vote" by show of hand and approve with "unanimous enthusiasm" this measure.

In the late summer of 1948 I spent 2 weeks at the student recreational facility in the lakeside spa of Balatonboglár and met there Gisella Bőjthy, a classical dancer and member of the State Opera's Ballet Corps. Gisella

was a petite brunette with a lithe body, perfect figure, and such graceful movements even in ordinary everyday activities that it was at that time that I decided that if I ever had daughters, I was going to have them take ballet lessons. We became friends, which was no longer an easy matter in those days. One had to be constantly on the lookout for informers; it was rumored that the AVO was assembling secret files on everyone in the whole land and the country was flooded with clandestine collaborators who one way or another were coerced into part-time undercover service. People generally became suspicious, cagey, and new acquaintances would parrot before each other the currently approved slogans for days or weeks. There was always a risk in taking new friends into one's confidence and anyone too ready to "bare his/her heart" was more than likely a stool pigeon. What eventually convinced me of Gisella's innocence in this regard was her sincere and unbounded enthusiasm for Ulanova, Plisetskaya, and the other great Russian ballet dancers. Otherwise, she was a thoroughly unpolitical creature. When we went on a date in Budapest and I picked her up at the stage entrance of the State Opera, I saw there the Stakhanovite posters exhorting the Corps members to "over-fulfill the norm". It was not clear how this was to be done and when I asked Gisella, she said with a laugh, "I think they want us to dance more steps than the music allows". This sort of idiocy was not rare in the Communist programs of those days. Inapplicable principles were frequently transplanted from one field to another by uncritical party bureaucrats under general orders from above.

At the University, the student body was organized into "Study Circles". We were to do all of our studying, and even socializing, in our assigned Study Circle. Each of these had a "Chairman" (a respected, strong student as figurehead); a "Secretary" (the party delegate, typically a poor student, sometimes not even of the field); and about a dozen members. Each study circle session started with the Secretary summarizing and "explaining" for us the day's news, soliciting political discussion, and presenting resolutions to sign. The expected "political discussion" was of course vigorous assent to whatever the party line was at the moment, and preferably in the precise language prescribed by the party. Even minor variances were frowned upon. I first tried to take these discussions seriously and attempted to express free opinions on some of the items that came up, but never got very far. The party functionaries received special training on how to run a meeting in such a way that unpleasant questions (e.g., if there was only one choice for each office, what were elections for?) were nipped in the bud. All I achieved was to call attention to myself as a would-be heckler and reactionary agitator. I lost count of the number of messages that were sent over our signatures to Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and other Western leaders, furiously protesting everything from atomic blackmail to warmongering in Berlin. These were matched only by the adoring telegrams sent to Comrade Stalin, Comrade Rákosi, and our other glorious leaders.

The stated purpose of the Study Circles was that the stronger could help the weaker, but that was not easily achieved in practice. Hard sciences are best studied by "total immersion" and after the political harangue was over we just tried to concentrate on study materials individually, and ignore the presence of others. On the whole, the study circle system was a colossal waste of time and our studying was frequently interrupted by the Secretary, instructing us to correct "obsolete information" in the textbooks or lecture notes. According to Communist doctrine which at that time encompassed a great deal of Russian chauvinism, the real father of modern chemistry, originator of atomic theory and classifier of chemical reactions, was not Dalton or

Lavoisier but Lomonosov. The inventor of the telephone and wireless telegraphy was not Alexander Graham Bell or Guglielmo Marconi, but Popov. Every important scientific advance or valuable discovery in human history was credited to the Russians, giving rise to the following joke whispered on campus:

*Question.* Who created the world?

*Answer.* Jehov.

In my senior year, I was appointed Teaching Assistant in the institute of Professor Gróh, and I had a section of the freshman qualitative analysis lab to supervise. The job was sheer delight. I discovered that I loved to teach, and took great interest in the didactic simplification of fundamentals in order to introduce gradually the more complex concepts. According to the feedback I had, I did it quite well, too, and of course I basked in the general respect accorded to a member of the teaching staff. On the other hand, between the teaching job, the Study Circle, and the senior chemistry curriculum I had literally not a minute left for off-campus activities. My courtship of Gisella that for a while looked extremely exciting and promising, was dying on the vine for sheer lack of opportunity to meet. Our schedules were difficult to reconcile and of course she too had the usual problems of constant encroachment on her free time at her workplace. After a while, we just drifted apart.

By mid-fall 1948, my attention was captured by a cute, voluptuous, and very flirtatious student in my lab group, Maria Lomniczy. We started dating, but as our relationship started to develop she became strangely reticent. After a little prodding she confessed that she had to report on me every week to the campus party organization. She assumed that I might be having the same duties with respect to her; I had a hard time trying to convince her that I did not and that I was actually not on best terms with the party organization in general. I think she remained dubious. She said she would do her best to cause as little harm to me as possible but I must understand that she was not in a position to refuse such a service and knew that I would not be either if I were approached. We continued to see each other; in some ways the candor was wholesome but it also put a strange damper on our affair. I also felt that many other colleagues including even some old friends of the Chrysoidin Club were now shunning me. For people with professional ambitions, it was no longer advisable to associate with known non-supporters of the regime. Perhaps it was also assumed that I might be a well-camouflaged informer. In the climate of a People's Democracy, everyone was forever suspect and the first rule of existence was self-preservation.

Throughout 1948/49, the Hungarian papers were filled with accounts of the "life-and-death struggle" in the villages against the Kulaks. "Kulak" is the Russian word for a well-to-do peasant. Perhaps they existed in Russia; in Hungary all peasants were really quite poor because most arable land was formerly owned by the nobility to whom the actual tillers of the land were indentured. One of the first major measures of the post-war government of Hungary was the re-distribution of land to the peasants. Now it seemed that those who could successfully manage their parcel of land and were therefore opposed to the collectivization of agriculture were branded as "Kulaks". The vituperation heaped on the heads of Kulaks in the daily press defies description; it can be compared only to the propaganda against Jews in the Nazi press. According to the Budapest papers of the time, the Kulaks were the scum of the earth, responsible for every ill in the rural world

from poor harvests to too high prices for produce, and the natural allies of the Imperialist warmongers. Self-defensive measures against these despicable monsters who exploited the honest rural population were said to be imperative and had to be implemented with Communist firmness. Immense concentration camps--the Hungarian branch of the Gulag--were established in several areas of the country for the imprisonment of Kulaks, together with industrial saboteurs (e.g., workers who were openly critical of the Stakhanovite movement) and recalcitrant intellectuals. The population of these camps swelled to hundreds of thousands. Typically, the AVO would come in the dead of night to get their victims and the ring of the doorbell at an unusual hour became an ominous sign of impending disaster. "Csengőfrász" [bell jitters] was the expression coined by the wags of Budapest to describe the abject terror in which the population lived. Although the expression has an amused, sardonic ring, the situation was not at all funny. The country had descended to the lowest depths of totalitarian repression.

At the University, the most exciting happening of the year was the Lysenko affair that burst into the scientific world of Hungary with greatest suddenness. Lysenko was a Soviet academician and plant breeder of whom nobody in Budapest had heard before. In the fall of 1948, a long article appeared in the Hungarian party monthly, *Sociological Review* under the title "The Situation in Biological Science" which turned out to be translation of a speech Lysenko had given at the Soviet Academy of Sciences during the summer. The gist of the speech was that biology was divided into 2 hostile camps: reactionary, imperialist, "Mendelist-Morganist" biology which aimed at perpetuating the exploitation of the working classes and served the Capitalist warmongers; and "Michurinian" biology which was the true heir of Darwin and served the progressive social forces of the Soviet Union. Much of the article was devoted to vituperative abuse of Mendel, Morgan, Weissmann, and a few other scientists who around the turn of the century worked out the laws of heredity and the basis for scientific genetics. Michurin, it turned out, was a Russian horticulturist who could improve plants by judicious grafting or crossbreeding. Lysenko formulated a far-reaching theory on the basis of Michurin's work, denying the very existence of chromosomal heredity as determinant of biological character traits, and claiming that inheritance of acquired characters was the driving force of evolution with all morphogenesis and speciation dependent only on environmental influences that were modifiable and improvable by human effort. This at least is a reasonable oversimplification of his long, very obscure, and in places quite confused article. Practical proofs were hinted at but not presented in any detail or referenced in the accustomed scientific way; opposing views were furiously denounced as inspired by enemies of social progress. The whole thesis was developed more on the basis of quotations from Marx, Lenin and Stalin than on conventional technical reasoning from data and the article represented a startling departure from the internationally accepted standards of scientific communication.

The party apparatus at the University of Budapest received instructions to enforce the teaching and practice of "Michurinism" in place of the old, reactionary biology in all pertinent departments without delay, and a stampede had started on campus that is difficult to describe. Faculty in the affected specialties scurried to the library to find something on Michurin, or Lysenko, or anyone else connected with the "new school" but drew complete blanks. The article in *Sociological Review* remained the only fountainhead of the new doctrine and how to re-design professional curricula in biology, botany, agricultural science, and perhaps even chemistry and

medicine, on the basis of one single polemic article was a good question. Eventually, more information trickled through but it only consisted of more speeches, and it seemed that no regular scientific papers existed on this matter at all, at least in the internationally referenced literature available in the Budapest technical libraries.

Party propagandists rushed in to fill the void and for a while the Budapest papers were replete with stories glorifying Michurinism that supposedly could transform the vast steppes of Siberia into a garden of Eden and would be a harbinger of a happy age to all Humankind if only the sinister, racist, Mendelist-Morganist ideas of reactionary biology could be stamped out. It was darkly hinted that devious scientists who tried to deceive the working class by attempting to reconcile the new teaching with old ideas and now used words like "nucleic acid" or "allelic determinant" to cover up their continued adherence to the discredited ideas of genetics would surely get their just desserts. The alleged experimental proofs for the so-called "laws of heredity" did not matter; they were based on bourgeois statistics that had no place in a goal-oriented progressive science. Harping on them, as the reactionary biologists were wont to do, only exposed the latter as secret agents of Imperialism. The eternal truth of Comrade Lysenko's teachings were not dependent on petty experimental fussing because they were derived from Marxism-Leninism and had the personal endorsement of the greatest scientific genius of all times, Comrade Stalin.

For traditional scientists, the merit of the new theory was almost beside the point. For one thing, in the absence of published experimental proof, it was not ascertainable anyway. The most striking thing about the whole affair was that a new theory, or any theory, would be imposed on the academic world by fiat from the state apparatus and all opposition to it, or even hesitation with respect to it, denounced as treasonous. It resembled the promulgation of religious truth in the middle ages.

Two faculty members at the University of Budapest, Professor Gimesi of plant physiology and Professor Doby of agricultural chemistry, declared themselves unable to incorporate the new teaching into their lectures for the time being, and pleaded for more time until additional information became available. These professors were summarily dismissed from their posts with such savage suddenness that one morning they were not allowed into their own offices. The whole campus watched with baited breath; the drama played in the middle of a semester and the scheduled lectures of the fired professors had to be continued. I was at that time enrolled in agricultural chemistry and of course we were wondering what was going to happen next. After one missed period Dr. Erdey, assistant professor of analytical chemistry whose manual was a popular guide in the sophomore laboratory, stepped into the breach and continued the lectures in agricultural chemistry in a most ludicrous fashion. The subject was utterly outside of his expertise and his lectures consisted of verbatim reading of Lysenko's article in Sociological Review, laced with completely nonpertinent presentations of agricultural machinery out of an encyclopedia. When he ran out of material, he just started all over again with a perfectly straight face. The other affected instructors handled their assignments in a similar way. The precedents of the fired professors had their intended intimidating effect: fear reigned supreme.

In addition to the "new biology", stirrings were also heard about a "new physics" and "new chemistry". Albert Einstein was severely criticized on the basis of his Zionist leanings and the theory of relativity denounced

as too idealistic and not in tune with "dialectic materialism". For some strange reason, the resonance theory of chemical bonding was also frowned upon and declared "un-Marxist". These directives of course meant instantaneous dropping of the allegedly offensive materials from the curriculum. Biochemistry was supposedly revolutionized by the sensational new discoveries of Professor Olga Lepeshinskaya of Moscow University, who could create new whole cells, and even functioning microorganisms, from "living matter" in test tubes. What "living matter" exactly was, remained open—perhaps mistranslation of some Russian term; most people understood it as some sort of nurturing medium. Her publicized experiments were so naïvely crude that even undergraduates could see that she mistook outside contamination for artificial emergence of new life. However, her "research" allegedly received the personal interest and encouragement of Stalin himself, which of course put her work totally above reproach and beyond any possible criticism. The mere questioning of these "breakthroughs" became sheer sacrilege and the questioners furiously denounced as "class enemies". My intellectual endurance was reaching its limits and I feared that I was going to get myself expelled from the University for just calling out uncontrollably:

"Hey, have you all gone crazy? How can you swallow all this nonsense?!"

I tried to calm myself but Lysenko and Lepeshinskaya were the last straw. The handwriting on the wall was becoming clearer and clearer every day, and it said only one word:

OUT!

## C H A P T E R   N I N E

-----  
E S C A P E :   T H E   F I R S T   A T T E M P T

LAST OPPORTUNITY to leave Hungary legally was in the summer of 1948. Group travel was organized for fans to attend the Olympic Games in London, and anyone who could come up with the required cash (an immense sum in Hungarian currency) could sign up, obtain a passport, and go. I had friends who did that, returned to Hungary after the games, and have regretted doing the latter ever since. In the fall of 1948 all old passports were invalidated and for ordinary citizens it was no longer possible to get a new passport. As totalitarian repression sharpened, a mass exodus would have taken place if tolerated by the authorities and the necessary concomitant of any Communist regime is naturally the complete prohibition of all foreign travel.

In addition to ending legal foreign travel, measures were taken to inhibit illegal departures as well. Hungary has a long common border with Austria and although the eastern part of Austria was still under Soviet military occupation, it was of a much milder variety than that practiced in Hungary, and once past the border, there were said to be no obstacles to reaching Vienna, a four-power city under the Potsdam Agreement. Thus, the place to apprehend would-be escapees was the Austro-Hungarian border and throughout the fall of 1948 rumors were whispered in Budapest about how that border was being transformed into the virtual perimeter of a penitentiary, with barbed wire fence, a chain of watchtowers with searchlights, minefields, and heavily armed border patrols with police dogs. Minor loopholes such as passage of the Leitha and Raab rivers, and a brief stretch of railroad track in the area of Sopron that skirted Austrian territory, were secured by the AVO one-by-one and by early 1949 the western border of Hungary was said to be virtually hermetically sealed. The country was progressing towards transformation into one immense concentration camp.

Preparations

I watched these developments, or more correctly I listened to the whispered rumors of these developments, with dismay. As a senior student in the chemistry program at the University, I obviously wished to conclude my studies before I engaged in the adventure of illegal emigration. On the other hand, the urgency was undeniable: after completion of fortifications on the Austro-Hungarian border the next step was rumored to be the building of a similar security belt on the Yugoslav-Hungarian and Czechoslovak-Hungarian borders. If one wanted to escape at all, it had to be done before the encirclement was complete.

My resolve to escape from Hungary was a-building during the winter of 1948/49 and received a strong boost from my dismissal in February 1949 from the teaching assistant's post I held in the freshman qualitative analysis lab. The act was purely political. Professor Gróh confidentially and

apologetically communicated to me that he had to submit the list of proposed reappointments to the party organization on campus and my name was crossed out from the list. My status as matriculated senior student was not affected for the time being, but the question was, for how long? Expulsions from the study circles on charges of "reactionary agitation" were rumored to be in the planning stage and these were tantamount to dismissal from the University. I was beginning to look back on my foolhardy "frank discussions" in the early days of the study circle with increasing uneasiness and worry.

Naturally, the decision to emigrate was not an easy one to make. There were the sentimental considerations of native land, native language, and all that; in the western world one would be without roots, without connections, without a home base. Some people felt that the present excesses of repression could not last forever and a technically trained person such as myself could eventually find his place even in a "People's Democracy". There were also the "squatters": i.e. those who were so certain that the prevailing conditions represented the last convulsions of a moribund system that their secret slogan was: "we can hold out for the remaining days of this hell even if we had to squat". Many people believed that the outbreak of World War III which would bring instantaneous collapse of World Communism was not far off and events like the Berlin blockade of 1948 were watched with expectant excitement.

In addition to the agonizing question of whether or not to go, there was the even more agonizing question of *how*. Not only was the western border itself converted into a formidable military frontier, even the approaches were closely watched and all travel in a westerly direction meant increasingly certain encounter with road blocks or train checks. Detailed maps or hiking manuals involving areas close to the border vanished from the bookstores and libraries; asking for them invited AVO inquiries. By late 1948, the only way to get even close to the border was with a "guide", i.e. a local person to whom one was ostensibly invited for a visit and who was supposedly familiar with the terrain including alleged gaps in the barbed wire, safe paths through the minefields, and the schedules of border patrols. The fee for such a "guide service" was of course exorbitant. If a deal sounded too good to be true, it usually was. The AVO caught on to the emergence of these people smuggling rings fast and instituted its own countermeasures: the "market" was soon flooded with *agents provocateurs* who represented themselves as residents of border villages well familiar with local conditions and capable of assisting would-be escapees. If a client swallowed the bait and started negotiating, he was promptly delivered to the AVO. I had heard of naive schemes such as the one offered to a young couple with a baby. According to the offer, they were to be taken comfortably by car to a point from where they could walk no more than 500 feet safely into Austria. The driver would even help with the luggage. When the deal was struck, a car came obligingly to pick them up, then drove 15 blocks to the AVO headquarters, where the driver cheerfully announced, "we have arrived". Most offers were of course a bit more sophisticated and typically included earnest warnings of considerable hurdles and significant risks. To have or not to have confidence in such offers was a harrowing game of very high stakes. It became customary to demand "references" from would-be guides; i.e. postal address of a satisfied former customer or two now in the West, who could confirm the guide's competence and good faith. One could write a postcard to such a person in Vienna, Munich, or Paris, with the approximate text of:

"I heard you were a stamp collector and our mutual friend Mike is offering me some specimens he says he also sold to you--could you tell me whether the stamps were genuine?"

Such a postcard would be immediately understood and answered. That of course was no full proof of anything and the essential element in establishing trust was still careful psychological probing and the interpretation of claimed credentials. According to some rumors, the AVO itself allowed its agents to smuggle out safely some individuals every now and then, for the precise purpose of establishing such credentials so that they could catch the bigger fish. According to still other rumors, every smuggler was in the service of the AVO and had to present lists of clients to their AVO bosses regularly; the AVO supposedly check-marked those they could take abroad and those who had to be brought to them. Since the payment schemes typically involved a larger part of the fee to be paid only after safe arrival, there was an obvious incentive to be selective in the ordering of arrests. The net result of all this for the would-be escapee was a pervasive sensation of total insecurity.

The one group of friends with whom I could discuss these matters in complete frankness was the Tapirs, i.e. former members of the labor service company with whom I served during the war, most of whom also became "alumni" of Fertörákos, Mauthausen, and Gunskirchen. We maintained regular contact in the post-war years and had many a hilarious get-together at which we reenacted the funny occurrences of our labor service with great exuberance. We also attempted to perpetuate the remembrance of our martyred buddies, but from 1948 onwards the subject increasingly dominating our agenda was the problem of escape. Virtually all of us were fed up with Communism to the gills and to each other we could admit it freely. There were a few nominal party members in the group, but betrayal from a fellow Tapir was unthinkable. By early 1949 the clever ones (John Horváth, John Lukács, John Stricker) had already left and the rest of us reluctantly agreed that the "western route" (i.e., directly through the Austro-Hungarian border) had become practically hopeless. Attention was focused on the "northern route" (i.e., into Czechoslovakia as a first step) which was judged more realistic. Approaching the country's frontier in any direction involved the likelihood of AVO checks, but in 1949 there was no barbed wire on the northern border, at least not yet; Czechoslovakia itself, although also a Soviet satellite, was at an earlier stage of transformation into a People's Democracy than Hungary and still allowed relative freedom of movement. Most importantly, Czechoslovakia was reputed to have cordial relations with the new state of Israel and allowed Zionist groups to leave the country semi-legally for settlement in Israel. A regular escapee program (the "Brikha") was reputed to be operating out of Bratislava into Vienna specifically for these Jewish emigrants. If one could reach Bratislava safely and place oneself under the wings of Zionist authorities there, one was virtually "home, free".

I was never a Zionist. During my youth my Hungarian identity was always stronger than my Jewish identity and although I was gravely offended by the treatment accorded to us during the Nazi period, I still felt that I owed my patriotic allegiance to Hungary. Nonetheless, the establishment of an independent Jewish state after two thousand years gave me, like Jews everywhere, a sentimental thrill. Emigration to Israel certainly seemed preferable now to living in Communist Hungary. My brief flirtation with the

Christian religion could of course become something of an embarrassment if I re-joined Jewish groups, and would have to be discreetly forgotten.

Actually, I had no clear idea of where I wanted to go. Getting out of the "People's Democracy" was my only concern for the moment, and vaguely, away from Europe as well. That continent had already triggered two world wars and now clearly seemed to be preparing for the third. The farther away one was from the "old gunpowder barrel" the better. But, overseas, I had close family connections nowhere. One distant cousin lived in Casablanca, another in New York. Going to the United States would have been my first choice by far; not only was that country the acknowledged leader of the free world now, I also had my pleasant personal memories of living with the Americans after the liberation from the Nazi concentration camp. But, in the present circumstances, one could not afford to be choosy and any non-Communist country of the world looked good, including Israel. I had no hesitancy in seeking contact with underground Zionist groups.

By the end of March 1949 I became an attendee at the clandestine meetings of the Hapoel Hazion, the youth group of the Israeli Labor Party, functioning underground in Budapest. In retrospect, I must state that the security arrangements for joining this group were quite inadequate and I can not remember much scrutiny before I was allowed to participate in discussions of escape. Of course, there was a price to be paid for inclusion in an emigrant group and I believe that for casual joiners such as myself it was higher than for old-time members. On the other hand, it was understood that, once out in the West, one could detach oneself from the Israel-bound transport and go where one pleased.

My father gave me the required money (a very substantial sum: about one month's salary) without demur. There were about a dozen young men in the group to which I became assigned. We received our instructions regarding the operational details of the trip which included wearing double underwear from shirt to socks, light excursion gear on the exterior, and not more than one light briefcase-ful of other personal belongings. Ostensibly, we were making a week end study trip to the stalactite caves of Aggtelek, close to the northern frontier of the country, about 120 miles northeast of Budapest. The plans were to take a fast train to Miskolc, change there to a local train, disembark in the area of the cave where we would meet our guide, and take off on foot. At some point, we would "lose our way" and walk over into Czechoslovakia. A farmstead on the other side of the border was said to be expecting us with food and opportunity for a night's rest. Next day we would be bussed into Bratislava where one could report to the Brikha authorities.

#### Departure and Capture

On what I thought was to be my last night in Budapest, I remember walking out to the banks of the Danube to say goodbye to the city I grew up in and loved so much. Chances were at the time it was going to be my final farewell. I was quite touched, almost in tears; but when my gaze landed on the newly installed red star on top of Parliament Building, my resolution hardened. There were no decent opportunities for me in a People's Democracy. To leave, as long as leaving was possible, was clearly the thing to do. It was a pity that my studies at the University of Budapest had to be abandoned only a few months before concluding my last term, but procrastination was dangerous. I would not have been ready to sit for my final Rigorosum

[concluding examination] earlier than the fall, anyway; the distractions of the last months had of course interfered with my study schedule somewhat. Too much could have happened in the meantime, and I was grabbed by what became known later in German as "Torschluss-Panik" [Door closing panic]. The die was cast.

My mother was in virtually constant tears since my decision was made. It's not that she was fundamentally opposed to the idea but she was desperately apprehensive about what was going to happen to me if I were caught; how was I going to survive in the world if I were not caught; and she generally just worried herself sick about the whole situation. My father regarded the matter like a military problem with obvious grave risks which however were clearly unavoidable. He agreed that to stay and live under Communism was for a young man like myself the poorest of all possible choices. He was grimly supportive of my effort and helped to meet its expenses readily. No one else was made privy to the plan. The close relatives and some Tapir friends were vaguely aware that I was planning to escape but to burden anyone with details would have been both unnecessary and foolhardy. At the University, I was attending classes and participated in study circle sessions to the last day.

On Friday, April 29, 1949 early in the morning we assembled at the Eastern Railroad Station of Budapest, bought our tickets, and boarded the train for Miskolc. All of us were young men of roughly the same age group; we knew each other only superficially from prior meetings of the Hapoel Hazion. The guide was to meet us at the railroad station of Szin, the point of debarcation for the Aggtelek caves. Only the designated leader of our group had met him previously and knew who he was.

We were all in our prescribed garb and tried to act as inconspicuously as possible. I can remember pretending to be immersed in a magazine in order to avoid conversation that might have betrayed my nervousness. We arrived in Miskolc after a 2-3 hour trip. As we were scurrying from one platform to another in order to change trains, we found ourselves surrounded by a uniformed detachment of the AVO. We were herded off the busy area of the station and lined up on a sideramp. Any protests or questions were silenced by menacing gestures; we were to make any communication only to the commanding officer at headquarters.

It was clear that we had been betrayed. The identity of the informer remained unknown but we did notice a rather strange occurrence during our capture. One of our number, Tibor Itzkovits, stayed behind for some reason and managed to avoid being included in the surrounded group. In fact, as we were being lined up he walked up with unlit cigarette in his mouth to one of the AVO men, asking for a light. Perhaps it was just a bravura performance of *sang froid*; perhaps he was in on the whole happening. The rest of us watched in crestfallen consternation.

We were marched several blocks to the AVO headquarters of Miskolc and were lined up there in a corridor, about 4 ft distant from each other left and right, facing the wall. An AVO man was walking up and down behind us, prodding people with his gunbarrel if anyone wiggled too much, or tried to turn around, or tried to talk. This continued for all afternoon and all night, a total of at least 18 hours. Guards were changed twice, and during each watch we were directed to go to the lavatory down the corridor singly, in the order we were standing, whether we wanted or not. I had a 1,000 Austrian

Schilling banknote hidden on my person as a last-ditch cash reserve (worth about US-\$35 at the then current exchange rate) and my main concern was to get rid of it in some way. Had they found this money on me, that would have considerably aggravated my problem since possession of foreign currencies was in itself illegal in Hungary. The first guard who took me to the lavatory did not allow me to close the compartment door while I was sitting on the toilet but the second did, and with a deep sigh I flushed the 1,000 Schilling note down the bowl.

The successful operation made me bolder and as I was being taken back to my place in the wall lineup, a higher AVO officer walked past and I turned to him with a show of indignation.

"I am being held here for more than 12 hours now", I said. "I demand to know why I had been arrested."

The officer looked me over from head to toe as if I were a strange zoological specimen. He was obviously quite amused at my daring. He replied, "Arrested? You have not been arrested. You have been taken into custody. We have 14 days by law to hold you in custody before charges, if any, are proffered." He walked away.

By the morning of Saturday, April 30, all of us were quite weary. Around 9 A.M. the offices of the building started to hum with business and we were ordered, one-by-one, to report for interrogation. It was about 10:30 A.M. when my turn came and I was taken to an office where an AVO lieutenant was looking at me with bored indifference. My name, address, birth date, and occupation were taken.

"University student, eh?" The lieutenant said with an expression that was a mixture of surprise and contempt. "One would think that University students had more sense than that. What's your father's occupation?"

"Employee of an insurance company."

"Ah, insurance. Well, that figures. May I see your rail ticket?"

I gave it to him; he looked at it briefly. "Budapest to Szin. No doubt you are a member of the so-called Aggtelek excursion group?"

"Yes."

"And you had no other intent with this excursion but to visit the cave?"

"Correct."

"Would you kindly tell then, why do you have two shirts two underpants, two socks on?" He looked at me with a triumphant smile. "No doubt to fight off the dampness of the cave?" He chuckled.

"Yes, sir" I said, deflated. These devils know everything already. My original resolve to stonewall the interrogation was faltering.

"Take out everything from your pockets and from your suitcase and lay everything on the table here." He pointed to an empty table next to his desk.

I complied; there was not much beside my toiletries, my magazine, some spare underwear, a pair of pajamas, my wallet, pocketbook, and penknife. We were warned during the preparatory meetings not to have any notebooks or address books with names and telephone numbers. Anything essential had to be learned by heart.

The lieutenant frisked me cursorily and looked over the items on the table, also in a most fleeting fashion. He riffled through the magazine I had, and through the pocket calendar booklet in which I had marked nothing more than birthdays and a few University deadlines.

"Okay. You can put everything back." I was surprised; the superficiality was in pointed contrast to the fearsome reputation the AVO had. We were obviously too small fish to bother with thoroughly. It occurred to me that if I still had the 1,000-Schilling note on me it would not have been found; but one did not know what was still to come.

The lieutenant took a bunch of typed sheets from his desk, filled in my name and personal data, and gave me one to read. It was my confession, already prepared, of having attempted to leave Hungary illegally, in contravention of pertinent laws and regulations; of having attempted to carry various items of value across the state boundary without customs clearance; and of having combined with others to carry out together the above crimes and misdemeanors. There was a groveling admission that I did all this in flagrant abuse of the freedoms bestowed on me by the People's Democracy and in wanton disregard of the duties and obligations I had as a citizen to build Socialism. On the other hand, none of my "accomplices" were named; the Hapoel Hazion as instigating organization was not named. I immediately reached for the pen and signed all five copies.

"Now, there is a smart boy." The lieutenant beamed with satisfaction. "You know, one of your friends was a little recalcitrant and we had to use a little *persuasion*." He gave the word an ironic, unpleasant ring. "We try to avoid that, if possible. You can go now."

The way he said that, I thought I could walk out the building a free man but that of course was a misperception. I was taken down to the detention room where most of the other young men of our group were already waiting. Not one, but two of them appeared to be beaten up; in conversation we found out that one was insisting that he really wanted to go to the Aggtelek caves and the other asked, perhaps ironically, how he could be charged with illegal border crossing at the Miskolc railroad station, which is 50 miles away from the border. However, after appropriate "persuasion", both signed. Before long, all of us were together in the detention room. By about noon we were taken out to the courtyard and loaded into a black prisoner transport van. After a 10-minute ride we were unloaded in front of the Miskolc County Jail and herded into the "reception area" of the institution.

#### Serving Time in the Miskolc Jail

My most vivid memories of the Miskolc jail are the incessant clanking of steel-grated doors and a constant odor of chlorine. The way the jail was laid out, barred partitions separated each segment of the corridor and doors in these partitions were opened and slammed shut every few minutes all day long as the turnkeys moved around. The odor originated from the portable bucket-potties present in every cell, disinfected each day with a fresh slab

of chlorinated lime. As the weather turned summer-like, a third distinguishing feature of my jail experience was the near-intolerable heat without a trace of breeze or fresh air.

The "reception formalities" after arrival were simple enough. A complete inventory was made of all our belongings and taken for safekeeping, except the clothing we wore. There was no jail garb, but suspenders and a sort of clip to hold shoes together were available since belts and shoelaces were also taken from us. Then, we were each issued a straw-sack, blanket, dixie cup, spoon, and taken to various cells, each to a different one. It was explained that this separation measure applied only to our investigative detention and served to prevent collusion in our pleadings. After our sentencing, we would be allowed to do time together.

Generally, my jail sojourn can be sharply divided into the first 2 weeks of "investigative detention" and the following 11 weeks of serving my sentence. At the time, I found the jail regime after sentencing to have been the much more lenient and agreeable, but in retrospect it was the investigative detention that was the more fascinating by far, because of the various fellow inmates I met, many of whom turned out to be quite unforgettable.

I can well remember my utter dejection as the cell door slammed shut behind me. It seemed that, once again, I had arrived at the rock bottom of human existence. I faced my cellmates: about a dozen people of various ages, all looking at me with undisguised curiosity. I suppose the way I looked at them was a perfect giveaway of my thoughts because after a few moments a voice said, in a mocking-humorous tone:

"What lousy luck! Another greenhorn."

There was boisterous laughter, and people came up to me offering their hands, introducing themselves, as if we were at a reception in a country club. Some even clicked their heels. The general jolliness absolutely amazed me. These people were not depressed about being in the slammer; if anything, they seemed to be amused by it. I was shown where to put my strawsack and was soon drawn into conversation. All of my cellmates were in investigative detention for some common crime, and all claimed to be innocent--although some of them said so with a wink. The charges against them were thievery, burglary, document forgery, rape, manslaughter by negligence, manslaughter in a fit of passion--the whole gamut of lawbreakings, it seemed, and to get to know these people intimately was certainly a unique course in human psychology on a much more practical level than the academic subject by that title that I had studied once at the University. However, it took some time to shake off my gloom and to appreciate that opportunity.

The jail cell was certainly depressing. It was perhaps 18 x 18 ft, with straw sacks and blankets piled in a corner during the day. In another corner was the "pottie": a rusty metal drum with loose-fitting lid, without any sitting amenity on the rim and without a curtain or other means of privacy. In a third corner was a bucket of fresh water with drinking cup attached to it with a chain. There was no running water in the cell but there was an old-fashioned toilet stand with a small wash basin. There was one barred window placed too high to reach it without standing on the shoulder of others. The steel door to the corridor had a spying hole at eye level and a larger

opening below it for the handing in of food. Both had covers controllable only from the outside, and, of course, doorknob also only on the outside.

A few hours after my arrival I partook of my first jailhouse meal: a pot of mixed legumes--beans, peas and lentils all cooked together, in a thick brown sauce. It turned out that this was standard fare, given virtually every day. In the morning, there was a thin soup with caraway seeds and the daily bread ration. On Sundays only, the breakfast included a ball of lightly fermented cottage cheese. By Mauthausen standards, the diet was almost luxurious, but at the time I perceived it as miserable enough. Parcels from the outside were allowed for convicts but not for prisoners in investigative detention. I lived on unmitigated jailhouse fare for two weeks; after our sentencing we were allowed a package a week and we barely touched jail food any more.

A day in jail started early in the morning with a lot of shouting, whamming, banging, as the turnkeys proceeded from cell to cell, unlocking doors, and ordering the daily "caretaker crew" (two inmates from every cell on a rotating assignment) to empty the pottie, collect a new slab of chlorinated lime into it, and refill the clean water bucket. In the meantime, the other inmates piled their strawsacks into a corner. Then the caretakers received a broom and dustpan to sweep the floor, full of dust and debris from the strawsacks. About an hour after reveille we received breakfast. Sometime between breakfast and dinner, at various timepoints each day, we had our "walk" in the tiny inner courtyard of the jailhouse. During our investigative detention we had to walk single file, with all talking strictly forbidden, in a tight circle. The scene had a distinct resemblance to Vincent van Gogh's famous painting now hanging in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, which I had opportunity to see much later in life. From a second floor window, a barrel of a machine gun was aimed at us to discourage rioting. There was never a need, at least during my stay there, to put it to use and I have no way of knowing whether the gun was even loaded. For prisoners after sentencing, the walk became a bit cozier with pair formation and quiet conversation allowed. Depending on schedules, the walk lasted 15-25 minutes daily.

In the evening, at a signal from the guards, the straw sacks had to be spread out in the cell, occupying most of the floor. Then, the light was put out. Immediately on my first night, I became acquainted with that typical example of jailhouse humor, the "Visit from the Prosecutor". As I was drifting off to sleep, there was commotion, voices apparently from the outside, and I heard my name called. Neighbors nudged me awake in apparent awe:

"The Prosecutor is here to talk to you."

I sat up, confused, and was ordered by the voice from the outside to get dressed immediately. While I was looking for my belongings in the dark, the voice asked for my birth date and place, home address, and then said:

"That's it! You are detained here by error. Collect all your gear. You are to be released immediately."

There was no chance to reflect on all this as I was dressing in haste, still barely awake, and so I was genuinely disappointed when standing before the cell door with all my belongings, it turned out that it was all a hoax.

The "voice from the outside" was produced by a cellmate talking into a tall boot in a corner of the cell. The reverberations thus produced created the impression that the sound had originated in the corridor. This was standard initiation procedure, so to speak, of all greenhorn prisoners and a source of merriment for the old-timers. It was also a means to separate the naïve from the experienced. I can remember that when, a few days later, the joke was played on another newcomer who, unlike myself, was not a first-time jail detainee, he turned over good-naturedly when awakened with the Prosecutor's call and said: "Tell him that I am busy right now but will call him back at my earliest convenience" and went back to sleep. The cellmates had their laugh, anyway.

Doubtless the most fascinating character in my investigative detention cell was Stevie the Nut. He was a young man in his early twenties, in for some petty thievery, and virtually a caricature of himself. He was thin but muscular, with an enormous head that was slightly hydrocephalic, with bulging forehead, matted hair, and exaggerated facial features that were constantly changing. His portrait could have well served in any textbook of psychiatry as an example of a sociopathic personality, or the adult outcome of the fetal alcohol syndrome. He had mischievous eyes and a zany sense of humor. He talked incessantly; I found him hilariously funny at first but quite tiresome after a while. He was inordinately proud of having had twenty-some criminal arrests already but not a single conviction. When asked how he managed that, he straightened out, standing almost at attention, and proclaimed with proud solemnity: "Mental incompetence". He then impersonated the court psychiatrist examining him by walking from cellmate to cellmate, peering into their eyes, asking them to look left and right, and fingering their skulls. He would then announce contemptuously:

"You guys, you are all phonies. But look at me! I am the genuine stuff. If I decide to freak out, there is no doctor in the world who is not going to be taken in." He broke out in boisterous laughter, and gave a rapid-fire exhibition of talking deliberate nonsense. Then he would stop for effect and ask in a completely different, sober tone:

"There, now. Does anyone here still doubt that I am going to be let off again?"

Stevie the Nut could be also quite sociable, helpful, and good-hearted in sharing his last cigarette or deferring to other cellmates in taking the last helping of fresh water or the best spots in the cell for a spell of rest. If he was crossed, he could change from placid cordiality to wild fury in an instant, yelling angrily:

"You had better leave me alone or I'll freak out for you [kiverem a dilit] until you are sorry you were born." He did, too, if his warning was not heeded and this stunning ability to manipulate one's own apparent mental state at will was a most fascinating display to watch. For a long time I was uncertain whether Stevie was genuinely psychotic or not, but much later in life I had the unfortunate opportunity to learn that this blurred borderline between normal and abnormal and the lack of distinction between the helpless acts of a sick person and the cunning behavior of a schemer are in fact characteristic of certain mental disease states.

Another person in the cell obviously not quite right in the head was Uncle Mike, the ax-murderer. He was a somber, brooding man in his fifties

who was in for killing a neighbor during an argument. He sat in a corner all day, quiet, morose, and he avoided being drawn into conversations. If someone insisted on talking to him, one could see his desperate effort at self-control, with hands trembling and eyes flashing. Once he lost his control for an utterly frivolous reason, picked up the washstand (a considerable feat of strength) and hurled it at the person annoying him. We all soon learned to leave Uncle Mike alone.

The other person charged with manslaughter was the exact opposite: a timid, unassertive chap and the epitome of peacefulness. He was a railroad signalman who fell asleep at the switches and caused the collision of two trains. The "rapist" was a young peasant lad whom I found on the whole the most congenial person among my cellmates. He insisted that the complaint against him was an act of revenge on the part of a jilted girlfriend. It may be noted parenthetically that the act of rape in Hungarian law is only a misdemeanor, not a felony; virtually invariably it used to involve courting couples where the element of undue force and the lack of consent were arguable. The American scenarios of gang rape or rape between strangers under threat of lethal force or with a lethal weapon were unheard of between Hungarians then, and to the best of my knowledge, still are. Accordingly, being charged with rape ["fastfucking" in the jail vernacular] did not quite involve the social stigma attached to it in this country and was treated lightly by both the authorities and the general public.

Then there was Joe Derda, the swarthy gypsy horsethief, who could not understand for the life of him (or so he insisted) what the authorities wanted of him, since the horse was coming with him quite willingly; the beast obviously had had enough of his former owner. John Szegö, the document forger, was in the Christmas tree business and had a permit to cut 6 trees from the state-owned forest. He judged that the market could well support a higher volume and added a zero to the figure 6 on his permit. He went around in the cell, explaining to everybody who would listen:

"A zero, only a zero! How much is zero? Why do they make such a huge fuss over a zero? How could I sustain a successful business with only six trees, anyway? They should have given me sixty to begin with."

On the fourth or fifth day of my detention I received my own indictment papers, with the main charge against me specified as "smuggling". That, of course, referred to the shirt on my back; the one item of real value I carried, namely the foreign currency banknote, I had successfully gotten rid of. Nonetheless, whatever objects of any value I attempted to carry across the national boundary without reporting to customs technically constituted "smuggling". I found the accusation extremely humorous and for a while I kept humming to myself the Smugglers' Chorus from the third act of Carmen. At some point, I had my real encounter with the Prosecutor which naturally was no nighttime jail cell visit but myself being taken to his office in handcuffs.

I remember my meeting with the Prosecutor mainly for its pointed cordiality. He obviously wished to advertise that he did not cherish the duty incumbent on him in this particular case and that he did not regard me as a criminal. He instructed my jailguard escort with a disdainful flicker of his hand to remove my handcuffs; he then shook hands with me and bid me to sit down in his office. The guard was instructed to wait outside. The poor fellow's mouth fell open and his eyes almost popped out of his head;

the procedure was obviously unusual. The Prosecutor chatted with me amicably for a few moments, inquiring if I had any complaint regarding my treatment in jail and saying virtually apologetically that I must regard it as a favor that I was locked up with common criminals. Charging me with smuggling allowed him to classify me as a non-political offender and keep me out of AVO hands. Of course, there was going to be a trial and I would be sentenced; he did not know to what term but guessed it would not be very severe. Each of us was going to get an officially appointed defender and mine would be Mr. Dancz, a practicing attorney in Miskolc who would visit me in jail shortly and discuss with me the possible pleadings and points that could be brought up in my defense. The Prosecutor wished me well, called in my guard who cooled his heels in the anteroom, and dismissed me with another handshake. On the way back to the jail, the guard asked if I was related to the Prosecutor or was he a family friend. I played dumb and said:

"No. Why, is he treating other defendants differently?"

The guard grunted and smiled under his moustache.

Mr. Dancz indeed came to visit me a few days later. He was a small, bald, middle-aged bespectacled man who told me right away that there was not much he could do for me. Everything in connection with our trial and sentencing was centrally decided. He informed me cheerfully that he just heard that the charge of smuggling was going to be dropped and we were going to be tried for attempted illegal border crossing only. I mentioned the technicality of "illegal border crossing" at the Miskolc railroad station; even if I had the intent then, I might have changed my mind during the several hours it would have taken actually to reach the border from there. Mr. Dancz waved this point aside and said that in his opinion there was no question but that I must plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court. He felt I was going to get 2-3 months but perhaps more if I played obstinate and started to argue about technicalities.

Naturally, I wrote home as soon as I was allowed to do so. Postcards, duly censored, were allowed by the jail administration. It was painful to convey the melancholy message that I was sitting in the Miskolc jail. I could imagine the distress of my parents. When the news broke in the family my uncle Endre the attorney got in touch with Mr. Dancz to see if there was anything special that could be done for me. Of course there was nothing. I received postal answer from home confirming that the family agreed with Mr. Dancz's assessment of my case and that Uncle Endre was personally coming to my trial which was set for mid-May.

On the morning of my trial, I was shaved by the jail barber and taken in handcuffs to the adjacent court building. Only the jail guard, the prosecutor, the defense attorney, and Uncle Endre as "general public" were present with me in the courtroom. Uncle Endre and I greeted each other with wistful cordiality. Then the judge entered and my trial started. All members of our escape group had separate trials that I suppose was a favor, because this way the "conspiracy" aspect of our cases did not have to be dealt with.

The judge showed me the confession I had signed at the AVO and asked me to verify my signature which I did. He then read the charge, asked me to plead, and I said,

"Guilty."

He then nodded to the prosecutor who stood up and delivered the following speech of accusation:

"The charge is sustained."

Then came the defense presentation and Mr. Dancz delivered a beautiful long speech. He touched on my Holocaust experience and on the emotional impact the foundation of a Jewish state must have had on me. He said that my foolish act stemmed from naïve thoughtlessness which I deeply regretted in retrospect. He concluded by stating that I had learned my lesson well and would now become an eager builder of Socialism if given a chance.

According to Hungarian court procedure I had the last word and said that I was indeed sorry for my stupidity (which I truly was, i.e. that I joined a group without adequate safeguards against infiltrated informers) and that I would strive to become a good citizen (not specifying of what country). I asked the indulgence of the Court.

The judgment was handed down right away. It was three months' jail, with time spent in investigative detention to be counted. My educational status as senior University student was regarded as an aggravating factor, because I should have known better. On the other hand, it was part of the sentence that no record of this conviction was to be carried in my civil files, in order to allow me a clean slate for a second chance. The whole trial lasted about 15 minutes, of which 10 were taken up with Mr. Dancz's speech. I was taken back to jail and placed into a different cell with several of my traveling companions. We were now convicts, which in jail practice meant certain easements in comparison to investigative detention.

My new cell was larger and less crowded, and as special amenity it had a makeshift curtain in front of the "pottie" and some sort of wooden seat fittable to it. The strawsacks could be placed on iron bedstands. There were about 10 of us in the cell, all members of the Hapoel Hazion group with whom I had plotted my escape. Each of us received sentences of 2 or 3 months; it seemed that the *bona fide* members of the organization got the lighter sentences and the casual joiners such as myself the more severe ones.

I found my fellow cellmates, all of whom were young men in their 20's, quite congenial and we got along well. At least 2 of them, Ed Leitner and Tom Izsák, were genuine ardent Zionists who in fact ended up in Israel eventually. Several others including Alex Fürst, Adam Kemény, and myself did not much care where we went as long as it was out of the Soviet orbit. In jail we could at least exchange candid opinions on the "People's Democracy" and we soon found out that most of the guards shared our views on that subject. There were just a few party stooges among them and we were duly warned to be careful when the latter were around. Otherwise, we could give free rein to our sentiments and we particularly enjoyed singing a "patriotic" song that had the following lines in it (referring to the blessings of Communism):

"Nincs a földön gazdagabb, szebb ország,  
Minden ember érzi, hogy szabad."

[A richer and more beautiful country does not exist  
on this Earth; Every person *feels* that he is free.]

Of course, we would bellow the latter line particularly loudly, so that the walls reverberated. Guards and fellow prisoners all had their laugh. Generally, I felt that we were being treated with a degree of consideration by both the guards and fellow inmates; it was recognized that we were not run-of-the-mill jailbirds and we became known, more in respect than in contempt or derision, as "the Jewish boys". Once during our walk I became paired with a middle-aged man, some sort of artisan, who confided to me that he, too, was a Zionist and that's why he was locked up here. He certainly did not look Jewish and I asked him, dubiously:

"What do you mean, Zionist?"

"I, too, think that the Jews should go to Palestine."

It developed that the man was a former Arrow Cross member who was serving a sentence for atrocities committed during the war. For all that, he did not mind begging cigarettes from me and assured me that he had nothing against Jews as long as they lived in a country of their own instead of in Hungary.

Generally, we were also set apart from other prisoners by the regular and very substantial parcels we received from our families. I believe the jail administration was also generous by letting everything through even though the contents might have been occasionally above official limits. Thus, we were always well supplied with cigarettes, sweets, and such valuable food supplements as sausage and cheese. Small gifts of these items to fellow inmates made us popular in the jail and virtually privileged prisoners with respect to such things as first call on laundry service, or more frequent visits by the jail barber, and related matters.

Games such as chess or checkers were allowed in the jail but card playing was not; at one point one of us got a Monopoly game sent from home and since that game includes a set of cards, too, the question came up whether or not it was allowable. We had to explain the whole game to the chief warden in order to win that question. He was so fascinated with the game that he wanted to play with us (but changed his mind when he realized that one game lasted for hours). Later, we obtained in secret from fellow inmates for a few cigarettes, a homemade deck of regular playing cards as well. I taught my cellmates the game of contract bridge and thus we managed to keep ourselves occupied one way or another.

Once, for some trivial infraction of jail rules, I was sent for 24 hours to "the movies": the dark solitary cell of the jail used for disciplinary purposes. The cell was a small cubicle with perfect exclusion of all light and sound. One was allowed to take in a blanket and twice during the 24-hour period bread and water were handed in. Otherwise, one was in total seclusion and in such perfect darkness and quiet that for one who has not experienced it, it is difficult to imagine the sensation. I suppose that the total deprivation of all sensory input can become mindboggling after a longer period but for just one day the punishment was tolerable. In fact, I almost welcomed the opportunity to be left alone with my thoughts for a while. It helped me to assess my situation and formulate my plans.

There was no doubt in my mind that I must try again as soon as I was let out. The seemingly generous provision in my sentence, namely that no criminal record was being created, was in reality meaningless because

people's lives, jobs, or promotion opportunities were governed by secret AVO records rather than public files. If I had reason to flee the country before my jail sentence I had even more reason after it. Of course, I had to learn from my misfortune and not attempt escape in such a large group, with the probability of AVO infiltration naturally increasing with the size of the group. Individual escape through Czechoslovakia still seemed possible, and in fact I had received several confidential offers from fellow jail inmates living in border areas, that they would be glad to assist me after release if I was still interested.

What I was to do once out of Hungary was another matter. Obviously, I must finish my chemistry education; just how and where, were questions that could not be answered as yet. I was grateful to my parents that I could speak reasonably proficient German, English, and French and I was confident that with this knowledge I should be able to get a good start wherever I landed in the end. In spite of the influence of my Zionist cellmates who were truly wholesome, enthusiastic young men and really most pleasant fellows, I still had grave doubts about settling in Israel. My wonderful memories of living with the Americans after my liberation from the concentration camp became more and more pervasive and I saw myself in the future as an American, of course with an advanced degree in chemistry, and perhaps on the faculty of a respected, large university. Naturally, in such a situation my funny Hungarian name that had no long tradition going back through generations anyway, would just not do. When the time came, I must change it to something really American-sounding--with a middle initial if possible: --after all, every important American I knew of, from Harry S. Truman to John H. Northrop, sported a middle initial in his name. I felt fortunate that I was given a second name at birth (Louis) even though that was not customary in the Hungarian middle classes and I never used it in my youth. As an American, however, the second name was going to come in handy. With all spelling duly "Americanized", I saw with my mental eyes my future nameplate or business card projected on the dark cell wall:

Professor Andrew L. Reeves, Ph.D.
-----------------------------------

At just about that point, my 24 hours dark cell punishment was over. There was clanking, calls by the guards, and blinding light as I was led out into the real world. The pipedream vanished, and I was again András Révész, convict for illegal border crossing, serving his 3-month sentence in the Miskolc jail.

Doubtless the hardest part of my jail confinement was the last month. The summer brought stifling hot temperatures; the fellows receiving the lighter sentences were already released and replaced by other and less congenial cellmates, including a highly disagreeable bully. I was beginning "to chafe at the bit" and lost patience with cards and dice. The prison had a library, heavily weighted with Communist works, and I read large parts of Marx's "*Das Kapital*"; some obscure treatises by Engels; and the official "*History of the Soviet Communist (Bolshevik) Party*". If I had not been a confirmed opponent of Communism already, this would have done it. The obsolescence of these doctrines was almost shocking. The Marxist classics addressed problems that no longer existed in the twentieth century and one did not have to be a political scientist to recognize that the Utopian projection of future society under Communism ("from everybody according to

his abilities, to everybody according to his needs") was simplistic, to say the least. Who was to determine what an individual's "needs" were? What if there was a disagreement between the individual and the Government? The whole concept seemed to throw back human social development to a stage before even the first practical refinements of Roman law had been thought of.

As for the official party history, its boundless cynicism was nothing less than astounding. The claims that Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and all the other former intimates of Lenin, one after the other, were "unmasked" as sworn enemies of the working class should have taxed the credulity of even the most devoted adherent. I wondered, how many professed Communists really believed this? How was it possible to remain a Communist if one didn't? It was ironic that Communism, professing to be anti-religion, should have itself acquired all the hallmarks of a most intolerant religion in which the "deviationists" were persecuted with a fury formerly reserved for Arius, Pelagius, and the other heretics of the early Christian faith.

With one of the congenial cellmates, Adam Kemény, I frequently played the word game "*Bar Kochba*" (similar to "20 questions" but without this limitation). The game was named for a Jewish general of the 1st century A.D., who once allegedly sent a spy into the enemy camp. The poor fellow was caught and punished in truly barbarous fashion: according to the story he was shown all the secrets he came to learn but then his tongue and hands were cut off so that he could supposedly no longer communicate what he saw, either by word or by writing. Then he was sent back to his commanding officer. Bar Kochba nonetheless obtained the information he wanted by quizzing the soldier in such a way that all questions could be answered by shaking the head "yes" or "no". I am not at all sure that this story has historic credibility but the game based on it is certainly intriguing and we honed it to great perfection. One quiz typically lasted the entire day and the subjects successfully guessed included some ludicrous esoterics. A particular one I distinctly remember was, "That particular ringing of the Big Ben chimes of Westminster Palace in London which was recorded to serve as the call signal for the British Broadcasting Corporation." It required strict compartmentalization of one's mind and rigid logic to even come close to such subjects. I think that I am indebted to Adam and the many hours I played this game with him for the clear definition of intellectual categories in my mind that I could put to good use in later life in my scientific writing.

My parents traveled to Miskolc once to visit me in jail. It was a melancholy experience that would have been best to skip. The "visiting room" of the jail had a tight wire mesh screen in the middle, with inmates and visitors on the two sides, in the presence of guards. My mother instinctively lifted her arms for an embrace when she saw me and burst out in tears when she realized that the partition frustrated her intent. The inane questions and answers ("How are you?"--"Fine, fine") were asinine but unavoidable. After the 15 minutes visiting time was up I think we all left more disturbed and frustrated than with a sense of satisfaction.

At any rate, the expiration of my sentence was drawing near. The last night of one's jail sojourn was to be spent in the "pre-release" cell and theoretically it was supposed to be possible to demand freedom one minute after midnight on the designated day of release, but in practice it was customary to sleep till the morning and wait for the arrival of the day shift of the guards. There was one guard for whom I had developed particular fondness, because he had a hilarious sense of humor and actually used

deliberate clowning in order to cheer up depressed inmates. He had big handlebar moustache and he could arch his eyebrows and maneuver his moustache in a most humorous way. He was certainly a character, and a refreshing one in the jail ambiance. I had nicknamed him "Frosch" after the jailer in the third act of the operetta Die Fledermaus. Mr. Frosch happened to be on duty on the morning of my release and it was he who checked me out and returned my belongings to me. We had an almost emotional farewell, with him wishing me the best from the bottom of his heart and with an expressive wink of his eyebrow--all but saying that he hoped that my next attempt at escape from Communism would be successful. I signed the receipts, received my release documents, and by about 7:00 A.M. on July 29, 1949 I walked out of the Miskolc jail a free man.

## C H A P T E R   T E N

-----  
E S C A P E :   T H E   S E C O N D   A T T E M P T

IT CROSSED MY MIND upon walking out of the Miskolc jail that maybe the AVO was waiting for me around the corner and would recapture me after my formal legal punishment had been served, and put me in the Gulag for the rest of my days. Horror stories of this sort were bandied about; but fortunately that did not happen to me. I could walk away unhindered and by previous arrangement I went to the home of Mr. Király, the local agent of the Foncière Insurance Company, from where I could telephone my parents. We agreed that I could spend the weekend at the nearby spa of Lillafüred for a spell of rest. Sunday evening I returned, ignominiously but safely, by train to Budapest.

The atmosphere in Budapest was a shade less dismal than at the time of my departure. An international youth festival was in progress, and the city was full of young people from all over Europe--mainly from the surrounding "People's Democracies" of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, but also with a generous sprinkling of Westerners from Scandinavia, Italy, France. Of course, the event was a Communist stint and dominated by young party members and fellow travelers. My little cousin Vera who had just graduated from high school, was involved in the event as designated hostess. There was a lot of marching under red flags and revolutionary song-singing, but the international assembly was fascinating nonetheless and I made a few casual acquaintances on the street in order to practice my foreign languages. It would have been nice to get some help from the Westerners present in Budapest with my escape plans, but I soon realized that any such idea was a naïveté. There was no opportunity to form friendships intimate enough for such a matter even to be broached, and no way could I have made them to understand the reasons for it. The visitors were seeing a Potemkin village and to them it seemed that to live in a People's Democracy was a great blessing.

We had a couple of joyful get-togethers with my former cellmates, and I can especially remember an evening in the "English Gardens" (amusement park) of Budapest where I had a brief but torrid flirtation with Adam Kemény's cute younger sister Eve. However, my mind was completely focused on continuing with my escape plans. The jail connections I had were highly useful and soon I was again negotiating with various potential guides, and before long we had a deal.

The Second Takeoff

My new guide was a peasant lad from the village of Lácacséke, a tiny hamlet in the northeastern corner of the country, and I was his only client for this particular trip. He had a string of successful former clients, mostly connected with Jewish organizations, and he came to me highly recommended. The plans were for me to take the train to Sáropatak, a small but historic town not far from the triple border point of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. He would meet me at the railroad

station and take me by horse carriage to his farm for a "visit". The border was a few miles away and by nightfall we would simply walk over into Czechoslovakia. The project had a clever element in the choice of the location; to attempt to escape to the West as far to the east as possible was a good example of reverse psychology and exploited the fact that AVO surveillance of the area was expected to be light. Once in Czechoslovakia, I was to be taken to the Jewish Community Center of one of the local villages from where one could supposedly get in touch with the "Brikha".

The Brikha (the word means "escape" in Hebrew) was certainly one of the more remarkable organizations that sprang up in Europe after the conclusion of the war. Its purpose was to help survivors of the Holocaust to get out of Europe; it was staffed by young Jews of various Eastern European nationalities and financed by whatever funds could be secured from the greatest variety of sources. The nucleus of support was contributions from American Jewry funneled through the so-called "Joint Distribution Committee" (or "Joint" for short); but UNRRA funds, donations from local Jewish congregations, and facilities of the U.S. military occupation authorities in Germany and Austria were also tapped to the extent possible and the budgets of the various units depended a great deal on the cleverness and wheeling-dealing of individual unit bosses. Just where the refugees were to go was kept deliberately vague. There was a strong Zionist element in the organization but open admission that people were being steered to Palestine was not possible in the early post-war years when Great Britain officially opposed Jewish immigration there. In the beginning, the clientele consisted of liberated concentration camp inmates who found themselves completely uprooted and had no place to return to. As the years passed, the numbers were swelled by a new wave of refugees from Communist countries, wishing to go to Israel or other free-world overseas destinations. Assistance was provided by the Brikha with no questions asked as to why people wanted to leave or where they wanted to go, as long as they were Jews. The assistance included the provision of basic necessities, political protection if needed, and transportation. The attitude of governments was tacit acknowledgment of the existence of this organization and its operations but no formal recognition, and the movement of Brikha groups across national boundaries could be best described as "semi-legal". For all its improvised air, the outfit was quite efficient and the envy of non-Jewish refugees throughout Europe.

Monday, August 29, 1949 or exactly 4 months after my first attempt, and one month after my release from jail, was the date of my second departure. The train trip to Sárospatak was uneventful and my guide met me at the railroad station as agreed. It was already dusk when we set off in a one-horse peasant carriage, very much in the style of hayrides on winter vacations many decades later. I can remember seeing in the distance the Castle of Sárospatak, ancestral home of the Rákóczi clan. After we left town, there were just mile after mile of unpaved road, sparsely populated countryside, and virtual absence of traffic. We were certainly off the beaten track. We halted at the Lácacséke farmstead just long enough for the horse to be unhitched and taken to the barn, and we set out on foot in a northerly direction. It was about 8 P.M. and already quite dark. Far to the right, I could see the sky lit up brilliantly as from the lights of a big city; but none existed there to the best of my knowledge. I asked my guide and he said, meaningfully:

"That's the Soviet border."

We were no more than 5-6 miles from it and the thought was nerve-tickling. I could imagine the formidable illuminated frontier fortifications that probably dwarfed anything Hungary had on her western border. Fortunately, I was at least on the right side of this one.

We continued our hike through the fields in complete solitude. At some point, my guide pointed to a stone marker between two cornfields: the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border. We crossed in silence. Before long, the lights of a small village became visible: Králová Chlumec [Királyhelmece]. The Jewish Community Center of this place was our destination and upon reaching it my guide rang the doorbell and said to the man coming to the door:

"Here, I brought another one." He collected his fee, wished me luck, and started back to Lácacséke. I had successfully arrived to first base.

#### Slovakian Adventure

The man who admitted me turned out to be the Shammes [sexton] of the adjacent synagogue, and the "Jewish Community Center" was little more than his service apartment, with an extra room or two thrown in. The latter were now jammed with refugees like myself; there were about 10 when I arrived and another 3-4 joined us during the 3 days of my sojourn there. Most were from Rumania; it turned out that Králová Chlumec, because of its location, was the collection point mainly for Rumanian refugees who had to traverse Hungary in order to get to Czechoslovakia and were of course seeking the shortest possible traverse route. It was a colorful assemblage of humanity. There were two young couples with babies; several young men and one woman of my age group; and a few older men one of whom was a Hasid ["pious"; i.e. traditional religious Jew] who used to wear sidelocks and distinctive clothing but had to abandon these hallmarks now for reasons of personal safety. He prayed virtually incessantly in order to atone for this sacrilege.

I was integrated into the group with a minimum of officiousness, offered food, and squeezed into a sleeping space. The total informality amazed me. We were all one big family; the young mothers nursed their babies in public and within 30 minutes after my arrival I was assisting in the change of diapers. As it developed, we were waiting for Yoshka, the local agent of the Brikha organization who went to the county seat to negotiate our safe conduct with the authorities. In the meantime we were to stay indoors. Any unnecessary advertising of our presence in the village was to be avoided.

Yoshka came back from his trip on Thursday, and he proved to be a likeable and energetic young man. Everything was supposed to have been taken care of. Next morning, a police bus was to come to pick us up; ostensibly, we were to be deported to Hungary as illegal aliens but in actual fact we would be allowed to board a train for Košice where we could report to the local offices of the Agudath Israel for further assistance. We took note of this communication without qualm or misgiving. The arrangements were in fact fairly typical of Brikha operations. Obviously, some bribe or other inducement for the authorities was part of the deal. One young man in our group was designated as group leader and given further confidential instructions.

The police bus came as announced and we boarded it on Friday, September 2. Three uniformed Czechoslovak policemen came with the bus and remained with us as escorts. They were matter-of-fact, neither friendly nor unfriendly, and since they spoke only Slovakian most of us could not communicate with them. Our designated group leader did speak Slovakian and had some words with the policemen. He came to the back of the bus afterwards and had a whispered conference with us refugees. The orders of the policemen were to escort us back to Hungary "informally", and just how efficiently this order was to be carried out would depend on "circumstances". Our leader suggested very strongly that we augment the bribes the policemen had already received. A collection was taken up, to which most people contributed items of jewelry--necklaces, rings, watches, and the like. The collected items were taken up front and the policemen raked them in matter-of-factly and without comment. The bus ride continued for about an hour. At some point, at the outskirts of a village, we were told to get off; the policemen stayed with us while the bus was driven away.

We numbered about 15 refugee souls, including two small babies who made quite a racket and were given sleeping drops by their parents. We assembled for what appeared to be a cross-country hike. Hopefully, the hike was to a railroad station in order to catch the Košice train, but this did not seem at all certain. At someone's suggestion a second impromptu collection was taken up, and the results--more items of value of the greatest variety, including some foreign currency notes--were again presented to the policemen who put it away without comment and apparently in disdain. We started our march. The task of carrying the children was shared by everyone on a rotating basis. After having negotiated about a mile we were allowed to have a rest. An argument developed between the policemen and our leader, in Slovakian that I did not understand but gathered from word-fragments and gestures that the policemen were quite dissatisfied with the loot and were actually determined to expel us from the country all the way. One of them pointed to the golden wedding band on one of the young wives' fingers and said in Slovakian what seemed to be in essence:

"As long as you people aren't even willing to part with trinkets like this, you are obviously not serious about wanting to stay in Czechoslovakia."

A third and rather desperate collection was taken up and every remaining item of value still in our possession was contributed by every member of the group, including the wedding rings. What little I had in valuables was already given up and in spite of insistent and almost panicky urging by my fellow refugees, I had nothing more to contribute. The loot was again presented to the policemen who picked out the items they liked and disdainfully refused the rest. We were required to continue our march. At that point, it was becoming clear that we were not being taken to any railroad station but in the direction of the Hungarian border; the only question was, how far? In view of all the bribes the policemen had already pocketed, I just couldn't believe it would be all the way to Hungary.

Then followed a scene that ranks in my memory as among the most bizarre of my life. From the paths between the cornfields on which we were marching we arrived at a clearing about 250 ft deep, with a forest on the far side. The policemen were prodding us to move forward with increasing impatience and unfriendliness. As we reached the far side of the clearing, I noticed on the edge of the forest a stone marker of the same type I passed with my guide between Lácacséke and Králová Chlumec: we were on the Czechoslovak-

Hungarian border. A few feet inside the forest, just barely on the Hungarian side, there was a footpath--evidently the trail of Hungarian border patrols. The policemen were pushing us into the forest with shouts and shoves. When it was realized that we were being forced into Hungary, pandemonium broke out. People screamed, remonstrated, attempted to run back into Czechoslovakia; the policemen chased us back into Hungary with increasing ruthlessness, sometimes using their truncheons. We must have crossed back and forth 3-4 times. Every time the policemen turned their backs, we would make a dash for Czechoslovakia, whereupon they would turn around with more angry shouts and shoves, and push us back into Hungary. The babies awakened and started crying. The whole situation was nerve-racking; if a Hungarian border guard detachment were to show up on routine patrol, we would be all captured. Eventually, we realized that we must nonetheless remain on the Hungarian side of the border long enough for the policemen to get out of sight or we were merely prolonging a frightfully dangerous situation. We attempted to "hide" in the forest and watched the policemen disappear in the cornfields. I guess it took no more than 10 minutes; but it was the longest 10 minutes of my life, all the while watching the footpath nervously. By the grace of God, no Hungarian border patrol materialized. With the babies crying, the mothers frantically trying to calm them, the Hasid chanting his prayers in ceaseless monotone, and everyone else communicating in a semi-whisper high-strung with excitement, we were hiding about as effectively as a herd of elephants on Times Square.

Finally, with the policemen safely out of sight, we stepped back into Czechoslovakia. The babies were again given sleeping drops by their distraught parents. The task now was to find the nearest railroad station as inconspicuously as possible; our designated group leader had pre-purchased tickets for all of us. It was already early afternoon.

The nearest village with railroad station turned out to be Michaľany [Alsómihályi] and we reached it without further incident. The policemen who were our nemesis at the border less than an hour earlier had evaporated without a trace (doubtless they were sitting in an inn, partitioning the loot) and the local populace paid little attention to us. There was some wait at the station for the train which made the Hasid, who was thus far one of the more blasé members of our group, suddenly very nervous. There was a chance that our trip might last until after sunset (i.e., into the Sabbath since it was Friday afternoon) and no way was he going to take that risk. He tried to persuade us to stay in Michaľany until Sunday. Of course, everyone else in the group rejected the idea. For one thing, there was no obvious place to stay. The train came in, we boarded with the tickets furnished by our group leader, and arrived in Košice uneventfully and just in the nick of time (about 6:30 P.M.) for the impending Sabbath.

I had known Košice [Kassa] already from childhood trips. It is a pleasant town of about 100,000 inhabitants at the foot of a mountain range, with a beautiful Gothic cathedral. We found the Agudath Israel headquarters with relative ease and immediately after checking in, I had a most pleasant surprise: an old Tapir friend, Laci Szilágyi and his lovely new wife Marzi were among the residents. They had arrived from Hungary the day before by another clandestine route and were of course also waiting for an opportunity to join the Brikha. We immediately resolved to join forces and we took in as a fourth into our little community the single girl in my group, Susan Domány, with whom I had become quite friendly during the preceding adventures.

The Agudath Israel is the world organization of ultra-religious Jews and we seem to have been steered to their Košice headquarters because it had room. The organization operated a school there that was not in session as yet and the classrooms were converted into emergency dormitories for refugees, both from Rumania and from Hungary. There were about a hundred of us, people of all ages, sexes, and conditions. Hungarians were in the majority and the lingua franca was Hungarian. In true Jewish fashion, there was a minimum of admission formalities with virtually no questions asked; we were accepted, assigned a sleeping place, and offered food as a matter of routine. Of course, one had to conform to the customs of the place and soon after arrival we were expected to attend the Sabbath service that was just beginning in the adjacent synagogue. We went; it was my first encounter with Hasidic Orthodoxy and quite memorable. Nothing in my previous contacts with Neolog [Conservative] Judaism in Budapest or Érsekújvár quite prepared me for it.

There is an admonition somewhere in the Scriptures that, if someone prays, "every bone" in one's body is supposed to be praying. Like so many other figurative exhortations, this too is taken quite literally by the ultra-religious and interpreted to mean that during prayer all bones of the body must be constantly shaken. The resultant bows, turns, jigs, and other contortions are bizarre enough if one watches the devotional exercises of the pious singly (as one can e.g. at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem); in a Hasidic synagogue where this goes on *en masse* and is accompanied by an indescribably fast patter of prayers ending in occasional shouts and howls, the summary impression is nothing short of astounding. I suppose that "speaking in tongues" in the Pentecostal fringe of Christianity is a fair counterpart. We stood there bewildered, as if we were witnessing an exotic aboriginal ceremony. Later that night, all hell broke loose when one of the newcomers was caught smoking a cigarette (forbidden on the Sabbath because it involves making fire, which is classified as "work"). The fuss that was created is difficult to describe; it was regarded as desecration of the entire building, and the religious were crying, lamenting, lifting arms and eyes heavenward for God to forgive, or to avenge (it wasn't sure which) this sacrilege.

The communality arrangements I had with the Szilágyis were for the moment somewhat one-sided. They had money, I didn't; it was characteristic of their Tapir spirit that this point was totally brushed aside when we entered our agreement and we were to share equally in everything. I had relatives in Bratislava so I hoped to be able to reciprocate once we got there. But now we were in Košice, and future arrangements elsewhere were little more than pie in the sky.

We remained at the Agudath Israel quarters in Košice till Monday evening. It took that long for the Brikha agents to get rail tickets for the group. For 3 days, we were footloose in town and I enjoyed the experience greatly. In a bigger city, it was not necessary to observe the precautions practiced in the village and Sunday evening, by treat from the Szilágyis, the four of us even went to the Opera and heard a Barber of Seville performance in Slovakian--with local talent that was not exactly on Metropolitan or La Scala quality level, but nonetheless enjoyable enough and it remains one of the most memorable presentations of this old chestnut that I have ever attended anywhere.

The train ride from Košice to Bratislava took the entire night of September 5/6 and was not without some drama. Being illegal aliens, it was of course again essential not to draw attention to ourselves that was complicated by the fact that almost none of us spoke Slovakian. Prior to World War II, that would have been nothing unusual; a substantial segment of Slovakia's population including my own family in Nové Zámky [Érsekujvár] and environs, were Hungarians who never learned Slovakian. But after the end of the war the remaining minorities were expelled from Czechoslovakia and the population became much more homogeneous. Any attempt at opening our mouths would have been a fairly obvious giveaway and in fact we chose the night train because it gave better opportunity to avoid conversation by pretending to be asleep during the entire train ride.

The trip should have been uneventful, with most passengers being genuinely asleep. My near-downfall came when the train passed under the beautiful Tatra mountains, with which I was familiar by virtue of a childhood trip. In order to catch a glimpse of the range in the moonlight, I walked out to the dark corridor of the rail car. As I was spying the countryside, a man in uniform came up to me, addressing me in Slovakian. My blood froze. I thought, "This is a policeman and he is obviously telling me to follow him because I am under arrest." It took me just a fraction of a second to reflect quickly and the next thing I realized was that the communication sounded too casual and plaintive; this was not the tone in which a policeman would make an arrest. Concurrently I also recognized the uniform as that of a railroad man rather than of a policeman. That was a load off my chest but what does the man want? They had already checked tickets--perhaps he wants to see mine again for some reason? That did not seem too likely but reaching for my ticket was the only thing I could think of, when suddenly I spotted a large banknote in the man's hand. Recognition came in a flash. He is asking me to change money! I quickly shifted my fingers from the ticket to my wallet, pulled it out, and showed him that I did not have nearly enough small bills or coins to change his banknote. The man said something that was obviously "thanks, sorry" and walked away. I virtually broke out in cold sweat. It was a close one; discovery could have had ominous consequences. Quickly, I went back to my place and pretended to be asleep again.

In later reminiscences I always recalled this episode with a chuckle and sense of satisfaction. I did not fall apart under pressure; to figure out the meaning of a communication in a strange language on the spot did require some presence of mind. It reminded me of the old aristocrat joke (the Austro-Hungarian equivalent of the Polish joke) in which the Count Bobby regaled his friends with the account of his adventures in China, where on one occasion he was captured and almost executed by native rebels, had it not been for a most moving speech which he delivered under the gallows and which softened his capturers' hearts.

"But, Bobby" said his friend, the Baron Mucki skeptically, "since when do you have such mastery of the Chinese language?"

To which Bobby replied: "Well, you know, it was the mortal fear."

One has to experience a situation like the above in order to appreciate fully the humor of this joke.

Bratislava [Pozsony] is a city of about a quarter of a million souls, with a long and distinguished history. For about 250 years during the Turkish

occupation and afterwards, it served as the Capital of the Habsburg-ruled part of Hungary. Its inhabitants used to be about 1/3 Hungarian, 1/3 German, and 1/3 Slovak. In 1919, the town was ceded to Czechoslovakia and these proportions shifted somewhat. In 1945-46 when the post-war expulsions took place they shifted again, and the town became predominantly Slovak although the surviving Jews typically retained their Hungarian or German language. I had some cousins living there--the Kolman branch of the family, i.e. relatives of my late maternal grandmother. These were, widow Lilly and son Peter of my mother's first cousin Ernest Kolman who himself perished in the Holocaust; and Edith and Felix Messinger, my mother's second cousin and her husband, a childless couple. I knew these relatives only very superficially from one or two brief childhood encounters. Nonetheless, strong cultivation of clan connections was always a tradition in our family and so I had no hesitation to write them from Košice, explaining my situation and asking if we could meet while I was in transit in Bratislava.

Our arrival in Bratislava was uneventful and by instructions received in Košice we went to find the Jewish Community Center in the old town. There, to my great pleasure, was a personal message waiting for me from the Messingers:

"Dear Andris, welcome to Bratislava.  
Come straight to our house at Palisády 32.  
Love, Edith & Felix."

Of course, I went and was received there with a cordiality that could not have been warmer if I had been their own son. There seem to have been close childhood ties between my mother and Edith, which became transferred to my person. It was immediately "decreed" as a matter of course that I was to stay with them; it happened that Felix was on the staff of the Jewish Neolog Congregation of Bratislava and could keep a close watch over happenings with the Brikha and make sure that I did not miss any transports to Vienna.

For about 3 weeks, I lived as a family member with the Messingers and developed great fondness for them. They were truly a lovely, warmhearted couple who made me feel completely at home in their house. When they discovered that I had close companions to whom I owed favors, they insisted on meeting them and arranged private accommodations for the Szilágyis and Susan Domány also. The "elite", i.e. those who had connections, lived privately while the great masses of Jewish refugees sojourning in Bratislava were given pretty skimpy quarters in a boarding house connected with the Community Center. Altogether, we numbered several hundred souls, all waiting for Brikha transport to Vienna.

On the whole, it was like having a vacation. It was the season of the high Jewish holidays and many official activities at congregational offices were on hold. No new Brikha transport was planned till the end of the month. I attempted to make myself useful in the Messinger household but mainly we went on walks, visited the sights, and of course I spent some time with my other relatives Lilly and Peter Kolman. Peter was about 12 years old then and just started to study the piano. I could dazzle him by displaying my "virtuosity" with my old showpieces. Peter became a noted composer in later life--if I can take any credit for having engendered enthusiasm in him for this profession, I would be only too glad to do so.

Czechoslovakia was progressing towards a "People's Democracy" at a slower pace than Hungary and in 1949, life in Bratislava was still quite pleasant. Relations between the government and the Jewish community were cordial. The movement of Jews out of the country was only for Zionist reasons and semi-officially condoned by the authorities. Stakhanov, Lysenko, the Kulak question, or the secret police infiltration of the populace with virtually obligatory mutual spying on each other had not touched Czechoslovakia as yet. My tales of horror of the Hungarian version of Communism were received by my relatives with astonishment and skepticism. They just could not believe that that sort of repression could ever gain foothold in democratic Czechoslovakia. Before long, they were to learn differently.

There were some orientation sessions for the refugees at the Jewish Community Center, and one evening I spotted there a girl who made me stop in my tracks. There was a virtual clone of Julia, my sweetheart of pre-Holocaust days, in a more mature, more intellectual, and if that was possible, even more beautiful version. Her name was Rita, and she turned out to be a functionary of the local Jewish youth organization and one of the liaison persons to the Brikha. Her resemblance to Julia seemed accidental; she was not aware of any relatives living in Hungary. She must have noticed the stunning impact she had on me and we exchanged a few pleasantries but there was of course no opportunity to start a courtship. The date of our scheduled departure from Bratislava was drawing near. Rita was in fact one of the officials filling us in on the details. We were to assemble one morning with all our gear before the Community Center, and board buses there for transfer to Vienna. Some sort of group permit for crossing the border was being arranged, and each of us received a personal ID card listing name and birthdate, attesting to the bearer being a registered member of the transport group. The whole trip was to last no more than a couple of hours.

I took my farewell from my relatives and arrived to board the bus as directed. There were over a dozen vehicles lined up on the small street in front of the Community Center. The people to be transported numbered about 800, mostly from Hungary. We were all full of good spirits. Freedom now seemed to be within arm's length. In addition to Susan and the Szilágyis, I can remember meeting there another old friend with Tapir connections: John Major, first cousin of the twins who perished during the death march between Mauthausen and Gunskirchen. We greeted each other joyfully, with mutual congratulations for having reached this point. The buses were filled one after the other and took off in a westerly direction.

#### The Forced Return to Hungary

At the railroad freight yard of Devinská Nová Ves [Dévényujfalu] the buses were halted for some reason. It developed that the road bridge across the Morava river which formed the Czechoslovak-Austrian border, was under repairs and not passable. We waited, sitting in the buses; sometime later it was announced that we were to transfer to railroad cars and we were going to cross the river by train. There were several railroad passenger cars on a side rail but no engine attached to them as yet; the transfer was obviously not urgent. Slowly, we moved our belongings from bus to train, lingered around, and looked at the Morava river which was no further than a good stone throw away. Its far bank seemed to beckon with promises of freedom. It was a beautiful fall day and the hours passed. The buses that brought us from

Bratislava left by about noon and soon thereafter another bus arrived, disgorging several dozen Czechoslovak soldiers. They took up positions around the freight yard and gently but resolutely forbade any straggler to cross the line of our encirclement.

Something was clearly not quite right. We discussed the matter among us; why should it be necessary to guard us if we were going to be taken to Austria where we all wanted to go, anyway? Someone suggested that it had to be a group transfer and the long wait tempted people to try it on their own, thus embarrassing Czechoslovak frontier authorities. I tested the effectiveness of our encirclement in various directions and was rebuffed several times.

Late afternoon a passenger car arrived at the freight yard and out of it spilled several young functionaries of the Bratislava Jewish congregation, including Rita. They walked up to the officer in charge of the detachment guarding us and exchanged a few words. The officer listened, nodded, and the visitors walked back to the car, took out bags and sacks of various food items, and carried them through the military cordon. There appeared to be a phoney cheerfulness as they bantered with the soldiers, explaining that they had brought us some food while we were waiting, so we would not starve. Rita was in a red blouse and absolutely ravishing, but she seemed to be quite tense and her laughter was forced. When she saw me, she beckoned to me and thrust a big bread knife into my hand saying loudly, and obviously for the benefit of the soldiers watching us:

"Here, you had better come and lend us a hand. Let's cut up these loaves into individual portions."

I complied; when the soldiers were distracted she whispered to me while we both pretended to be absorbed in our jobs:

"Listen carefully. There is a sudden change in Government policy. The Brikha negotiations have broken down. They are planning to take you all back to Hungary. A bunch of transport trucks is already on its way."

It's difficult to describe the cold grip I felt around my heart. I whispered,

"What do you suggest we do?"

"Just refuse to go. They have orders not to shoot. Perhaps in the confusion a few of you will succeed in swimming the river."

A guard turned to us and for a few minutes we had to pretend to be making sandwiches: my hands trembled so badly I almost cut myself. At the next available opportunity, Rita whispered:

"Don't tell anyone until after we are gone."

During the next several minutes we distributed food with forced cheerfulness. The people who came to collect a portion had no inkling that anything was wrong and complimented the young officials on the tasteful treats and on their thoughtfulness for having brought them. There was light banter about how our last meal behind the Iron Curtain was made especially memorable. I just could not stand this for too long and after a few minutes

I excused myself and went to find Laci and Marzi Szilágyi. The burden I was carrying felt almost unbearable; as the only one who knew what was in store for us I felt I had special responsibility to *do something* but what??? The military cordon around us was tight and fully alert. I found the Szilágyis in one of the railroad cars and shared with them the awful news; as I was doing that I saw Rita & company leaving in their passenger car. We were now free to let everybody know and we went from compartment to compartment, announcing,

"They will come and try to remove you forcibly. You must refuse to go. They will not use weapons."

As the news got around there was some crying and lamenting but it was clearly too late for any organized action. In fact the transport trucks were rolling in already and they formed a tight circle around the railroad cars, with their rear gates opened. Soldiers boarded the cars, ordering people out; the "resistance" was of course pathetic and totally ineffectual. In one compartment, people started singing the Hatikvah (the Israeli National Anthem) that was taken up by the entire train. It was a wistful, haunting scene a bit on the theatrical side, and naturally of no use whatsoever. The soldiers used just the necessary force to get the people into the trucks; gently if it sufficed as with women and children and more roughly if it did not. Before long, all of us were transferred into open-deck military trucks which took off with breakneck speed as soon as they were filled. We were driven through Bratislava and across the Danube bridge, towards the Hungarian frontier.

I can't remember any more who was with me in the truck I was forced into. I know that the Szilágyis were not. There were about 40 or 50 of us in each truck, with four guards in the four corners. We were required to sit on the floor facing the rear, and any attempt at getting up, turning around, or even straightening up, brought immediate action from the guards with rifle butts. The intent was obviously to prevent people from jumping out. I contemplated that possibility longingly during the entire trip. I attempted to get up or straighten out a few times in preparation for a jump and was beaten down each time. The only way to do it was to hurl oneself out from a sitting position in one sudden movement. As it turned out later, several people managed to do that (although not from the truck I was sitting in) including the Szilágyis, and the trucks did not stop to collect them. I have nothing but admiration for the people who had the enormous physical courage to do that; I did not have it, for all the presence of mind I could muster in other tight situations. The trucks were being driven in a truly maniacal fashion. Even turns were taken at high speed and the drivers were obviously under instructions not to slow down for any reason. To jump out from a rear-facing sitting position was a crazy, neck-breaking maneuver. Eventually it occurred to me that a relatively favorable opportunity existed during the turns when one could use the centrifugal force created by the high-speed change of direction to one's advantage, but after I came to this insight no more turns came. We were speeding along a straight road and at one point the trucks broke out in insistent, loud horn signals. We were approaching the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border checkpoint at Rajka. The barrier gate was raised ahead of us and we rushed through without stopping. It was obviously all prearranged. Before long, we arrived in the town of Mosonmagyaróvár and halted in the inner courtyard of the AVO barracks there.

Thus ended, sadly, my second attempt at escape from Communism. After all the trials and tribulations, after having had the "promised land" across the river within sight already, I found myself once again in Hungary, as captive of the authorities, and as second offender having to look forward to a most ominous future.

It is needless to say that my spirits were at their lowest possible ebb. As the trucks were emptied we were all herded into some sort of gym hall and were told to camp down for the night. Virtually the entire floor was taken up by the multitude in almost Gunskirchen fashion. There were people of all ages, from babies to old men and women; and numerous young and middle-aged couples with children of pre-school or school age. The only mitigating circumstance seemed to be that it was patently impossible to put this entire crowd into jail or concentration camp. We had to wait and see. I spent one of the most fitful nights of my life on that gym floor.

Next morning which I believe was October 1, a young captain of the AVO came to address us. The message he had for us was sensational and almost unbelievable. The gist of his speech was that although we had transgressed against the laws of the country by making or attempting to make illegal moves across state borders, the People's Democracy, in its boundless generosity, was going to forgive us this one time. After individual personal interviews we were going to be released, and he exhorted us to become honest builders of Socialism as befits good citizens who wish to prove themselves worthy of this unprecedented magnanimity. People were to report for interviews in a number of adjacent small offices in the approximate order as we were positioned on the floor.

We listened to this announcement with a degree of amazement that bordered on perplexity. Where was the catch? It was not exactly in the character of the AVO to let captured offenders of our sort go free. There had to be a trap somewhere. Perhaps they expected the liberated prisoners to lead them to some sort of central instigator or subversive organization? If so, it would have been pretty inefficient to put eight hundred tails on all eight hundred of us for this purpose, even assuming that such an entity existed. Or maybe we were being put off guard in the expectation that we were going to say something self-incriminating that could be used against us later, and the whole charade of release was a deception? After the first few people went through the interviewing process and could actually walk out of the barracks unhindered, we had to conclude that the miracle was really happening and the AVO really meant what it had announced.

I had of course a grave personal problem as repeat offender. Even if the bulk of the detainees were let go, how about a hardened criminal like myself? The obvious answer was to change my identity, and since I heard about the jump of the Szilágyis, I considered reporting to the interview as Laci Szilágyi and thus escape possible detection as second offender. In order to do that, it was necessary to get rid of the ID card received in Bratislava that was of course made out in my own name. The time-honored way to do that was to flush it down the toilet. However, as I was joining the line for the toilet the rumor swept through the crowd that people unable to prove their identity were being detained and only those with some sort of ID card, such as the one received in Bratislava, would be released.

So, here was a genuine dilemma and I had to undertake what was to become later in life one of my professional responsibilities in a somewhat different

field: a comparative risk assessment. If I reported to the interview as András Révész and proved it with my ID card, they might find out from their records that I had already served time for this same offense and they might decide that for the second time around I was unworthy of amnesty. If I reported to the interview as Laci Szilágyi and could not prove it with my ID card, they would detain me pending confirmation of my identity. It was easy to see that there was no way I could come out ahead with the second alternative. I didn't even know Laci's birthdate or home address. I had to decide to retain my own identity and hope for the best.

The processing of the crowd was being handled quite efficiently; there were numerous interviewing rooms and families were taken together. Seldom was more than 5 minutes spent with one case. In the great majority of instances, people were released after the interview. The Rumanians had to wait for a special bus that was to take them to the Rumanian border under AVO supervision, and those who could not document their identities as well as a relatively small number of others for unknown reasons, were detained. I have never found out what happened to the latter or what was the reason for their detention.

Obviously, I was waiting for my own interview with a great deal of apprehension. It was late afternoon by the time my turn came. My examiner was a young AVO lieutenant. He asked for my name, birthdate, home address; I was to surrender any foreign monies I had and the ID card from the Bratislava authorities. He checked off my name from some master list and made notes in his workbook. There were no other questions asked and not even a body search. He gave me an exit pass to give to the sentry at the barracks gate, and said:

"You can go."

The whole procedure took no more than 5 minutes. I was totally overwhelmed with a sense of relief and almost dizzy with bewilderment. I walked out of the Mosonmagyaróvár AVO compound a free man and immensely grateful for that; but, most depressingly, still, or rather again, in Hungary. My second attempt at escape had also failed.

## C H A P T E R   E L E V E N

-----  
E S C A P E :   T H E   T H I R D   A T T E M P T

THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER of the last 24 hours was taking its toll, and I felt pretty much washed out. The expectant euphoria of boarding the Brikha buses in Bratislava; the hours of ominous uncertainty at Devinská Nová Ves; the crushing burden of being in sole possession of a terrible secret and not being able to do anything about it; the horrible indecisiveness of wanting to jump but at the same time not daring; the total despair of being in AVO hands again; and finally the stunning experience of being released without a thorough check--it was almost too much. I was clearly in need of some emotional rest. There were enterprising souls among us who felt that here was the best opportunity to escape from Hungary if one took prompt action; if one did not take it now, one might never be able even to get this close to the country's western border again. I was totally unprepared even to think about that under the circumstances. I felt that we might be watched, and at any rate I had barely enough money left to buy my rail ticket to Budapest and to telephone ahead. Curiously, I decided to call not my parents but my Uncle Dezsö and Aunt Annus. I guess I wanted to spare my parents the sudden shock, or in my confused mind I imagined that their telephone line might be watched, too. My aunt and uncle were obviously also quite shocked when I announced that I was in Mosonmagyaróvár and would be coming to Budapest on the evening train, and would like to stay with them for the night. All other explanations I promised to give personally.

In spite of considerable effort then and later, I could never find out what exactly transpired behind the scenes, causing the dramatic happenings of our forcible return from Czechoslovakia to Hungary and then turning us loose there. With 800-some individuals of all ages and conditions involved, it was something more than a negligible occurrence and in the free world it would have been the subject of some sensational newspaper headlines. Obviously, in the tightly controlled media of totalitarian states, not a word was printed or said about it. The event coincided with the general hardening of the political line in Czechoslovakia, following the assassination of Jan Masaryk (the second "defenestration" [i.e., murder by throwing out of a window] of Prague: the first, in 1618, started the Thirty Years' War. The second, 330 years later, consummated Czechoslovakia's transformation into a People's Democracy). It is likely that Hungarian Communists complained to their Czechoslovak comrades about the loophole that Czechoslovakia was allowing to exist on her border with Austria, which began to attract increasing numbers of Hungarian escapees. Since the Brikha operation was at the core of this happening, it would have been only natural if the new state of Israel, with which both Czechoslovakia and Hungary wished to maintain good relations at the time, had also become involved. I am guessing that a confidential deal was worked out according to which Czechoslovakia agreed to close the loophole and return to Hungary the escapees already in transit, if Hungary agreed to refrain from prosecuting them. Such an agreement would have had the added attraction of letting the AVO off the hook with respect to having to figure out what to do with the numerous families with children of all ages in the group. It may be thus that I could experience one of the major surprises of my life by being

promptly released after having been caught in the act of escape for the second time.

I arrived in Budapest on the evening of October 1, 1949 uneventfully and the shock, dismay, commiseration, but also relief, both from Uncle Dezső and Aunt Annus, and from my parents next morning when I finally announced at home that I was back to square one once more and narrated all the details, may be left to the imagination. After two failed attempts the situation was ripe for an agonizing reappraisal. With the collapse of the Brikha the obvious indirect route was now also closed and after my near-miraculous deliverance I was not ready to rush headlong into a new potential disaster. I felt that the option of living in a People's Democracy ought to be explored after all, at least until something really promising came along.

#### Intermezzo: Autumn in Budapest

As long as I was stuck in Hungary anyway, the sensible thing to do was, go back to the University and attempt to conclude my studies. I had been absent from campus since April but I had not officially withdrawn and formally at least, I should have been eligible to sit for my final examinations. Of course I realized that it would be a naïveté to expect that the University authorities, and the campus party organization in particular, had no knowledge of what happened to me in the meantime.

The Rector of the University (the chief executive officer analogous to an American college president, but at European universities traditionally an office annually rotating among the senior faculty) in that year happened to be Dr. Vadász, Professor of Geology, whom I knew quite well as Chairman of my minor department. I went to call on him; he appeared quite astonished at seeing me. He listened to my tale with compassionate fascination. He had heard rumors of my attempted escape and capture but said that no official communication about me had been received by the University administration and he saw no reason why I couldn't make an application for the final examination. Of course, it would be prudent to do it with as little fanfare as possible and not show my face on campus too much.

The mechanism of applying for the final examinations involved handing in one's "study passbook" which contained the student's entire academic record. It was the conceptual equivalent of a transcript, but in a sort of academic passport form, into which the student entered his/her elections each semester and the professors certified by signature or departmental stamp the successful attendance in each class, with the grade attained. Rationale for this system went back to the Middle Ages when students frequently traveled from university to university in the course of their studies and carried this "passport" with them as evidence of their academic standing. The study passbook, duly validated in the required subjects, was the necessary attachment to an application for the final examination and I handed it in, hoping for the best. It was troynt it was virtually immaterial to me what grades I would get. I was confident to know enough not to flunk and all I wanted was formal conclusion of my studies.

Some 2 weeks later the list of qualified candidates for the final examination in chemistry, with time assignments, was posted and my name was not on the list. There was also a shorter list of a few applicants who lacked some prerequisite and whose application for the final was deferred, and my name was not on that list, either. I went to the Registrar, to inquire; the

clerk to whom I talked could not find my records and asked me to come back in a few days while he investigated

When I returned I could immediately see from his demeanor that I had a problem.

"You had better go in and talk to the Boss", he said.

The Registrar received me, standing, and conveyed in an officious tone that my records, including my study passbook, were now at the Ministry of Education and I would have to go there in person to retrieve them. Until that was accomplished, he was not in a position to certify my standing or act on my application for the final examination. He gave me the room number at the Ministry of Education where I should go. He said he did not know why my records were summoned there.

Perhaps it was sheer foolishness but I actually went to the Ministry, trying to retrieve my records. The response I got was similar to that of the AVO officer in Miskolc when I asked why I was arrested. They simply looked at me in amazement; one clerk said in an aside that I must have rocks in my head to have come to them with such a request.

"Forget your study passbook if you know what's good for you. You are lucky to be walking around freely; leave good enough alone and don't bother us with absurd requests of this sort. Why do you think your records got here in the first place?"

I walked away, deflated. Seizure of my study passbook was a major loss because without it I could not substantiate anywhere what my academic record at the University of Budapest had been. The Rector's advice of applying for my final examination quietly, although clearly given in good faith, turned out to be a disaster. I went back to him, reporting; he made a gesture of total helplessness. Not only was he now a mere figurehead of a powerless University administration, he and his staff were not even informed any longer of the measures the real bosses (i.e., the Party) were taking with respect to University policy. I asked him to give me a personal certification of the classes I had attended and the grades I had earned in his department (geology). That he did on the spot most willingly. Characteristically, he typed out the certification on departmental stationery himself. He gave it to me with the murmured comment, "The fewer people know about this around here, the better."

I spent the next several days calling on every professor or lecturer whose classes or laboratory sessions I had attended during my 3½ years of studying chemistry at the University of Budapest, requesting such a certification. It was a memorable odyssey. Virtually all professors had heard of my predicament one way or another, and some were literally scared to death to receive me in plain view of their office staffs (among whom there were obviously planted informers). Professor Gróh, for whom I had worked as a teaching assistant just a year earlier, made an ostentatious show of refusing to talk to me in his office but whispered at an opportune moment:

"Meet me in front of the University Library at six tonight."

I did, and we walked around in the library courtyard, off the beaten track, for a few minutes. He listened to my tale with great compassion. I

presented my request and we agreed to meet next day again; he came and gave me in an envelope the certification I had requested.

It was essentially the same story with all the other professors. Some were cocky and asked me into their inner offices with a show of defiance; others were timid and looked over their shoulders nervously, asking me to come back later as they were "too busy" right then. Of course, there was absolutely nothing improper about attesting to true facts at the request of a student; but the reasons why I asked for such a certification were all too clear and in the climate of intimidation that existed at the time, all cooperation with "public enemies" or even insufficient vigilance in exposing them, made people virtual accomplices. It did require some civil courage to do what I had asked. One could make an assessment of the professors' moral fiber, or perhaps foolhardy daring, on the basis of how they reacted to my visit. Eventually, however, "when the coast was clear", all except one acceded to my request and some gave me better grades in these certifications than I had actually earned. I still have these certifications and I used them in my applications for advanced standing at the Universities of Vienna and Munich.

The one exception was Dr. Erdey, the analytical chemist who became our substitute instructor of agricultural chemistry when the specialist professor of that field was summarily fired in the Lysenko crisis. Dr. Erdey informed me frostily that to give such a certification was not his function but the Registrar's, and that's where I should go with my request. Of course he knew perfectly well why I came to him in the first place. Fortunately, agricultural chemistry is not a required subject in the chemistry curricula at most universities of the world and my lack of credits in that class were never missed. However, it did leave a bitter taste with me that my academic record should have to remain forever incomplete because one instructor put brownie points with the Communist authorities ahead of personal integrity and honor.

During my peregrinations on campus it was of course inevitable that I should run into former classmates and other fellow students I knew. The reactions produced by spotting me ranged from amazed horror to ostentatious disdain. Curiously, superficial acquaintances were more ready to talk to me than former good friends; it seemed that having had me for a friend was already trouble enough and these poor souls were trying to avoid piling up the indictment against themselves. One acquaintance told me she heard that I was beaten up by the AVO so badly that my own mother failed to recognize me. Another heard that the person who betrayed me was Petronella Cholnoky, my former great love who jilted me years ago but to whom I was nonetheless supposed to have gone for a last farewell. I could see that it did absolutely no good to deny these groundless rumors. People would just look at me compassionately, signaling that they understood that I was not allowed to admit these things.

One memorable encounter I had was with Peter Rádi, a former close friend and co-founder of the Chrysoidin Club. In the last few years we had drifted apart because Peter became too much of a fellow traveler; in fact he was then having some important administrative function in the coordination of the study circles. I happened to run into him as I was coming back from the Ministry of Education, having just received my final brush-off. He averted his face when he saw me. In my mood at the time I had an overwhelming need

to talk to someone with influence and I cornered him anyway. His reaction bordered on being rude.

"What do you want? I have no business with you." He addressed me in the third person ["maga"] instead of with the familiar "thou" customary on campus even between strangers. It was the ultimate affront.

"Peter, for heaven's sake. Please listen to me." I told him briefly of my predicament and that I wanted to become a productive member of society right there. I needed to be admitted to my finals. Could he help?

I can remember his answer virtually word for word. "Society in a People's Democracy can be thought of as an immense pegboard" said he, "with holes of various shapes so that various personalities can fit in. For round pegs we have round holes, for square pegs we have square holes, for triangular pegs we have triangular holes. We even have some weird, irregular-shaped holes for the eccentric. But the kind of hole into which you would fit in, we simply don't have." He walked away.

I puzzled over the meaning of this parable for some time. It seemed extraordinary that a failed attempt to leave the country should have been so severely regarded by someone who had been my friend once. Of course, I don't know what else might have been bruited about me in the unsubstantiated rumor mill. Decades later in life, when I was already an established member of the international scientific community, I thought of writing him and letting him know that in the societal pegboard of the free world, there were holes into which I fitted very nicely indeed. In the end, I did not do that; I learned that Peter Rádi himself fell from official favor in Hungary at some point, ended up in a lowly job, and faded from professional visibility.

Eventually, I found out what happened behind the scenes in the fall of 1949 at the University of Budapest, from fellow students who were supporters of the regime then but became, or at least pretended to have become, opponents of Communism during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Many such characters gained admission to the United States or Canada in the aftermath and landed in excellent jobs in the chemical industry; some made spectacular careers. I met several of these people at American Chemical Society conventions in the late 1950's and of course we chatted about old times. It was naturally assumed that I understood the coercion under which they operated then and would let bygones be bygones.

According to what I learned, news of my attempted escape and capture was communicated by the AVO to the campus party organization right away and rumors spread like wildfire. By mid-May the study circle to which I used to belong was presented with a resolution draft demanding my expulsion, which was of course unanimously approved. A seminar paper I wrote, dealing with the geochemistry of soils that was to be printed in the Hungarian scientific monthly [*Élet és Tudomány*] got pulled in the galley stage. There matters stood until my application for the final examination showed up in the Registrar's Office; a vigilant party hack spotted it and alerted the authorities. A special meeting of the University party committee was called at which my case was the only point on the agenda (my major claim to fame in Hungary to this day). It was resolved by majority vote that I must not be allowed to graduate. It was at that point that my files were removed from the University Registrar to a special office of the Ministry of Education dealing with academic suspensions and expulsions. Interestingly and most

unusually, this decision was not unanimous; I was told that one member of the party committee, Margaret Bihari (no kin to my cousin of that surname but a former personal friend without romantic involvement) actually voted against it. It was the courageous act of an upright soul who could not betray her old loyalties. That, of course, totally disqualified one from being a true Communist and there is no way that an act of this sort would not have had some unfavorable effect on her own career. I remember her with friendly affection.

The ambiance in Budapest in the fall of 1949 was going from bad to worse. There were not many people left to whom one could talk freely; many of the like-minded, and specifically most of the Tapirs, had successfully escaped in the meantime. Andrew Györi and Ervin Mohay (two young men who by great personal resourcefulness and daring had also escaped deportation by the Nazis) were already in the West. So was another group of Tapirs consisting of my old buddy Ervin Fenyő with his new wife Marianne, John Stricker's sister Anne, and Julius Vajda. This foursome was caught by the Czechoslovaks when the political line in that country suddenly hardened but, fortunately for them, they were not in Bratislava yet and thus they were not included in the forcible repatriation group. They were jailed for a while in the state prison at Nováky. The time gain thus achieved proved to be decisive: Zionist authorities could intervene and arrange for their transfer to Vienna.

My friends the Szilágyis who successfully jumped from the speeding truck between Devinská Nová Ves and Mosonmagyaróvár, had hair-raising adventures of their own. They became separated from each other during the chaotic moments of the jump and took refuge at different farmsteads. Marzi could successfully walk over into Austria after nightfall and arrived safely in Vienna. Laci, however, broke his ankle in the jump and lay incapacitated for a few days, after which a compassionate farmer took him by horse cart back to Bratislava. He was hidden there by my cousins Lilly and Pete Kolman whose address he happened to remember. He received medical attention and remained there until sufficiently recovered to undertake the passage on foot (at night, with a guide) to Austria. Eventually he was reunited with his wife. So far as I know, these extraordinary adventures still wait to be written up and each could become a thriller of its own.

In Budapest, AVO surveillance of the population intensified. One day, Mr. Kövér, concierge of the apartment house where my parents and I lived, confidentially informed my father that the AVO came to inquire about me. I was nearly scared out of my wits and expected to be arrested shortly; for a week or two I arranged to stay with relatives or friends a night at a time, in order to avoid capture. But, eventually, I gave up this scheme as ineffectual if they were really after me. It seemed after a while that they were not, at least not on an immediate basis. The AVO simply wanted to know if I had returned home from Mosonmagyaróvár and lived with my parents. Whether or not this was a preliminary to possible later action against me, remained open. About that time, the project of involuntary "resettling" of the undesirable elements of Budapest into the provinces had started and as a jobless person with a political record, I was a prime candidate. Fortunately, those with living space coveted by the mighty were higher on the list and during my remaining days in Hungary I was spared this action.

Economic conditions deteriorated. Shortages of all kinds were experienced with increasing frequency and the quality of available merchandise became shoddy. Rationing of food, lifted after the monetary

reform, was reintroduced. To add insult to injury, these deprivations were accompanied by shrill insistence in the media that we never had it so good. Generally, it can be said that among the most aggravating features of living in a People's Democracy was the relentless exposure to propaganda which at least equaled, if not surpassed, the brainwashing efforts of the Nazis.

The newspapers became utterly unreadable. Although they continued to appear under their traditional individual mastheads inherited from pre-Communist times, their printed contents became the same across the board, virtually word-for-word. Page one was invariably devoted to the Stakhanovite heroes of the day, with banner headlines announcing that "Comrade John Doe from the Klement Voroshilov Combine in Stalin City [formerly the village of Dunapentele] overfulfilled his quota by 786 per cent." There would be an illustrated lead story complete with the text of congratulatory telegrams from Comrade Rákosi, Comrade Gerö, and others. Inside the paper, there would be more Stakhanovite news, with honor lists of people who oversubscribed the peace bond issue, with encouraging or approving comments such as:

"This is the language which the Imperialist warmongers (with their chain dog, Tito, yelping at their heels) understand. Truman and Attlee are trembling in their boots at the sight of the noble sacrifice of Joe Blow of the Red Flag Steelworks who purchased six months' worth of peace bonds. The Capitalist gangsters can now see that their despicable warmongering is being frustrated by the staunch unity of the international working class."

On Page 3, there might be a thriller of how two Kulaks in the village of Csajágröcsöge conspired with the village priest to smuggle Colorado beetle eggs, freshly obtained from the priest's ecclesiastical superiors who belonged to an American spy ring, into the fields in order to ruin next year's potato crop. The monstrous plot almost succeeded, had it not been for the magnificent vigilance of the local party secretary who became suspicious when the two Kulaks went to confession the same Sunday when the priest exhorted the villagers to observe the Advent. This might be followed by a feature story on a local kindergarten, in which children were playing with alphabet blocks and brilliant sunshine suddenly filled the room when one tot succeeded in spelling out STALIN. There was simply no relief from this sort of painful "journalism" and it was the same thing with the radio. Foreign broadcasting (such as the Radio Free Europe which had regular programs in Hungarian) was effectively jammed. Intellectual life became stultifying and all this had to be liked, too, and enthusiastically approved or reaffirmed at every opportunity.

I can remember a textbook of world geography for the 7th grade of the Hungarian State Schools that was published at about that time which I had occasion to examine in some connection. It was a fairly sizeable book of over 200 pages, well organized and illustrated. About two thirds of it was devoted to the Soviet Union. There was no end to the most extravagant praise heaped on that country, gushingly described as the most beautiful, most prosperous, most advanced place on earth. Every republic, region, and major town was separately described and illustrated in loving detail. In the same textbook, the entire American continent rated 5 pages, of which a page and a half was devoted to the United States: according to the terse

description, a Capitalist hell with chronic unemployment, general social misery, and the Ku Klux Klan lynching Negroes all the time. For those of us who knew better from previous education or personal contacts, it was really ludicrous; but how many 7th graders would have that insight? How many parents would dare to contradict school information when they knew that children were routinely quizzed by the party representative at school about what Mom and Dad were saying at home?

It was no different in the scientific world. Lysenko and his followers reigned over the field and articles were published about how one species of organism could be changed into another by appropriate Michurinist treatments gloriously developed in the Soviet Union. Reactionary biologists were said to be fighting these breakthroughs in alliance with the Ku Klux Klan because they were worried that Socialist scientific progress would lead to the breakdown of their dominant and exploitative position over the enslaved races of Humankind. In the irrepressible netherworld of Budapest, a new kind of whispered joke came into existence, called the Michurinist joke. These were preambled by asking what will come out if X is crossed with Y. One sample I can remember went thus:

*Question.* "What will happen if the Michurinists succeed crossing horses with grapes?"

*Answer.* "Horseshit will be hanging in bunches."

A memorable event was the celebration of Stalin's 70th birthday in December 1949. The authorities outdid themselves --nothing else was talked about in the media for weeks. Loudspeakers were installed at virtually every corner in the city, blaring incessantly the songs, poems, symphonies, congratulatory messages and homage that all the world tendered on this occasion. Prominent among the pieces played was Aram Khatchaturian's "Stalin Cantata", repeated *ad nauseam*. The extravagant fawning on everything Soviet had precisely the opposite effect: everyone in non-Communist circles of Budapest, myself included, never gave a fair hearing to the works of Khatchaturian, Prokofiev, and the other Soviet composers. Just because they were officially pronounced to be the towering masters of "Socialist Realism" in music, we automatically dismissed them as garbage. I had one of my major surprises later in the West when I realized that these composers were truly highly regarded in the entire world and that Shostakovich, at least, was in official disfavor for a while in the Soviet Union which was never given publicity in Hungary.

As birthday gift to Comrade Stalin from the citizens of Budapest, a monumental bronze statue of him was erected in a prominent location of the city. In grooming the surrounding area for this great honor, a Catholic church standing nearby was razed; it was said to be in the way of the parade route required for the masses coming to the statue to pay their respects. The symbolic significance of the demolition of a Christian church in order to make room for a statue of the new God was not lost on the citizenry of Budapest, and the last mass in that church (the news about it passed by word of mouth) turned into an immense silent demonstration to which hundreds of thousands came, i.e. orders of magnitude more than the capacity of the church. They milled around on the streets leading to the church; one of those streets was Damjanich utca, where we lived. The crowd was orderly and solemn but the situation clearly had the potential for spawning trouble. I became inadvertently mixed up with the crowd on my way home on that day, and could witness first-hand how the AVO tried to disperse the people with truncheons. As I tried to dodge the trouble spots I ran into an AVO cordon and was ordered,

with several others, to surrender our ID cards. I broke out in a cold sweat. Being taken into custody in connection with such a demonstration was the last thing I needed. Fortunately, I could point out the address on my ID card and explain that I was just trying to get home. The AVO man let me go. It was another close one.

My social life at the time was dominated by a very interesting girlfriend. I met Suzanne Muhr while in AVO custody in Mosonmagyaróvár; she was also captured and released like myself and we exchanged addresses while riding on the train back to Budapest. Suzanne was an abstract-surrealist painter and easily the most eccentric person I had ever befriended. She wanted to leave the country in order to escape the artistic yoke imposed on her; she told me fascinating stories about how her professors at the National Academy of Fine Arts, who included some highly renowned painters and sculptors, were coerced to work in the style of "Socialist Realism" which meant in practice, creating works with a propaganda message. After our joint setback, Suzanne also decided to wait for a better opportunity and we started seeing each other regularly.

Modern art, actually anything post-impressionistic, was a closed book to me until then and Suzanne went about filling that gap in my education with great enthusiasm. She dragged me to museums, lectured me at home with illustrated books and magazines, and I can say that my eyes opened up to the fascinations of 20th century art gradually. Prior to meeting Suzanne, I might have heard the names of Matisse or Picasso but knew virtually nothing about them except that they were the "crazy" modern painters. Names like Chagall, Dalí or Miró I had never even heard of. With Suzanne's guidance, I became first an avid student and eventually a fairly accomplished connoisseur of modern art, and I enjoyed the new experience immensely.

Suzanne herself painted in the "non-objective" style; Mondrian or Kandinsky were her closest spiritual precursors but she tried to develop their approach three-dimensionally, with geometric shapes floating in space being a hallmark of her art. She also tried collage and a unique mix of picture and words. I remember an india ink drawing of hers with a fantastic landscape and in one spot spelled out (also in black india ink): "Red Dot". I asked her:

"What does this mean?"

"It means that you must imagine a red dot in that position."

"Well then, why don't you actually put a red dot there?"

"Because this is an ink drawing. An actual red dot would be incongruous. But imagining it being there, is OK."

I found this idea amusing and for a while I used "Red Dot" as her private nickname between us.

Red Dot had nothing but disdain for "old-fashioned-pretty" picturesque art and names like Ingres, Bougereau, or even Klimt, were anathema to her. Sometime in late 1949 a traveling Soviet collection was exhibited in Budapest under the title "Masterpieces of Socialist Realism". We went to see the exhibit that consisted of pieces that could have made Bougereau look distinctly avant-garde in comparison. Red Dot could barely hold her

contempt. To be sure, the subjects of the paintings were pretty monotonous: about half of them depicted Stalin in various poses. There was Stalin looking out broodingly over the ramparts of the Kremlin; Stalin visiting the military front before a decisive battle of the Great Patriotic War [World War II]; Stalin contemplating the bust of Lenin; Stalin addressing the meeting of the Supreme Soviet; Stalin and Lysenko examining the new crop of produce; and so forth. The other half of paintings also invariably had some propaganda message. There was the Stakhanovite overfulfilling his quota; the agrobiologist girl driving a tractor; the blessings of collectivized agriculture being enjoyed in the kolkhoz; Popov inventing the radio. It was all pretty obvious but the technical execution was often not bad, at least to my eyes; comparable perhaps to a lesser canvas of G. Caleb Bingham or other early American naturalists. Suzanne called it poster art, but even she admitted that one or the other did represent "an awful lot of work". Visiting the Soviet exhibit was made compulsory for the entire working population of Budapest by organized tours from every workplace. The workers, most of whom had never been to an art gallery before, were duly impressed and the exhibition got rave reviews.

After my expulsion from the University, I was officially unemployed. That put me under the jurisdiction of the Office of Manpower Administration and the first thing I had to do was to file a résumé with them, setting forth my occupational credentials and whatever else was relevant with respect to my employability. For people in good political standing and/or with professional ambitions, that had to be in a party-approved format beginning with one's parentage, with appropriate expressions of anguish if it was non-proletarian and with emphasis on when and under what circumstances one broke with the bourgeois tradition. There had to be a clear indication of one's "political development", with contrite self-criticism if it was not prompt enough or fast enough. These résumés had to be re-written and re-submitted at every change of assignment or promotion and any internal inconsistencies or discrepancy with AVO records were suicidal as far as professional advancement was concerned.

Obviously, my own prospects under the circumstances were highly limited. I did not have a finished university education and was saddled with grave political liabilities. It was true that according to the terms of my sentence I had the right of not mentioning my "criminal record" but at that point I already knew enough of public life in a People's Democracy to realize that such rights were meaningless. Not admitting such a history in an official résumé could have been construed as "misleading the working class", with dire consequences. I ended up mentioning both unsuccessful attempts at escape, with appropriate "self-criticism". Then, I just had to wait for interview schedulings. I did try to contact people I knew at the Dr. Wander and Chinoin drug companies where I had previously worked, but it was of no use. In a People's Democracy, one does not apply for jobs at the company level, nor are openings directly communicated to job seekers. Everything goes through the Office of Manpower Administration.

The interview schedulings I got could be characterized as slim pickings at best. I found out that I was not even eligible to get a lab technician's job; I lacked the required certificate and the fact that I was almost a graduate chemist made no difference. My relatively best prospects were "chemical" jobs like formula mixing at a cement plant or mordant bath preparation in a hat factory. It became clear during the interviews that these companies were not exactly keen on employing someone who was expelled

from the University for political reasons, and I may add that the lack of enthusiasm was mutual. So, I remained unengaged which was just as well. My craving for escape at almost any cost was coming back with a vengeance.

#### The Ship Voyage

The "almost any cost" phrase in the previous paragraph must be understood figuratively. I was desperate enough to assume high risk; but I had virtually no money, and after two failed attempts, both of which involved considerable cash expenditures, the family reserves available for such a venture were depleted. At the same time, the fees charged for schemes that had even the faintest promise of success were getting more and more exorbitant. With the fortifications along Hungary's western and southern borders complete and after demise of the Czechoslovak Brikha, no obvious route of escape existed any longer and projects under consideration became more and more esoteric. For instance, I believe that the very first plane hijacking in air traffic history occurred on an intra-Hungary flight, taking over from the pilot at gunpoint (by a former Hungarian Air Force officer) and flying the plane to Munich. One heard of other bizarre projects now and then, all of which had the limitation of working only once. By the end of November, my attention became focused on a potential route that had the virtue of ingenious simplicity and was therefore strangely off the beaten track: the Danube. It still had commercial river traffic and some of the barges loading and unloading cargo at the Budapest wharves were Austrian.

Approaching these areas and attempting to talk to the sailors was an adventure all its own. The harbor had to be very carefully cased for potential AVO surveillance. I am sure that I occasionally mistook innocent strollers or perhaps other would-be escapees for AVO plainclothesmen, and the misconception might have been mutual. After a while, one developed a sixth sense for the instinctive recognition of AVO characters or other Communists, but even encounter with competitors for available space was highly unwelcome. It was finally on a dark, rainy, windy, dismal night, the kind one would not chase a dog into, and the harbor virtually totally abandoned, that I succeeded in getting involved in small talk with a sailor from one of the Austrian freighters. Very carefully, I steered the conversation to the possibility of being hidden on his boat. Yes, he had heard that smuggling people out of Hungary could be a profitable proposition, and yes, such a plan "might just be possible" after he talked it over with his buddies. We agreed to meet again next evening and I went home full of excitement.

My father was intrigued by the idea especially since I could assure him that I recognized the sailor as genuinely Austrian from his accent, and thus an AVO setup was unlikely. I went to my appointment next evening as agreed, and we sat down at a nearby bistro to talk.

The young man's name was Angelo Faas, and the news he had for me was mixed. The plan was possible in principle but not for the next departure two days hence, for which the space was already filled. However, his ship was scheduled to return to Budapest before Christmas and for the departure after that, space could be made available. The hiding place was some sort of air shaft or buoyancy chamber into which two people could be squeezed in. The price he named was stiff and it was immaterial whether one or two persons occupied the space. If I was interested, I had better give him a deposit before his departure, i.e. within 24 hours, or the space could not be held for me.

I walked away somewhat dispirited. The price of the venture seemed out of reach and offhand I could think of no one with whom I could share the space and cost on such short notice. It was at that point that my dad came up with an interesting possibility: Mrs. Valerie Kun, young wife of the last President of the Foncière Insurance Company for whom he worked all his life, was anxiously and impatiently seeking a way to join her husband who escaped to Switzerland in the course of a business trip about a year earlier. She was a somewhat overcautious type who hesitated too much with respect to the more adventurous schemes offered to her, and such a ship voyage might be just down her alley. We contacted her the same evening and by next noon we had a deal: she was enthusiastically interested, was willing to assume 2/3 of the total cost in recognition of my services in finding the opportunity, and she readily gave me the required advance payment. It was all on faith and with the understanding that if anything happened that thwarted the project, the money would be lost. It was not the time to quibble about financial security; it looked like now or never.

Next evening I went to tell Angelo that the deal was on and handed him the deposit money. They were scheduled to weigh anchor early next morning but he said they would be back in Budapest by mid-December. I was to watch his ship, the "Schwechat", to come in, and wait for him in the same bistro where we were then sitting.

The Schwechat indeed disappeared from the harbor by next day and during the waiting period I was bursting with nervousness. Valerie Kun and I met a few times to talk over the adventure looming before us. The trip up the Danube to Vienna was expected to last 2-2½ days. I had not actually seen the hiding place offered to us but understood it to be reasonably tolerable for two persons. Once under way and out of sight of shore patrols, there was said to be opportunity to leave our hiding place briefly for the calls of nature. We were impatiently looking forward to the trip.

Valerie was an attractive woman in her mid-30's, i.e. she could have been Mr. Kun's daughter. They were married relatively recently, after he had spent his life in bachelorhood and with the reputation of being a gentleman rake. He used to have a long series of comely young company employees as mistresses. The last of these was Valerie. Of course it crossed my mind, as it must have hers, that being locked up together in a tight space for 2-3 days might lead to seductive or compromising situations, but the matter was ignored. Getting out of the country was what mattered. We were both counting the days, with me checking several times daily whether the Schwechat was again in port.

The ship arrived on December 20, i.e. several days late, and curiously it docked not at the commercial harbor as before but at one of the inner city loading piers. Spotting Angelo on deck took a load off my mind. When we met he reassured me that everything was OK, the reason for the change of position having to do something with the unloading of cargo that was then in progress. Actually, from our point of view, it was easier to approach and board the ship unobserved in its present position. Departure was scheduled right after Christmas. I gathered that having to be away from home on the holiday, necessitated by delays in shipping schedules, was a source of considerable annoyance to Angelo and his shipmates. With my mother's ready permission I asked Angelo and one of his buddies to our apartment for a Christmas meal. Valerie was also invited and the occasion was suitable to

get to know each other a little better. The event was quite pleasant and also served to dispel the few remaining doubts we had regarding this whole deal. The sailors were obviously genuine and well-meaning; naturally they charged what the market would bear and actually had to split the fee with the ship's officers and other crew. We were to board late at night on December 26; departure was scheduled for the following morning.

I can remember throwing a last glance on the newly installed red star on top of Parliament Building a few hundred yards downstream as we boarded the boat in the company of Angelo and his buddies. We spent a few hours in the canteen of the ship as if we were attending a party; but during the small hours of the morning we were taken to a spot on the rear deck where a manhole cover had already been removed and we climbed into our hiding place, Valerie first. The space turned out to be an irregular-shaped, long, roughly vertical shaft with plenty of crossbars, barely wide enough for one contorted person standing virtually on the head of another. It was a bizarrely uncomfortable position, and more so for the person on top (myself) who had to balance on narrow ledges about even with the head of the person below. The manhole cover was screwed back, cargo was piled on top of it, and our adventure had started.

It took a few hours to experiment with various body orientations to find the relatively most comfortable position. Each of us had a knapsack with thermos flask and sandwiches, and a flashlight--room had to be found for these items and no sooner were we installed for the long haul when Valerie announced, in anguish, that she was going to have a bowel movement. She did, too, and it is needless to say that there was absolutely no facility to flush or sequester any excrements. The product of her bowel movement remained in a pile at the bottom of the shaft, and the less said about the atmosphere in our hiding place after that, the better. I registered these happenings with obvious irritation, mingled with contempt. It should be said that I managed to withhold bowel movement for the entire three days we were locked up in there--myself being positioned on top, the logistics of a successful operation would have been a great deal more complicated for me than for her. Of course, urination was unavoidable but the discomfort caused by that was dwarfed in comparison to staying in a confined space above a pile of fresh human feces.

Obviously, these circumstances hampered friendly conversation between us somewhat. Valerie was deeply embarrassed and after some muttered apologies she became increasingly withdrawn. For the most part of our ship confinement, I felt emotionally alone. The racket caused by the ship's machinery made conversation difficult anyway, and except for some technical communications between us it was easier to be immersed in one's own thoughts. Departure was scheduled for the morning of December 27 but strangely, just about at daybreak according to my watch, the ship's engines stopped and suddenly we were enveloped in uncanny silence. We could hear muffled human voices from the deck. This continued all morning and early afternoon; it was about 4 P.M. when the machinery started again and we became virtually imbedded in violent vibrations. Obviously, our departure was delayed somewhat but finally we were under way now. I tried to follow our progress up the Danube river in my mind. I imagined I even felt the changes of direction at the Danube bends at Vác and Visegrád and when the ship's engines stopped again, I figured we must be in Esztergom. One could hear traffic noises in the distance, even the clanking of streetcars--did Esztergom have streetcars? Neither of us was certain but the noises were also indistinct. When we got under way again I almost saw with my mental eyes the cities of

Komárom and Győr as we sailed past them and when the engines stopped once more I knew we must be at the country's border at Rajka. As expected, there was a longer stop and we could hear commotion on deck. There were voices, and the noise of cargo boxes pushed around. We cowered in worried silence until, just about at mid-afternoon on December 29, the ship's machinery started up again and we sighed in relief. Obviously, the customs check was concluded without discovering us and we were now leaving Hungary. We rejoiced; by nightfall I figured to be in Austrian waters already and sure enough, at some point we heard noises overhead as the manhole cover was being screwed open and lifted. Cold clean air hit my face like a refreshing kiss. Angelo and his buddy were standing on deck, urging us to come out. As I climbed up I caught glimpses of city architecture around me and my heart leaped: we were in Vienna.

When we finally stood firmly on deck and I looked around me, I could not believe my eyes. There was before me the illuminated red star on top of Parliament Building just as when I boarded the ship; on second look, the city scape around us was unmistakably Budapest. It was all like a bad dream.

"Wha-wha-what happened?!" Valerie and I looked at each other, and at Angelo, in anguished disbelief. "Did we have to turn back midway for some reason?"

Angelo explained in obvious embarrassment. No, we did not turn back; we never got off. Suddenly, and for unknown reason, the sailing permit of the ship was withdrawn and they were not allowed to weigh anchor. Whether or not the AVO had suspected that there were fugitives hidden aboard was uncertain, but there was in fact increased police surveillance of the pier and it was not possible to get us out safely until now. As for the engine noise that misled us into believing that we were under way, it was run in order to produce electricity for the crew quarters. In reality we had been standing still all the time, and the progress upstream past Vác, Komárom, Győr, with stops at Esztergom and Rajka, existed only in my imagination. On the morning of December 30, 1949, Valerie and I walked off the ship, safe and sound but weary and depressed, and almost tragicomically, still in Budapest.

#### The Last Try

We first went to Valerie's sister's home that was not far from the Danube pier where we were standing, in order to wash, refresh ourselves, and relax a bit. To have to telephone my parents reporting failure once again was a most painful duty. It was the unanimous consensus of all family and friends that I must give up. I remember going to a New Year's Eve party next night to which I had a long-standing invitation but hoped to respond to it by postcard from Vienna. All that was now a pipedream. I was very much present physically and the account of my recent adventures dominated the conversation. Although a failed attempt at escape was nothing to be ashamed of in that company, bouncing back three times was quite out of the ordinary and I felt that I was acquiring the notoriety of a hard-luck guy who just couldn't hack it. Everyone counseled me to give up, which made me even more stubborn, embittered, and totally determined not to live under Communism, come what may. My emotional involvement became so strong that I can remember recurrent dreams at the time of being again in Bratislava, or elsewhere close to the Iron Curtain, where only one leap separated me from freedom and I was desperately trying to make that leap--feeling strange resistance, as

if I were in neck-deep water. Throughout the month of January I pursued leads with single-minded devotion. River traffic was stopped for the season because of ice, and the crew of the Schwechat had to return to Vienna by train. It was a nearly hopeless situation and I was virtually living my nightmare, all the while also pretending to be looking for a job through the Office of Manpower Administration. By mid-January 1950 I made contact with two fellows who were planning to escape through Czechoslovakia-- old hat, as far as I was concerned, but the Hungarian-Czechoslovak and Czechoslovak-Austrian borders remained in fact still unfortified and provided the only possible terrestrial escape route without encountering fences and minefields. Come to think of it, my chief mistake in the memorable failed attempt at Bratislava had been that I was waiting for the Brikha transport rather than striking out with a guide on my own. If I did not make that mistake again, a scheme like that might be worth considering, after all. The two fellows planning that route were looking for a third in order to spread expenses; their scheme included a prearranged rest stop on the Czechoslovak side of the border with bed and board and even Czechoslovak ID cards with which to board the train for Bratislava. Once in Bratislava, they were on their own and when I mentioned that I had relations there connected with Jewish congregational operations, their interest in my joining them increased enormously. Their planned crossover point into Czechoslovakia was near Salgótarján, a middle-sized industrial town about 75 miles northeast of Budapest. As luck would have it, at about the same time, notice of a job opening was posted at the Office for Manpower Administration for a position at a pencil and ink factory in Salgótarján. I applied, got an interview scheduling slip, and thus a virtually foolproof alibi for at least the first leg of this trip. I raised the necessary cash by selling some old heirlooms of mine and joined in as a third.

My two companions, George Lukács and Feri Grosz, were simple fellows somewhat on the coarse side, whom I had not known beforehand. I no longer remember how we got in touch but whoever referred them to me vouched for their *bona fides*. January 25, 1950 was the day of our departure and we met on that day at 4:00 P.M. at the intercity bus terminal of Budapest. As we were standing in front of the ticket counter I spotted Sara Felberman, a close friend and the hostess of the New Year's Eve party that I had attended a few weeks earlier. I would have just as soon avoided friendly encounters at that point but she saw me, and stopped for a chat. I said I was going for a job interview to Salgótarján. I could see that she was struck by the incongruity of doing that in the company of two other young men and her eyes signaled comprehension--she wished me the best of luck almost too emphatically, and insisted that I must write her once I was established "in Salgótarján". It was the last social encounter I had in Budapest.

The bus ride had its own dramatic moments. More and more I had to realize that at least one of us, George, was a real oaf who had his own ideas about what constituted inconspicuous behavior. No sooner were we under way when he pulled out his wallet and started counting his hundred-forint bills with deliberate ostentation, saying loudly in the end, "Well, okay. The fee is all here".

I was virtually apoplectic. I tried to pretend we did not know each other but George kept talking to me, full of clumsy innuendoes relating to our intended adventure. When there was a chance I asked him in an angry whisper whether he was out of his mind, trying to attract attention; he was very surprised and said that in his view, acting "regular" was the way to

go and he thought that the worried silence in which I was sitting was more suspicious. At one point two uniformed AVO guards boarded the bus and my heart nearly stopped. This was the end. I had been betrayed again. But the AVO men remained in the front of the bus; they only wanted a ride and got off at another village, without talking to anyone. Perhaps the drama of this bus ride existed only in my imagination, but I certainly had frazzled nerves by the time we arrived.

Our guide met us at the bus terminal in Salgótarján and we immediately set out on our hike that was to last through the night. I remember sneaking furtively through back alleys on the outskirts of town. Eventually, we arrived in open country and continued through fields and woods in rolling terrain. There was about a foot of fresh snow on the ground and the hike was strenuous. In order to maintain the fiction of going to a job interview, I was dressed in business garb with regular suit, necktie, winter coat and hat, with my toiletries and a change of underwear in a briefcase. As we left town, I took off what I could but it was still a highly unsuitable attire for a field hike and soon I was drenched in sweat. At the same time, my hands and feet became ice cold. It was just about the coldest night of the year, with temperature out in the open about  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  (15 below on the  $^{\circ}\text{F}$  scale). I can remember how my handkerchief, wet from having to wipe my nose frequently, froze to a solid, crumpled object in my pocket. At one point I dropped a glove on the ground and it solidified like the hand piece of a knight's armor by the time I retrieved it.

We were treading in knee-deep snow, uphill and downhill, hour after hour, and before long I felt pretty near exhaustion. It seemed that all my companions had considerably longer stride than myself and as we proceeded wearily, each at his own speed, the distance between us opened up and at some point I could barely make out the black dots moving ahead of me in the snowfield. I followed footprints, but those petered out on some hillsides facing the winter gales. Being left behind, and perhaps freezing to death alone, looked like a real possibility and I felt I had to risk calling out loud:

"Wait! Wait for me!"

My companions halted very reluctantly and when I caught up it was their turn to give me a good tonguelashing. Of course I realized that breaking silence at that point was highly unsafe (we were well into the border zone already) but it was not clear that I had any other choice, short of risking getting lost. Fortunately, the intense cold probably discouraged border patrols from making their rounds all too strictly and we passed through the danger zone without mishap. At least, I could induce our guide to make certain that we stayed reasonably close together afterwards, but I had to work very hard to keep up.

The whole hike lasted precisely 12 hours, from 7 P.M. at the Salgótarján bus depot to 7 A.M. next morning when we arrived at a farmstead on the Czechoslovak side of the border. We had negotiated about 35 km (22 miles) through the snow. In appreciating the feat, one should not compare it to a 22 mile walk on a road or even mountain path; in the snow-blown terrain, steps in many places sunk into a foot or more of soft snow. In absolute terms, it was easily the most significant exertion of my life and even relatively it was pretty much on par with the death marches during my deportation. There were moments when sitting in a cozy detention room of the AVO looked quite

good in comparison. But I made it, and after taking some refreshment at the farmstead we slept through the next day.

We were at a farm called Szénágpuszta near the village of Almád', and the farmer was of course party to the scheme and had his cut of the fee. He provided fairly decent meals for us but our accomodation was primitive. We had to remain there until Czechoslovak ID papers were procured for us that was part of the deal. That took 3 days; it was the night of January 28 when we were finally taken by horse drawn sleigh to the railroad station of Hajnáčka [Ajnácskö] and boarded there the train for Bratislava.

The train ride was uneventful and there was no need to present our new ID cards to anyone, which was just as well. As it turned out later, they were such crude forgeries that they did not even look like the real stuff; having to use them would have meant promptly "blowing our cover". I suppose that the main reason for furnishing them to us (in addition to help with the justification for the high fee) was to give us some self-confidence for the train ride, and as such they served their purpose. We felt good and full of excited anticipation as we arrived in Bratislava on the morning of January 29.

Immediately after arrival, while my companions were waiting for me at the terminal, I went to call on the Messingers who lived not too far from the railroad station. My self-confident euphoria dwindled fast after our encounter. Edith and Felix were literally scared to death to see me; after the initial surprise they spirited me in furtively and their first question was, did anyone see me ringing their doorbell. The complacent cordiality of the summer days was completely gone and they seemed to be suffering from a case of "bell jitters" as bad as anything seen in Budapest. A lot had happened in Czechoslovakia since September and the realities of everyday life in a People's Democracy were catching up with them with a vengeance. After collapse of the Brikha any connection with that operation was made a punishable offense retroactively, and virtually the entire staff of the Jewish Community Center in Bratislava was under secret police surveillance and at risk of arrest. There could be no question of me staying with them again, let alone bringing in my two companions. Later in the morning Felix went downtown to try to find a solution for us while I was to stay indoors; all I could do was make a brief dash back to the terminal to tell George and Feri to keep waiting for me until further notice.

Felix returned home in the afternoon with the following news for me. There was no semi-official or other recognized escape modality endorsed by Jewish authorities any longer; but they had informal knowledge of private operators who took clients across to Austria according to individual arrangements. The place to make contact with these operators was a "hotel" for transients in the old town, essentially a flophouse. That's where I should go with my companions after nightfall, and hope for the best. They gave me some Czechoslovak money and bid me farewell.

We arrived at the flophouse, checked in, got our bed assignments, and it seemed that there would be no opportunity to make contact with any operator that night. As I was preparing to retire I kept thinking of Rita and wondered how we could meet. She would be doubtless the best resource person for our needs and of course just seeing her would have been a thrill for me. I was poring over the telephone directory when someone rushed in with the news

that a "border guide" had shown up and was willing to take a party across right away.

The guide turned out to be a strange duck, to say the least. He was a slightly unkempt, unsavory-looking young man who spoke a dialect all his own--not German, not Yiddish, not Rumanian, but a strange mix of all three with some Slavic of the Carpatho-Ruthenian or Bukovinian variety thrown in for good measure. I still don't know for sure what nationality he was, and it was extremely hard to communicate with him. Characters of this sort learn fast how to manipulate their own language limitations and they are hardest to understand when they do not *want* to be understood. When we started talking about money, the conditions of doing business were getting through clearly enough.

In essence, after a lot of false starts and other misunderstandings, the outlines of his offer were beginning to take shape. We would be taken by taxicab to the outskirts of town and hike from there not more than 5 miles through flat terrain to the nearest Austrian village, where we would spend the night at his buddy's house and go next day by bus to Vienna. I inquired about the name of the village; he said Kici or Kichi which did not sound familiar at all and I was beginning to develop some doubts. He named the price for the three of us that, as it turned out, was more than we had; that was just as well as far as I was concerned and I was ready to nix the deal then and there. But my companions started to bargain and the fellow came down with the price to a figure George and Feri were willing to meet. I still held out in opposition. I did not like the looks of the guy and I felt we would be better off if we waited a day and saw what other opportunities existed (with tapping of local experts, such as Rita). But my companions were eager to go, and I gave in with the condition that right then we gave the guide only a down payment, with the balance payable upon successful arrival in Vienna. That was a virtual necessity for me personally because I had no substantial sums with me at all. Once in Vienna, I knew I could raise some money through my Dad's professional associates there. The condition was accepted and the deal was on. It was 8 o'clock Sunday evening, January 29, 1950.

We started on our venture right away. Our guide hailed a cab, we got in, and he named our destination. As we drove over the Danube bridge to the suburb of Petržalka [Pozsonyiligetfalú] I sat in the back of the cab in worried concern. If there were road checks for would-be escapees, this was a logical place for them. Judging from the Messingers' mood the city must be crawling with secret policemen. Every cop who stopped traffic at road intersections filled me with terror. But eventually we arrived at the outskirts of town uneventfully. Our guide paid and dismissed the cab, and we started our hike. It was a lot less cold than 4 days before in Salgótarján, and although there was some snow on the ground it was not deep. Our guide reassured us that we should arrive at Kici, or Kichi, or whatever it was, well before 10:00 P.M.

The hike was not strenuous and being that close to freedom did give us a certain exhilaration. We proceeded through more or less flat terrain under diffuse cloud cover and moonlight; to the right of us, perhaps 5 miles distant, we could see a bank of bright lights. I was wondering about that being perhaps the border and attempted to find out from our guide. He found it convenient not to understand and after repeated inquiries finally said, enigmatically:

"Gur nish ka grenetz gur nish ka moire."

In trying to make sense of this utterance one had to assume that "grenetz" was his version of Grenze [border], and "moire", of course, means fear or worry in Yiddish. So, the translation of his statement seemed to be, "It's not the border and stop worrying."

The problem was, we just did not seem to make it to the border in spite of repeated assurances and encouragement. It was already 9:30, then 10:00, then 10:30, i.e. time to be at our destination, and the guide still pointed to a hilltop on the horizon:

"Dort grenetz."

When we arrived at the spot, he would point to another hilltop a further several hundred yards ahead:

"Dort grenetz."

This happened 3 or 4 times; finally we crossed a line of tall metal posts, apparently recently erected, about 50 feet distant from each other. The guide pointed to it in apparent relief:

"Here grenetz."

That was more like it; the installation looked like a frontier fortification in the process of being built and indeed in one position we could see huge rolls of barbed wire on the ground. Obviously, we had come just in time. A few days or weeks later there would be a wire fence here and perhaps minefields or other border hurdles as well. As we walked past the frontier posts I attempted to find out if we were now actually in Austria. Our destination was supposed to have been immediately on the other side of the border. The guide answered unintelligibly and the whole situation was beginning to look confusing. Soon we came to *another* row of frontier posts, or perhaps the same row of frontier posts from the other direction. We all looked to our guide, who said, now with a trace of worry or surprise in his voice:

"Here och grenetz."

That was too much. If we were already in Austria, crossing the border again would take us back into Czechoslovakia. An even more horrible possibility was that we might blunder into Hungary. The triple border point could not have been too far away. It crossed my mind that this rascal was perhaps leading us around in circles on purpose, in order to exhaust us so that we could not run when he delivered us to the AVO. A less dramatic possibility was simply that he was hopelessly lost. The three of us had a quick conference and we all agreed that the one thing we must not do was to linger right here at the frontier, whichever frontier it was, and expose ourselves to certain capture by the first border patrol that might come along. But which way were we to go? Clearly, the guide was of no use whatsoever and even though he still kept muttering to himself, "Here grenetz, dort och grenetz", we stopped listening to him. I felt it was incumbent on me to assume leadership on the basis of my vague awareness of the geography and I insisted that we must move *westbound* because that's where Austria was. The question was, which

way was west? It was too late in the night for any trace of sunset to be seen on the horizon and the sky was not clear enough for stars, even though I desperately tried to make out some familiar constellations. Of course, none of us carried a compass. It was at that point that I came to a spontaneous insight that was worthy of the Count Bobby and his sudden erudition under "mortal fear": the position of the moon could be used as a clue to rough compass directions. The first quarter moon was right above us and its shape clearly visible through a hazy cloud cover. I reasoned that the illuminated half of the moon indicated the direction in which the Sun had to be under the horizon, and since it was still well before midnight, that direction had to be west. It was all simple enough and I tried to explain my reasoning to my companions. I am not sure that they actually understood but they were willing to take my word for it. In the meantime, I learned that this method of reckoning is common wisdom among sailors but it was a new realization for me then, and it filled me with a sense of satisfaction.

As we were marching in the direction recognized as west with our "guide" haplessly tagging after us, we found ourselves facing the bank of bright lights seen earlier. From our new direction it looked more like a string of headlights and I had the unnerving impression of a column of tanks facing us and advancing towards us in a broad battle formation. It was an intense, profound sensation and I became almost panic-stricken. It was the best example of an optical illusion I ever had in my entire life and it took some time to recognize it as such. We continued our hike and at some point we could see the outlines of a forest to the left of us. Our guide suddenly became agitated and started motioning frantically. He now claimed to remember that we were supposed to follow the edge of the forest. We did so for a while but the forest turned out to be a relatively small roundish patch among the fields and in about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour we rounded it. That was the last straw. The guide obviously had not the faintest idea where we were or which way we were supposed to go. Not far from the forest we found a paved and well-cleared highway oriented east-west; it could have been the Budapest-Vienna trunk road. I was scared stiff. I felt we might be in Hungary already. We stood on the highway for a few moments irresolutely. There was a little house with bright windows some 500 yards to the west of us, on the right side of the road. After some highly indecisive arguing about which way to proceed, our guide finally volunteered to go in there and ask for directions. He walked towards the house resignedly, with obvious embarrassment about being totally lost, while we stood there on the highway and waited.

Then followed what were probably the most dramatic moments of my life. When the guide arrived at the house we heard a piercing whistle sound and lights went on suddenly, illuminating among other things a striped barrier gate across the road in front of the house. We could hear excited human voices. Terrified, we jumped off the road into the ditch on the left side and watched breathlessly. Uniformed persons with flashlights were running along the embankment on the other side of the road, not 25 feet away from us; I whispered that they would be coming back on our side and we had better clear out of there in a hurry. We crawled on our bellies a few dozen feet away from the road as fast as we could. Then we saw the soldiers or guards running back on the same side they came. The lights around the little house were turned off again, and there was silence. Our guide did not come back.

We got up, almost dizzy with excitement. It seemed that our guide had blundered into a border post, not certain of what country, and we were on

our own. How it came that we remained undiscovered just a few yards off the road remained a good question but at any rate a blessing. We decided to proceed further westbound, giving the border post as wide a berth as possible, and we walked across the fields in a broad half-circle. Eventually we arrived at a railroad track. There were outlines in the moonlight of an abandoned freight depot a few hundred yards to the left, with loading ramps and ramshackle buildings. We proceeded to explore the area; at least it should give us a clue as to which country we were in. I spotted a wooden shed with a white label on the door. I lighted a match in order to read it. It said:

EINTRITT VERBOTEN
-------------------

#### Arrival in Austria

We broke out in jubilation; without a doubt the German inscription signified that we were in Austria. We hugged each other, congratulated each other, and proceeded further westbound much relieved and with renewed enthusiasm.

It was months or years later through the excellent library facilities of Vienna, Munich, and eventually Detroit, that I procured access to maps detailed enough to reconstruct our adventure that night. The village of "Kici" to which the guide meant to take us was Kittsee, more or less southerly from Petržalka; the triple border point with Hungary was a good 10 miles further still to the south. The little forest patch we rounded was a "Fasangarten" [pheasantry] and the bank of bright lights that scared me so badly was in fact a military barrack compound just on the Austrian side of the border and used by the Soviet occupation authorities at the time. The line of fence posts that we crossed may well have been frontier fortifications in the process of being erected by the Czechoslovaks but they were not quite at the border. The actual border was the east-west highway to which we arrived; its north side was Czechoslovakia and the south side, Austria. At some point to the west, the frontier turned north and the road became entirely Austrian. The little house we had seen about 500 yards away from where we stood was a Czechoslovak border post standing in that precise corner. Its staff went into alert when they realized that someone was approaching and our guide was apprehended. Scouts came running out to capture the rest of the party but they had to stay on the Czechoslovak side of the road; by some fortunate chance we ducked down on the Austrian side and were thus saved from being apprehended. It is remarkable that the outcome of vital endeavors and whole human destinies can turn on such flukes.

At the abandoned freight yard we were a good half-a-mile inside Austria and as we happily marched further westbound we arrived at a small village: barely more than the walled mansion of some nobleman and a couple of dozen peasant houses surrounding it--Kittsee. It was already about midnight and everything was dead quiet. We decided to proceed further west and look for a bigger town, hopefully with a railroad station or bus stop from where one could reach Vienna. Of course, there was no longer need to walk in the fields furtively as heretofore; we were now in the land of freedom and could stay on the highway. We almost felt like singing as we marched to the next village

which turned out to be Berg-on-the-Leitha; at the boundary between the Austrian provinces of Burgenland and Niederösterreich.

An Austrian gendarme discovered us in Berg and took us to the local police station. We followed willingly and almost with a sense of relief; it was just as well to throw ourselves on the mercy of the authorities at that point, or so we thought. The Austrians were reputed to be sympathetic towards refugees from behind the Iron Curtain and although the part of Austria we were in was nominally still under Soviet occupation, hegemony over Austria was apparently not on the Soviet agenda and there was said to be little interference with civil matters.

We stayed at the Berg gendarmerie post through the night and regaled the gendarmes with stories of life behind the Iron Curtain. A friendly camaraderie was established, and we asked them to put us on the bus for Vienna, but they said that was not possible just as yet. An official record of our apprehension, or rather voluntary surrender, had been made and we must be taken to the regional police headquarters at Bruck-on-the-Leitha for further disposition of our cases. However, we had nothing to worry about; eventually, we should be transferred to Vienna and/or released.

At the county gendarmerie headquarters in Bruck, we went through a booking procedure and although there were constant encouraging noises that we were going to be transferred to Vienna, "for the time being" we were locked up in the local prison. We registered these happenings with mixed emotions. Since we were in the Soviet zone, we were not completely out of all danger yet; but, on balance, I was willing to give our guardians the benefit of doubt. Obviously, we were in technical violation of some ordinance by having arrived in the country illegally and we must allow matters to unravel at their own speed. The main thing was that we should be transferred to a place under Western jurisdiction *eventually*. The cell in which we were locked up was for 4 persons and the fourth prisoner was a local young man, serving the last day of his sentence for theft of a bike. He was to be released the next morning and I implored him to call the Rothschild Hospital in Vienna as soon as he got out and report that three young men, refugees from Hungary, were in detention here and required immediate assistance. The Rothschild Hospital was the Vienna headquarters of the Brikha operation and our intermediate destination in Austria. The young man solemnly promised to do that.

Next morning, some gendarmes came for us and we were loaded into a car. We kept asking, hopefully,

"Vienna? Are we finally going to Vienna?"

The gendarmes answered reluctantly. "Yes, yes, but not just as yet. First, we must have clearance from the occupation authority."

"Occupation authority?! You mean the Russians?!" We asked in horror.

"There is nothing to worry about. It's just a formality. In fact, they are in on the whole operation and receive a bribe from the Rothschild Hospital brass for every refugee they let through."

That was ominous news. A gut-wrenching feeling told me that in spite of all the reassurances, something was not quite right; but there was nothing

we could do. After a ride of about 30 minutes we stopped in front of the Soviet Com-mandatura in Wiener Neustadt and the gendarmes escorted us in, past a heavily armed Russian sentry at the entrance gate. It all looked scary. We were left waiting in an ornate anteroom.

One by one we were asked into an inner office where a Russian colonel interrogated us in broken German. He was almost a caricature out of a grade B movie: corpulent, loud, coarsely jovial. He took my personal data and then asked if I were Dutch ["holländisch"]. I was nonplussed and muttered something incomprehensible. The colonel gave a hearty laugh and continued, by way of explanation:

"All young men who come here seem to be Dutch." He dismissed me with another hearty laugh.

The gendarmes took us back into the county jail in Bruck. Although they continued to make reassuring comments about us being soon transferred to Vienna, I became more and more worried and as the cell door slammed shut behind me, I broke out in the most abject despair. This was all absurd; there was no such thing as being transferred out of the Soviet zone with consent of the Soviet occupation authority. We are being told this fib in order to keep us docile and easily manageable while they arrange our forced transfer to Hungary, or perhaps directly to Siberia. I virtually saw my whole life go down the drain then and there. I lost my nerves entirely; I am afraid I made the most frightful nuisance of myself as I cried, shouted, banged the cell door, and implored the jailers for mercy. I have no clear notion of how long I carried on but it could have been hours. The guards first tried to ignore me but at some point it must have become too heartrending even for them, and the chief warden came and took me to the jail office. He showed me the immense record book of the prison where the names of individual prisoners, their offenses, and the disposition of their cases were entered in neat handwritten boxes.

"Look here. See? Here is one, with unauthorized border crossing, and the disposition was "Transfer to Vienna." Here is another, with the same disposition. And a third, and so forth. Will you finally believe us that you will be transferred to Vienna and there is no danger of extradition?"

"But what about the Russian colonel?"

"Ah, the colonel. He is on the take, didn't you notice? Your organization, the Rothschild Hospital staff, has it all worked out with him and you are all being carried in his journal as Dutchmen subject only to some civil penalty from the Austrian government. A fellow from the Rothschild Hospital will be here tomorrow morning to verify their jurisdiction with respect to the three of you and *you will be transferred to Vienna*. Now stop fretting. We are not monsters; if there was any danger of you being returned to the east we would let you escape. Go back to your cell now and eat your dinner."

I returned, only half-relieved; the warden sounded reassuring but I still wished that we were physically in Vienna rather than being told, no matter how insistently, that we shall get there. I had another worried, fretful night.

Next day was Wednesday, February 1, 1950. About 10 in the morning we were taken from the prison to the police headquarters in Bruck where a friendly young man, emissary of the Brikha, was waiting for us. He introduced himself as Itzhak Thaler from the Rothschild Hospital staff. He asked each of us a few questions to make sure that we were *bona fide* Jewish refugees from Hungary. He then nodded to the gendarme officer present, some documents were signed, and we were officially released into his custody.

Itzhak loaded us into his car and we proceeded to Vienna, with the municipal limits only a few miles away. It is difficult to describe the relief, joy, and supreme happiness we felt when passing the highway sign "WIEN". We were exuberant; Itzhak was our saving angel. I asked him if the young man imprisoned with us indeed called the Rothschild Hospital as he had promised he would. Itzhak knew nothing about that and it seemed that the precaution was in any case unnecessary. He said they had steady contact with the police authorities and they were routinely notified if Jewish refugees were picked up near the border. The Brikha paid handsomely for this cooperation and it was true that the Russians were also in on the deal.

Vienna was under four-power administration, with the offices and institutions of interest to us refugees all being in the American or British sectors. That included the Police Headquarters at Rossauerlande for which we were now heading. Itzhak explained that he was obliged to take us there because the administrative disposition of the offense for which we were in custody had to be implemented first. We were going to get 3 days' detention for the offense of illegal border crossing. He would come on the day of our release and take us personally to the Rothschild Hospital premises. Until then, we could relax and cheer up in the certain knowledge that we were on the threshold of freedom.

Upon arrival at the Rossauerlande we were ushered in front of some sort of magistrate or referee who disposed of our cases quickly, and without the outward trappings of a formal trial. We pleaded guilty to the offense of entering the country without official clearance, received and accepted our sentences of 72 hours detention (with prior custody not counted) and were taken to the "Ausländeramt" [Alien Administration] wing of the institution.

The Rossauerlande prison was impressive for its comforts, at least in comparison to Miskolc. The cell compound in which we were locked up had a dormitory part with bunk beds for about 20 prisoners; there were regular washrooms with shower stalls and toilets, and a "living room" for daytime sojourn. Of course, in my new mood at the time, I was inclined to take a rosy view of circumstances and I enjoyed myself greatly. All fellow prisoners were foreigners but we three were the only refugees from behind the Iron Curtain. There were some Germans either illegally entering, or illegally staying in, Austria; one of those was a doctor with whom I had some friendly technical chats about pharmaceuticals then in vogue. There was also a group of Greeks who apparently belonged to a smuggling ring. I was friendly with everybody and the three days detention went by quickly.

On February 4, 1950 by 12:00 noon our sentence was served and Itzhak Thaler was there to pick us up as we were released. He took us to the Rothschild Hospital where virtually the first private person I ran into was Susan Domány, my companion between Králová Chlumec and Bratislava during my second attempt at escape. She had arrived in Vienna some weeks before me; we had a joyful reunion. Being in Vienna certainly felt like a dream

come true. The Budapest-Vienna distance is just 160 miles as the crow flies. In the more tortuous way as I had negotiated it, via the Miskolc jail, the boundary forest at Michalany, the freight yard at Devinská Nová Ves, the AVO barracks at Mosonmagyaróvár, the buoyancy shaft of the Danube freighter, the snowfields between Salgótarján and Hajnáčka, the border post between Petržalka and Kittsee, and finally the prison at Bruck-on-the-Leitha with the visit to the Russian colonel, the whole trip had taken exactly nine months and six days.

## C H A P T E R   T W E L V E

-----  
L I F E   A S   A   R E F U G E E

AS WINSTON CHURCHILL SAID after the conclusion of World War II, the problems of victory are more agreeable to contemplate than the problems of defeat, but they are problems nevertheless. That was certainly true in my personal case. Putting the nightmare of Communism and the anguish of running from it behind me was a great and hard-earned victory, but a whole new set of very difficult problems was awaiting me on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Those were, in the order of their ultimate importance but in reverse order of their urgency, (1) Where to settle in the free world and how to get there; (2) Where and how to conclude my university studies; and (3) How to survive while I pursued the former two objectives.

All waking hours during my first several weeks in freedom were spent in undiluted euphoria. During the severe struggles of the past months I had developed such intense, almost mystical longing for the city of Vienna as The Goal that, having attained it, small problems such as leading a pretty precarious existence with no money, having to forego even minor luxuries, and the exasperatingly slow progress with my major objectives of graduation and resettlement, just could not faze me. Stepping into the street and being able to take a walk without having to look at immense and nauseating portraits of Stalin and Rákosi, or being able to look at newspaper headlines containing world news instead of the Stakhanovite feats of the day, were by themselves Happiness for me. It is tempting to compare it with my liberation from the Nazi concentration camp, although the comparison is of course hardly fair. The Nazis' avowed objective was to exterminate me; in their view I was born to be vermin and there was nothing I could do about it. War exigencies required exploiting my labor first, but true to their ultimate aim that was done in such a cruel and murderous way that it was in itself tantamount to a slow death sentence. Under physical deprivations of that sort, spiritual oppression loses its meaning.

Communist persecution, at least for me at the time being, was at a different level. It was said that the internment camps of the Gulag (e.g. at Recsk in Hungary) differed little from the Nazi concentration camps; but fortunately for me, I did not get to know those. The regular prisons like the one in Miskolc were still relatively civilized institutions. On the other hand, my response to Communism, unlike my position with respect to Nazism, involved a *choice* and therefore refusal to embrace it provoked even more vehement antagonism from the true believers. It may be frivolous to suggest that spiritual oppression can be as bad as or worse than severe physical deprivation, but that was certainly the way I felt about it then. My hatred of Communism rivaled my hatred of Nazism and I was particularly infuriated by the fact that one was required to like it, too--an indignity that was spared us in the Nazi regime when Jews were not expected to be enthusiastic about their own persecution. Furthermore, I had learned from my experiences: no way was I going to stand there again with passive resignation while my

persecution got worse and worse like I did during the Nazi period. But resistance, or escape, or other active plotting, requires intense emotional involvement. This did have its after-effects on me and for several weeks or months after my arrival in Vienna I suffered from recurrent nightly nightmares with such regularity that I was virtually afraid to go to sleep. The details of the dream scenery varied but the essence was always the same: the AVO was after me, and I was desperately trying to escape their clutches. Childhood bugaboos were resurrected and I was battling AVO doctors trying to anesthetize me; they chased me through my old haunts in the neighborhood where I grew up, or in the school. Numerous times I awoke drenched in sweat and in abject terror. Sometimes it took minutes to calm down as I kept telling myself:

"These are just bad dreams. Now you are in Vienna!"

After many weeks the nightmares finally faded as I apparently worked out the residues of my trauma in my subconscious. It is a curious fact that after the liberation from the Nazis no such nightmares haunted me, perhaps because then I had never attempted to take my fate into my own hands.

### Vienna

The Rothschild Hospital on the corner of the Währinger Strasse and Währinger Gürtel in the 18th district of Vienna was a venerable institution of turn-of-the-century vintage, named after the banker family that endowed it. It once was one of the renowned health care centers in Central Europe. After the Nazi takeover it was of course expropriated; in 1945 it was restored to its former owners but at that point it was converted to a Holocaust survivor center and became eventually the informal headquarters of the Brikha operation with a kind of extraterritoriality granted to its residents. By the time I arrived in Vienna it was bursting at the seams with refugees from behind the Iron Curtain and it grew to include a number of satellite facilities in addition to the main camp on the former hospital premises. It was into one of these satellite camps that I was assigned upon checking in on February 4, 1950: a former school in the Arzbergergasse, with schoolrooms converted into emergency dormitories and a kitchen serving 3 basic meals daily.

In spite of the painfully primitive accommodations (the classrooms housed 25-30 persons apiece, mixed as to sex and age, with married couples trying to snatch some privacy with blankets hung up as curtains) I found life in Vienna exhilarating. There was a joyful reunion with old friends, and immediately on my first evening they took me out to the "Schmauswaberl" restaurant for a memorable meal to celebrate my arrival. It seemed that Vienna was swarming with fellow escapees from Budapest. Unfortunately I just missed two old friend couples who had left Vienna a week or two prior: Ervin and Marianne Fenyő were already on their way to Australia and Laci and Marzi Szilágyi had transferred their domicile to Salzburg. But many others were still there: Susan Domány, John Major, Anne Stricker, Julius Vajda, to name just a few. Valerie Kun (my "shipmate") was also in Vienna, having arrived there recently by some route of her own. So was Paul Steiner, an old professional associate and great admirer of my father, with his wife Vilma. The Steiners became my most important supporters and benefactors in Vienna although as recently arrived refugees from Hungary they themselves had extremely limited means. Otherwise, contact with other professional friends of my father who worked locally for the National Insurance Company in

Austria, a sister institution of the Foncière, or with Valerie and her husband in Switzerland, turned out to be disappointments. My father had high hopes for some of these contacts and virtually insisted that I call on them, but invariably I got the cold shoulder. Vienna was replete with refugees and caring for them individually was not high on the townspeople's agenda.

The first test came about a week after my arrival when our guide between Bratislava and Vienna, whom we had given up as lost en route, showed up at the Rothschild Hospital. He traced down our whereabouts and demanded the outstanding part of his fee. We thought that was a bad joke; I felt he should give us back the deposit he had already pocketed, for having exposed us to near-capture by the Czechoslovaks and actual capture by the Austrians. He had managed to get himself freed after a week or two of detention, finally made it across the border, and felt that we owed him the money--our own presence in Vienna being the decisive proof that his scheme was successful. The dispute actually came before a rabbinical court at the Rothschild Hospital where it was decided that we owed some, but not all, of the outstanding fee. Merely by bringing us to the border, the guide was said to have fulfilled a good part of his contract and was entitled to more than the down payment. My debt amounted to 1000 schillings (about US\$35)--a huge sum relative to my financial situation then. The Steiners paid out the money for me and were repaid years later when I was already in America.

Within a week or so after my arrival I accomplished registration with the International Refugee Organization (IRO), an agency of the United Nations. My IRO-ID card, the first official document I possessed in the free world, was stamped conspicuously:

"AFTER DEADLINE--LEGAL & POLITICAL PROTECTION ONLY"

which meant that I could not receive financial assistance of any sort. The IRO was originally set up as an organization for displaced persons of World War II and anyone not in refugee status on a certain date after conclusion of the war was not entitled to its support (although still protected from extradition or forceful repatriation). As a Jewish refugee I was fortunately under aegis of the Brikha and lack of IRO support, generally inferior to Rothschild Hospital facilities anyway, did not matter to me. To other refugees from across the Iron Curtain, however, the question was of great importance. Christian religious bodies, such as the Actio Catholica and the World Council of Churches also set up their charitable facilities but those were not remotely comparable to what the Jews had and being Jewish, for a change, entailed having a privileged and envied status.

One day in the Rothschild Hospital I ran into Rita, my Bratislava dream girl. She had arrived in Vienna some weeks before me; unfortunately it turned out that she had recently married. She and her husband were slated to emigrate to Israel shortly. I also made contact with Angelo Faas the sailor, in whose freighter I had been hidden for 3 days in December. He was laid off for the season and lived with his parents not too far from my quarters in the Arzberggasse. I gathered that it was pointless to ask him for a refund of the deposit he took from me. That was understood to have been forfeited but he and his parents, who were simple, well-meaning people, did invite me to a number of meals and other treats.

The most important encounter I had was with a fellow chemistry student at the University of Budapest with whom I used to be quite friendly and now

we became close buddies: Joe Kennedy. Joe, like myself, had an unfinished degree and we immediately resolved to join forces and explore the possibilities at the University of Vienna together.

Joe was in a little more favorable position than myself because he had an aunt and uncle with some means also sojourning in Vienna and could thus live privately. Unlike me, he also had his study passbook from the University of Budapest. I spent several hectic days with getting official translations of my individual attendance certificates from my several professors that I carried in place of my confiscated study passbook. Fortunately, when appropriate explanations were given, these translated certificates were accepted without demur and after the required petitions and interviews it seemed that there was no academic obstacle to our being accepted with advanced standing into the chemistry program at the University of Vienna. Bureaucratic hurdles remained; matriculation at the University for foreigners was contingent on a valid residence permit which as Brikha protégé one did not otherwise need and could only get if one had visible means of support. As a University student I could apply for a scholarship from the American Joint Distribution Committee (a Jewish charity organization known colloquially as the "Joint") but in order to establish eligibility one had to be matriculated first. Vicious circles of this sort were typical of the official life affecting refugees in Vienna and it took an awful lot of running around, explaining, and arguing to resolve successfully such "Catch 22" situations.

When all was accomplished and done, which took about 3 very busy weeks, I found myself in possession of an Austrian residence permit in addition to my IRO refugee status; a matriculated student of chemistry at the University of Vienna; and recipient of a Joint scholarship in the amount of 398 schillings per month. The residence permit allowed, but did not require, living privately off the Rothschild Hospital premises and as long as I chose to remain there anyway a sum of 170 schillings was deducted from my monthly stipend for room and board. The University of Vienna gave me credit for all classes that I had successfully attended in Budapest but imposed on me, as well as on Joe, one additional semester of advanced organic chemistry lab according to local requirements. Most important of all, the scholarship allowed me to live under relatively ordered circumstances while I studied and I remain forever grateful for the global solidarity of world Jewry, but mainly to the Jewish communities of the United States, for this generous support which I repaid manifold in the form of donations after I settled in the United States. The largesse of the Joint was in fact legendary and virtually all refugees coming from the east had heard of its existence. Not many understood the context from which the name was taken and some thought that the name "JOINT" was an acronym. Others assumed it to be French and pronounced it "Jo-Anne". In actual fact, the numerous Jewish charities of the United States got together and decided to pool funds so that needy European Jewry could be supported equitably from one source. Thus was born the "Joint Distribution Committee". I am not sure how my eligibility to receive support would have been affected by my past apostasy had I admitted it, but I didn't--in fact, once out of Hungary, my politico-emotional reasons for rapprochement with the Catholic Church had dwindled and I became quite a self-conscious Jew again, including even observance of the major holidays.

By the beginning of March, i.e. barely a month after arriving in Vienna, I had virtually all serious hurdles out of the way and could write my parents that I was coming along nicely. By previous agreement I also sent

them a phoney postcard asking for forgiveness for my treasonable act of escape and emphasizing that I had done that entirely on my own, without their knowledge and against their wishes and inclinations. I am uncertain whether my dad had actual opportunity to use that message from me in his own professional life but I understand that the postcard did get presented to the authorities when a huge bill containing the charges for my sustenance in the Miskolc jail had arrived, with demand for immediate payment.

The four-power status of Vienna meant that the city was nominally subdivided between the occupying armies. The northwestern parts including Währing, Döbling and Hernals were American; the districts of Hietzing and Meidling were British; Mariahilf and Ottakring were French; and the working class districts of Wieden and Favoriten, as well as the areas beyond the Danube Canal which included the Prater amusement park, Russian. The Inner City (first district) was "international", with a different occupying power presiding each month in rotation. To the Viennese, these subdivisions mattered little and in fact the occupiers did not meddle much in the municipal life of the city. We refugees of course initially swore that we would not care to be caught dead in the Russian sector and attempted to shun it like the plague. In time, however, this precaution turned out to be inconvenient and unnecessary. It was clearly impractical to avoid entering the Russian sector entirely and the experience was in fact commonplace and uneventful. I even had a fellow refugee friend, Adrienne Graul, who lived in a rented room in the Wieden district without any dire consequences.

Visiting the museums, palaces, and other tourist sights of Vienna was a delight. I became a regular at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Albertina, and at the reading rooms maintained by the Western occupation powers. My everyday life was about evenly divided between the Chemistry Laboratory of the University and my abode at the Arzberger school. Joe and I were accepted by fellow students and faculty with reasonable cordiality and we worked diligently. The chemistry curriculum at the University of Vienna differed from the one in Budapest only in minutiae and was more extensive in preparative organic chemistry which was the reason why this extra lab class was imposed on us. Upon completing it, we were to become eligible for the final examination.

I established good working relations with Professor Hromatka, chief of the lab and Dr. Kvasnicka, his first assistant. My bench neighbor in the lab was a lovely, effervescent Viennese girl, Beatrix (Trixi) Schorsch. Joe and Trixi and I frequently had lunch or refreshments together and we helped each other with the various experimental procedures as needed.

My roommates in the Arzberger dorm did their best to allow me opportunity to study but that of course turned out to be a difficult matter at best. Communal life in a mass dwelling develops according to its own rules and one becomes a member of the group. One amusing memory I have from the Arzberger refugee camp involved an issue of LIFE magazine that was making the rounds from hand to hand; the glossy, glamorous publication was a great and coveted treasure. As English speaker I was asked to translate and/or explain the articles. One feature dealt with the comparative incomes in various occupations. There was a tabulation with dollar figures in which the free professions such as medicine and law were near the top; engineering and business administration a bit lower; and school teaching or clerical work lower still (although, in comparison to European wages at the time, all incomes in America appeared to be fabulous). There must have been a

hundred different occupations listed with their average earnings in the United States, and the highest of them all was "industrial consultants". No one had any idea what sort of occupation that was or how one was to prepare for it, but all young men in the room promptly resolved that they wanted to become "industrial consultants". Many years later in life, after I had been retained by corporations such as Brush-Wellman or Owens-Corning to consult with them on matters within my expertise and even served for a while in consultant capacity as Chairman of the Toxicological Investigation Oversight Committee of General Motors Corporation, I recalled that LIFE article with a chuckle. It seems that I had become an "industrial consultant" after all. Too bad that it was only part time and I can't say that it had placed me anywhere near the top of the earnings pyramid.

A significant event some weeks after my arrival in Vienna was the arrival of Suzanne Muhr, my surrealist painter girlfriend. She could not join me in the ship venture and Salgótarján venture because of lack of funds, but she made it eventually through some adventurous route of her own. She got herself assigned to the same dorm room in the Arzberger facility where I was and we resumed friendly relations. I had just gotten my Joint scholarship award and Suzanne, being totally penniless, also expected to share in it.

Life with Suzanne turned out to be full of problems. She was a genuine bohemian constitutionally incapable of frugality or foresight. It is needless to say that the 228 schillings (about \$8) of spending money per month that was left after payment of my room and board required the greatest circumspection and prudence to break even. These sentiments were totally alien and even offensive to Suzanne. If any item in a shop window caught her fancy and she happened to have sufficient cash on her, she just made the purchase in total disregard of whether we could afford it or even had any use for it. The objects she acquired included an embroidered bookmark (we did not even own any books) and other such artsy-craftsy objects of perhaps attractive design but without even a place to put them. It was dangerous to let her carry any money and we had almost daily quarrels. We always made up in the end but our relationship was stressful.

One of the big excitements during my sojourn in Vienna involved my two border crossing partners George and Feri, and Suzanne. We all inhabited the same room in the Arzberger dorm, together with a couple of dozen other refugees among whom was an old schoolmate of mine, Matt Fehér. One day, a gold watch belonging to Feri vanished from his luggage. It was his one and only valuable possession and there was of course great consternation. Everyone in the room became involved in sleuthing, cabals were formed spying on each other, and sometime later George and Matt announced that they had sufficient evidence to make an open accusation. They took me aside for a confidential conference and told me that the thief was Suzanne. I was astounded and quite incredulous; I was firmly convinced that, for all her idiosyncrasies, such an act was totally out of character for her. As I listened to the "evidence" it became clear to me that it did not hold water. Not only was I personally aware of a convincing alibi for her during the time the theft must have been committed, there were other strange elements in the whole scenario and George tried a little too hard to fix suspicion on her. I protested in strongest possible terms, but it did no good. Matt, who had a strong personal dislike for Suzanne, was also convinced that she was the culprit and felt that a surprise announcement would catch her unawares and might produce an admission. I was prevented from giving her

a warning and a dramatic public accusation was made. Suzanne was totally bewildered; she simply refused to answer questions, to defend herself, or respond to the charge in any other way. In fact, she fell sick and stayed in bed all day. I felt that it was incumbent on me to do some investigating of my own, especially since I noted sudden and unexplained affluence of George himself--he said he had won some money in a card game. I attempted to trace down that card game and made a few inquiries to reconstruct George's movements on the day of the theft. It led me to a sleazy fencing operation on the shady fringes of the Rothschild Hospital dealing, among other things, in used watches. I had no longer any doubt that George was the real thief and indeed sometime later he was arrested by the Austrian police for involvement in another criminal activity. I don't know what became of him; Feri emigrated to Australia and still lives there to the best of my knowledge.

Suzanne of course recovered and regained the sympathy of her roommates. She was appreciative for my sticking up for her but she developed increasing contempt for my hopelessly philistine ways and eventually announced that she had had enough of it and was leaving Vienna for Paris. We parted on friendly terms and for a while we maintained postal contact. This petered out over the years but when I spent some time in Paris in connection with my NATO Senior Science Fellowship in 1973, I looked her up. She was still unmarried, no longer did any painting, and made her living by working as clerk in some government office. With the bloom of youth gone, Suzanne looked exactly like the eccentric she was: bizarrely dressed with too much makeup, multicolored hair, and wildly sculptured fingernails. She gave the impression of a character by Toulouse-Lautrec (an artist she could not stand by the way). We spent an interesting evening together but it was the last time we met.

About concurrently with Suzanne's departure from Vienna I moved out of the Arzberger premises. Not only was serious studying virtually impossible there, the location itself was quite unfavorable and if one added the virtually unavoidable streetcar fares, living there was not significantly cheaper than in well-chosen private premises. Again, Paul and Vilma Steiner were decisively helpful in my room hunting: they brought to my attention that their own landlady was willing to let another of her rooms and after the necessary negotiations a bargain was made and I moved in on April 15, 1950.

My new abode was in the Rathausgasse, an excellent address in an elegant area of the inner city and only one block from the main building of the University (although about a mile away from the chemistry laboratories). The reason why such a prime location was affordable to me was that the house was heavily damaged. It took a bomb hit during the war, and a corner of the building was caved in. The apartment of my landlady was astride the damaged area and traffic in it was difficult; actually, to rent the premises would have been pretty absurd for normal times but this was 1950, only five years after the war, and the city was swarming with refugees who had little money and needed a place to call home.

In the past, the apartment was obviously fashionable and elegant. The landlady, Nelly Stahl, was a well-known former actress who had obviously fallen on hard times and had to make do with the ruined remains of her formerly luxurious domain. She inhabited one room farthest away from the damaged area with a large menagerie of cats, and all other space in her apartment was sublet. Now that the winter was over it occurred to her that an additional

room next to the caved-in corner, itself considerably damaged, unheatable, and not rainproof, could perhaps also be rented to some unassuming student for the next several months. It was thus that I acquired an upper-class address in Vienna just 2 ½ months after my arrival there.

Actually, my room was comfortable. It had a good bed, table and chairs, and everything else I needed. One corner was off limits and furnished with various rain-catching devices under the caved-in part of the ceiling. Another slight disadvantage was that one had to navigate through the fully ruined area of the apartment in order to reach my room. The dwelling did have its slightly ridiculous aspects but I had a good sense of humor, and when the streetcar fares were factored in, the rent was hardly more than what it cost me to live in the Arzbergergasse.

Having to forgo the Arzberger meals was certainly no great loss and almost served as incentive to go private. I became a regular at the cheaper Viennese restaurants and developed great expertise in finding the good deals. There existed a chain of "Wiener Öffentliche Küchen" (WÖK) which offered reasonable fare but my favorite was Otto Kaserer ("O.K.") on the Kärntnerstrasse, a stand-up type fast food bar where one could get a genuine and excellent Wiener Schnitzel with potato salad for 3.50 schillings. Other good choices included the Ancora Verde and the Griechenbeisl in the inner city which in the meantime became quite touristy and expensive, but were affordable then, and very atmospheric. On the other hand, my worst meal in Vienna was a dish of pickled lungs (I believe of pork) at the Lugeck Café which I shall never forget. Another amusing recollection is a special celebration with a group of friends at the La Lanterna bistro when I decided to splurge and ordered as hors d'oeuvre an olive --an exotic item I had only heard of, but never tasted, before. It was served with appropriate flourish: a single ripe berry on a bed of ice in the middle of a large plate. I ate it with the necessary awe but concluded that the delicacy was not worth its price which was quite high.

Towards the end of April I met two sisters who were sojourning in Vienna, waiting for their emigration to the United States: Agnes and Anne Biró, 18 and 14 years old, respectively, and truly wonderful, warm persons. They were put across the Iron Curtain by their parents in a very elaborate scheme and were now expecting to join shortly their uncle in Rockford, Illinois, who was working on their immigration papers. We became fast friends, and having Agnes and Anne around me was like being in a cozy family environment. If there is such a thing as falling in love with two sisters together, I did it. Agnes and I became involved in a hot necking relationship but actually I had an equal crush on Anne also who was a bit on the young side but also exquisitely lovely. The Biró girls became my natural everyday companions for several weeks and when they left around the first week of June for another intermediate stop in Paris, they left a big void in my life.

The account of my Vienna days would not be complete without mentioning an idiotic and cruel joke that was played on me by some fellow refugees including, I am sorry to say, a Tapir who should have known better. A bogus long distance telephone call was staged at which a voice pretending to be Agnes in Paris told me how much she was missing me and that she just found out that if we got married right away I could shortly follow her to the United States. I was to come and join her in Paris as soon as possible, with French visa arrangements for me already in the works through her connections there. Would I be willing to go through with such a project?

Boy, was I ever. After the initial reaction of being totally flabbergasted, I became excited beyond description, counting the hours until I could be reunited with my sweetheart. In retrospect, it's hard for me to reconstruct how I managed to brush aside all the obvious improbabilities inherent in the scenario but I sure did it then, to the huge amusement of the perpetrators of the joke with whom I had daily contact in perfect innocence. No doubt my wishful thinking was a factor in the success of the hoax but, truly, the deception was elaborate. It involved cleverly faked telegrams and mail delivered by "diplomatic courier"; the long-distance telephone calls were accompanied by "line disturbances" suitable to make the recognition of voice difficult. All in all, I fell for the fraud lock, stock and barrel. For several days I lived in a dream world, checking twice daily at the French consulate to see whether my "visa authorization" had arrived. The fact that my emigration would also be solved in one fell swoop, and to the United States, no less, was perceived as a highly welcome fringe benefit but the main thing was that my true love would marry me, and I could not wait. When the dream scheme began to fall apart after several days I was disconsolate, and of course furious. Even the perpetrators of the joke could see that the matter had been carried too far. The principal originator, Peter Ambrus, had left Vienna before the whole thing unraveled and he never faced me again.

Worst part of the situation was that, while Agnes's supposed messages to me were phoney, my enthusiastic replies to her were very genuine, and sent through regular channels. She was obviously quite nonplussed at receiving them. I had quite a bit of explaining to do when the hoax was uncovered, and of course I must have appeared to her as a fool of fools. We maintained postal contact for a while. In late 1950 the two sisters emigrated to the United States and I lost track of them.

### Salzburg

An important world event occurred on June 25, 1950: outbreak of the Korean War. It was the first armed confrontation between the democracies and the Communists, and to many of us it seemed as the prelude to World War III. To be sure, the Soviet Union staged an immense propaganda campaign to keep the conflict localized: the war was characterized in the leftist press as an internal affair of the Koreans and "HANDS OFF KOREA" became the slogan of the day. It was screaming from newspaper headlines of the Communist dailies, from immense neon signs erected on Soviet-owned buildings in the city, and some refugees who had talked on the telephone with parties in Hungary said that Hungarian long distance operators reported on the line with "Hands Off Korea" instead of "Hello". The objective was, of course, to create pressure that would keep the Western allies from getting involved. The Communist strategic planners figured that armies on hand in North Korea could finish off the South Koreans as long as the latter did not receive aid from the outside.

Involvement of the United Nations thwarted these plans and for a while the international situation looked tense, with the soil in Vienna for us refugees getting hot. If hostilities became generalized, Vienna like Berlin could become a trap from which there would be no way out. The local refugee community redoubled its efforts to proceed further westbound and the Rothschild Hospital facilities were to be gradually phased out. The frontier

fortifications on the Austro-Czechoslovak border which we saw a-building on our way from Bratislava were by now functional and the stream of refugees arriving in Vienna was reduced to a trickle. The whole Brikha operation was in a state of slow dissolution and everyone was encouraged to sign up for "safe" transports across the Soviet zone to the Western-occupied parts of Austria. In spite of the relatively well-ordered situation in which I was living in Vienna with my Joint scholarship and university student status, it was clearly time to move. I decided to join in the exodus.

The bus transport to which I became assigned was scheduled for August 23, 1950, giving me some time to wind up my affairs. I concluded my lab class in organic chemistry with a passing grade, received some last-minute assistance from Jewish welfare organizations to help me meet the inevitable relocation expenses, and boarded the transport bus with a respectable-sized travel suitcase--I looked with satisfaction on how my belongings had grown since my arrival in the West with a puny attaché case. Where exactly I was going remained uncertain. The transport bus just carried us across the zone boundary to the town of Steyr; from there, we were on our own. I planned to visit my friends the Szilágyis in Salzburg but wanted to end up eventually in a major university town of Western Europe, hopefully Paris. I also wished to stop in Munich to explore possibilities. A close friend, John Spitzer, was winding up his medical studies there.

I can remember the anxious moments at the Russian-American zone boundary at the Enns river. Two Russian officers boarded the bus with the manifest of passengers in hand and checked each person against the typed list of names. The silence in the bus was so complete that the creaking of the officers' boots could be heard as they stepped from seat to seat. We all presented our ID cards; each of us was scrutinized suspiciously. Finally, the two officers left the bus and we rumbled across the bridge. I looked at my watch; it was 4:13 P.M. on August 23, 1950. I noted the time in my pocket calendar that I still have. At the American checkpoint at the other end of the bridge the guards waved us on without checking. It was thus that I finally and irrevocably left the Soviet-occupied part of Europe behind me.

The Joint had a facility in Steyr for transients, where one could get a meal and bed, and I spent the evening exploring the town. Being that close to the haunts of my deportation and liberation did bring back memories--the zone boundary was the same Enns river which we crossed on the death march from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen. I resolved to proceed to Salzburg the slow way and visit some of the memorable sites en route. Next morning I took the train to Linz and walked out to the Haag Flaksiedlung where I used to have my post-liberation abode next to the American tank battalion. Things have changed; the U.S. soldiers were of course gone and so was the old farmer couple in whose barn I had my dwelling. By noon I continued to Wels and alighted there in a small hotel. In the afternoon I took the bus to Gunskirchen. It was amazing how bucolic and peaceful this place had become which for me was a vale of horror full of awful memories. I had no difficulty in finding the site of our concentration camp--a bare and blackened clearing in the bush off the road. Not one structure was left standing, nor was there any memorial for the thousands of bodies buried there. I also located the very spot where the first American I encountered gave me my first bite of bread and gulp of milk. It was a moving odyssey. I walked back to the city of Wels the same route we took on the night of our liberation.

I located the Alpenjägerkaserne, the former Nazi party head-quarters, and many other memorable spots. Next morning I took the train to Salzburg.

Laci Szilágyi met me at the railroad station in Salzburg (I indicated my arrival by postcard from Steyr) and helped me get settled. There was a big refugee camp in Hallein, about ½ hour bus ride from the center of the city. With my IRO card I was basically eligible to stay there and Laci had two friends occupying a fairly comfortable apartment in the camp. It was arranged that they take me in as a third for a limited period and I stayed there for 10 days. The Szilágyis themselves were in the fever of last-minute preparations for their own emigration to Australia; they were to depart for the port city of Genova in a few days. Nonetheless, our reunion (about 11 months after our last joint adventure at Devinská Nová Ves) was joyful and I spent virtually all my time with them. They gave me, in daily installments, the Grand Tour of the city of Salzburg and environs which was doubtless the most delightful and enjoyable tourist experience since my childhood visit to Venice. I was quite enchanted with the beauty of the town; the Music Festival was in full swing and the place was jammed with the societal cream of the world. Five years after conclusion of the war, Western Europe was beginning to return to its former pattern of prosperity. I was fascinated by the ambience of luxury and elegance. Of course, attending a musical event, much as I would have loved it, was ludicrously beyond our means but we managed by subterfuge to see the open-air drama presentation on Cathedral Square by sneaking into the Bishop's Palace beforehand and watching the performance from a second-floor window. The piece played was "Jedermann" [Everyman], the medieval mystery play rewritten by Hugo von Hoffmansthal and staged by Max Reinhardt. It used to be the trademark of the Salzburg Festival before the Nazi occupation and was to become that again. The dramatic touches of reverberating calls from the Cathedral steeple and castle turret, accompanied by stunning lighting effects, were memorable and probably better visible from where we sat than from the regular rows.

Crossing into Germany from the Hallein refugee camp was no big deal. The way it was done was, first, to send one's suitcases by train to Munich as unaccompanied luggage, for which one needed no permit or documentation at all. Then, one applied at the local police station for a weekend excursion pass to Bad Reichenhall just across the international border. If one could show permanent residence in the Salzburg area (such as registration in the refugee camp), the pass was given without demur. Once in Bad Reichenhall, one simply boarded the Munich train and took possession of the pre-dispatched luggage there. It was all very simple (especially for refugees accustomed to far tougher borders) and by following this procedure during the weekend of September 2-3, 1950, I duly arrived in Munich.

### Munich

The city presented a sad sight. It was far more destroyed than Vienna and even more than Budapest. There was no significant ground fighting in Munich but the Allied air raids did a very thorough job. As I walked from the main railroad station to my friend John Spitzer's abode beyond the Isar river, I had to cross immense fields of debris in the inner city and although new building was in progress in numerous places, the overall picture was very depressing. I arrived on a Sunday morning, with scarce activity on the streets and most traffic consisting of jeeps driven by American soldiers at breakneck speed. Outward signs of military occupation were a bit more ostensible than in Vienna and for instance at the Isartor city gate, which

is at an angle to the afferent road axis, there was an immense warning sign in English:

DEATH IS SO PERMANENT--DRIVE CAREFULLY!
---

I found John's address in the Brahmsstrasse with relative ease and he greeted me with the accustomed cordiality. He had a tiny sublet room in a small apartment and in addition to his couch he also had a collapsible field bed there. It was arranged with his landlady that I could stay for a few days. John accompanied me back to the railroad station where I took possession of my luggage, and I moved in.

John gave me a capsule summary of the refugee situation in Munich. The place was swarming with Holocaust survivors and other displaced persons, some freshly arrived from the east like ourselves, and now classified as "double-persecuted" (i.e., by the Communists as well as the Nazis), but the great majority lingering there since 1945, waiting for an opportunity to emigrate, or to complete studies, or for some other reason. The IRO and/or the Joint provided basic support and John foresaw no difficulties for me to regularize my presence and join the ranks. He was himself a last-year medical student at the University of Munich on a Joint scholarship similar to that which I had in Vienna.

The refugee picture in Munich also had its shady side. Among the long-term sojourners the "blatnik" element (i.e., those who could not successfully overcome the concentration camp mentality with everyone ruthlessly for himself) predominated, and tales of corruption, embezzlement, and other misuse of funds in all organizations, down to the Jewish University Students' Association, were rampant. There was also a highly visible and very unsavory black market: the Möhlstrasse, a street in a formerly elegant neighborhood of Munich, which now was virtually taken over by criminal or semi-criminal types. American canned food and cigarettes illegally obtained from GI supplies were openly displayed in shop windows and it was hardly possible to walk through that street without being continually accosted with offers of all sorts of other contraband merchandise. Public opinion in Munich, nurtured on too many years of Nazi propaganda, usually took it for granted that the Möhlstrasse was entirely populated by Jews but it is a fact that among the sleaziest wheeler-dealers other "DP"-s, including specifically the Hungarian Arrow Cross, were also well represented.

Initially, I regarded my sojourn in Munich as temporary. I wanted no part of getting mixed up in this sort of environment again and my vague objective was to reach a University city outside of the refugee belt of Central Europe, such as Paris or Brussels. In Munich, I only wanted to find out about the ways and means of getting to these places but as long as I was there it made sense at least to explore the university situation for comparison. According to John, the University of Munich was where acknowledgment of foreign credits was easiest, the prospects for finishing early and the outlook for financial support while one was doing it, the best.

I inquired at the University and found out that all matters pertaining to the chemistry program such as admission, acknowledgment of foreign credits, graduation requirements, and virtually everything else was up to

the judgment of one man and one man alone: the Geheimrat Wieland. He was a Nobel laureate organic chemist with whose fame and accomplishments I was well familiar. He also managed to avoid getting mixed up with the Nazis and was now a person of good standing with the occupation authorities. With these credentials he became a virtual god at the University of Munich: what he said or opined was undisputed law. When I presented my problem at the registrar's office I was immediately referred to him and just a few days after my arrival in Munich I had an appointment with the god.

The "Geheimrat" expression translates to Privy Counselor that must not be understood literally. It had nothing to do with either privacy or counseling. It was a title conferred for distinction in one's professional field like the knighthood in Britain. The Geheimrat Wieland turned out to be a dignified and awe-inspiring gentleman in his 70-s who listened to my presentation sympathetically. He took a cursory look at my certificates from Budapest, recognized some of the signatures as belonging to colleagues he knew personally, and chatted with me about the politico-scientific situation at the University of Budapest. He dismissed me with a small handwritten note addressed to the Registrar, instructing him that all of my foreign credits from the Universities of Budapest and Vienna were to be fully accepted. The one additional requirement imposed on me was a semester of physical chemistry lab that I had left unfinished in Budapest. Following that, I was to become eligible for the final examination and thesis work.

I had to regard the outcome of my interview with the Geheimrat as exceedingly favorable. There were predictions that he might raise difficulties; lab space in chemistry was scarce and the University was not keen on accepting foreigners into this particular program. However, he might have found my story of how my academic passbook became confiscated and how I collected the individual certifications he saw as interesting, and he fully agreed that the Lysenko situation was in itself sufficient grounds to flee from Hungary at almost any cost. It was clear that not to take advantage of his admission decision would be sheer foolishness. When it also developed that no difficulties were to be expected with transfer of my Joint scholarship from Vienna to Munich, the basic decision was made: I was going to settle in Munich.

One formidable problem remained: housing. With much of the city still in ruins and with a large influx of refugees from the east, living space in town was at a premium. The official "Wohnungsamt" [Housing Authority] was an ineffectual outfit with immense waiting lists and delays of months or years. Private agencies existed but were mostly of the shady variety: commission had to be paid up front for a list of addresses that turned out to be either unsuitable or already taken by the time one got there. After one week of totally unsuccessful room hunting I was near despair when I ran into a fellow refugee whom I used to know in Budapest and also met in Košice: Otto Roboz. He was a man about 15 years my senior, single, and living in a sublet room at a rental rate he would have liked to share with someone. Before long we were in negotiations with his landlady, had a deal, and as of mid-September 1950 I had a steady Munich address: Schleissheimerstrasse 117, c/o Nömer.

My new room was superior to the one in Vienna in that it was undamaged and heatable, although in a far less elegant section of town. Otto turned out to be a reasonable and unobjectionable roommate. Our landlords the Nömers were simple country folk from lower Bavaria and I have particular

recollection of a joint outing to which they treated me on the first Sunday after I moved in: the Oktoberfest. We sat in the immense Löwenbräu tent, listened to oompah music, and quaffed beer by the "Mass" [quart stein]. It was certainly an appropriate introduction to Munich. Mrs. Nömer could develop quite a sense of humor after she loosened up a bit and when I asked, conversationally, why is this festival called Oktoberfest even though it is held in September, she answered with a mock nudge at her husband:

"Do schaug'her. Kaum zug'reest und kann scho' g'nau so saublöd dohi'frag'n wia a Preiss."

[Look at him. He barely arrived and can already ask stupid questions fit for a Prussian.]

Other than the temporary feature of the Oktoberfest, the attractions of Munich were not easily accessible. Most of the famous public buildings such as the Maximilianeum, the Opera House, or the Pinakothek Museum were in complete ruins, with a minuscule part of the latter's collection exhibited in an undamaged wing of the Haus der Kunst. Also undamaged was the former "Führerhaus" on the Königsplatz (Hitler's Munich offices), now renamed "Amerikahaus", open to the public, and housing an excellent library and documentation center where I was a frequent patron. Sadly, the chemistry laboratory of the University was also destroyed and operations of the chemistry program were squeezed together with biology in barely adequate quarters. It was indeed a privilege to have been offered a bench in the physical chemistry lab there. I earned my credits in that subject by the end of the winter term.

Our abode at the Nömers turned out to be temporary. Soon after my moving in, the City Housing Administration claimed the space and allotted it to another party with priority. We were required to vacate by the first of November. Otto found a job with the IRO in Bad Aibling and moved away from Munich; I, however, was back to square one with respect to room hunting and in the middle of the semester, too, when I could least afford to get involved with such time-wasting activities.

According to an old proverb, where need is greatest deliverance is closest, and just a day or two before the deadline I had my lodging problem ingeniously solved by a lucky break. There existed a Jewish Hospital in the Bogenhausen district of Munich, where numerous last-year medical students of the refugee community lived and worked as interns or quasi-interns. The Director of the hospital, a Polish Holocaust-survivor by the name of Dr. Osterweil, had a reputation of being a decent and helpful soul and my friend John Spitzer came up with the idea that under the circumstances it might be worth while to talk to him. I went to call on him, explained my predicament, and received prompt permission to move in and share a room with the hospital pharmacist. Nominally, I was to spend some time in the hospital lab as trainee, in order to provide justification for having lodging on the premises.

That was good news. My new roommate, Dr. Deutsch, was a Hungarian-speaking pharmacist from Rumania in his 30's with whom I got along well. Our room was reasonably comfortable and well heated. Above all, it was free. My Joint scholarship, refigured in West German currency, was DM

100 monthly and not having to pay about a third of it for room made a big difference.

The Jewish Hospital of Bogenhausen also had certain shortcomings, none of which however needed to concern me. Although it was abundantly staffed, the professional qualifications of some staff members were somewhat questionable. In the refugee community of the early postwar years it was obviously not possible to insist on documentation of educational claims in every instance and some of the doctors in the hospital could have used a refresher course in medicine. Also, it did not take me long to discover that the medical technologist of the hospital lab, a Sudeten-German girl by the name of Zita Wania, did not have the first inklings of clinical chemistry. She survived somehow in her work by literal adherence to every word in the instruction manual without having the slightest idea of what she was doing. Of course, it was inevitable that she would make naïve mistakes every now and then and when she realized that I was aware of those she became quite hostile to me. Instead of listening to some instructive comments which I offered in good faith, she let me know in no uncertain terms that, trainee or not, my presence in the lab was not desired. Since I was quite busy at the University anyway and visited the hospital lab only as a courtesy in return for my lodging, that was just as well as far as I was concerned.

A sensational new development occurred in December 1950: I was offered a job with the Joint. They had a big warehouse in Schleissheim, a northern suburb of Munich, and an opening occurred on the night watchman staff of that establishment which I was invited to fill. I owed this opportunity to my friend John Spitzer who had recently taken a similar job there and recommended me to the management.

The job required being on duty every other night from 6 P.M. to 8 A.M. with two 3-hour rest periods, and during the day as well on selected weekends. The guarding consisted of walking around the warehouse with a loaded rifle on one's shoulder. The warehouse was a converted hangar on a former military airfield about a ½-hour train ride from the center of Munich. It was filled with boxes upon boxes of provisions of various kinds including clothing, canned goods, cartons of cigarettes, and other such items of considerable value in post-war Germany. It was the central warehouse of Joint supplies for all of Europe and guarding it with highly visible firepower was an obvious necessity. Some of the merchandise found its way to the Möhlstrasse nonetheless but that was through administrative embezzlements rather than through outright robbery. During my sojourn in Munich there was no burglary of the premises and our service as night guards was on the whole uneventful.

The duty was more strenuous than one thought from the job description. Walking around for hours on end on cold winter nights was no picnic and the 3-hour rest periods were too much for just relaxing and not enough for getting a good sleep. We pleaded with the management to allow us to accumulate rest periods to one 6-hour stretch but it was refused. They cited some physiological study allegedly showing that 3-hour rest was sufficient for the complete refreshment of the senses. The result was a chronic sleep deficit and frequently during the day, I walked around like a zombie and more than once I fell asleep on my lab stool at the University.

However, the pay was fabulous. A night watchman earned DM 280 per month or almost three times the amount of my scholarship. Such a jump in one's living standard was of course impossible to resist and after only 9 months

of depending on charity following my arrival in the West, and before I actually concluded my university studies, I became self-supporting. That also meant that I could no longer stay in the hospital. I spent much of the Christmas season with room hunting, fortunately this time with a little more money to spend, and by January 1951 I moved into a room in the Giesing district of Munich, one of the old and relatively little damaged areas of town on the right bank of the Isar. My new address, and the first unshared abode I possessed in Munich, was Aignerstrasse 8, c/o Schmidtner.

My landlady, Mrs. Schmidtner, was a jolly old soul and almost a caricature example of the Munich townslady. She was a widow in her 50-s, rather stout, who liked to wear woolen suits of masculine cut, no-nonsense shoes, and invariably a green hat with a big feather. We established good relations and eventually Mrs. Schmidtner developed almost motherly solicitude towards me, insisting on keeping my wardrobe in good repair as a free service and checking me out for proper sartorial decorum daily before I left the house. I reciprocated by bringing her occasional treats from her favorite pastry shop and we became quite friendly. It was during my stay at Mrs. Schmidtner's that I had successfully concluded the laboratory course in physical chemistry and thus established eligibility to sit for my Final Examination, to be followed by thesis work. The latter took anywhere from ½ to 1½ years to complete and led to a Diploma of Chemistry. Alternately, one could also start a dissertation and earn in 3-5 years a Ph.D. Both of these options required the completion of publishable original work, for which one needed a research topic with an advising professor and space in his lab to do it. I was beginning to look around for such prospects while I also crammed for the final, which I wished to attempt sometime in the summer.

Just like in Vienna, my circumstances required gaining familiarity with the bargain eating places of Munich. Restaurant prices were generally higher than in Austria and it took about DM 2.00 with tax and tip to get a decent menu with a small beer (obligatory just about anywhere) at a place like the Ratskeller. If funds were low, a marginally reasonable meal called "Künstleressen" [Artist's fare] could be had in the restaurant of the Haus der Kunst, for DM 0.80. Once a week, John Spitzer, Andrew Brandstein and I (we formed a kind of triumvirate in the refugee student society of Munich until they emigrated in mid-1951) splurged and ate a somewhat more luxurious meal at the Torbräu Restaurant in the DM 3.00-4.00 range.

Obviously, the irregular sleep schedules required by my night watchman's job made serious studying difficult and so I was overjoyed when in March 1951 another job opportunity opened up for me through the good offices of my former roommate, Otto Roboz.

#### Bad Aibling

The IRO had its "Children's Village" in the town of Bad Aibling, a subalpine spa about 30 miles southeast of Munich (the prefix "Bad" means Spa in German). Otto had been the Jewish chaplain of the Children's Village since the fall and he now notified me that a position for a high school teacher had become vacant and he suggested that I apply for it. I did, and to make a long story short I got the job, resigned my position as night watchman, moved to Bad Aibling, and by March 15, 1951 I started teaching at the IRO Children's Village High School. The job paid DM 250 monthly, or a little

less than my former job but it included a room on the premises and opportunity for frequent free trips to Munich.

The Children's Village turned out to be a strange establishment. It was founded after the war for the care of orphaned and abandoned or otherwise displaced children in Europe, in order to organize their adoption and emigration and to provide them with sustenance and education in the meantime. Six years after the war's end most of the original inmates were already gone or grew out of childhood, but the ranks were replenished by refugees from the east, many of whom were not truly orphaned or abandoned but pretended to be in order to take advantage of the better living conditions the village offered in comparison to the adult refugee camps. Eligibility extended to age 20, but of course ID papers could be lost or gotten rid of and it seemed that some "children" were not too far in age from myself, who was at that time 26.

The staffing of the Children's Village was no less curious. Neither Otto as chaplain nor myself as high school teacher had proper professional credentials for our jobs, respectively, and it seemed that this was par for the course for the entire staff. The Director of the village, a Belgian gentleman by the name of Mr. Heuvelmans, materialized infrequently and was a rare presence on the premises. His deputy, Dr. Huth, a local German with a highly questionable personal history during the Nazi period, was in actual charge of day-to-day operations. He was cloyingly fawning to Otto and me (the only Jews on the staff) but we were aware that he dropped prejudiced remarks behind our backs and frequently plotted to our disadvantage. He supervised the various "house parents" (supervisors of dorms) and the school principal. The latter was Mr. Iwanski, A Polish-American who was amazingly uneducated for an educator and in my judgment almost certainly not a genuine high school graduate himself, at least in the traditional European sense. I reported to him.

Naturally, I assumed that I would be teaching science, but that was not to be. The school already had a science teacher (not a scientist, of course) and my classes turned out to be English and mathematics. I was quite taken aback by these assignments: mathematics was never my strong suit and, needless to say, my English proficiency then was not what it is today. I was reassured not to worry about these things. Indeed, it seemed that, in comparison to some other teachers in the school, I was superbly qualified to teach even English and math. However, my strangest assignment was to teach piano. The village never had music instruction before but they had a piano, and when they realized from my résumé that I had some background in that respect they insisted that I take that up as an additional assignment. Doubtless they figured it would add to the glamour of their annual report. Mr. Iwanski's concept was that I should be giving piano lessons to a class of 15 or 20 students together daily, or even twice daily--whenever they had open periods in their schedules. The idea of individual practicing requirements did not occur to him at all. He became quite annoyed when I told him that piano instruction could not be given the way he envisioned it--we had a drawn-out argument and we finally compromised. I could take two students at a time in turns, while the rest of the class watched. To keep them occupied in some way was the overriding requirement and generally the whole philosophy of the school was more heavily weighted on the side of babysitting than on genuine education.

There were no class programs, textbooks, or progression criteria from grade to grade. The teachers were entirely on their own with respect to content as well as method. Homework was frowned upon because it involved giving the children pencil and paper which was an invitation to mischief and which they would lose anyway. Generally, the High School of the IRO Children's Village was not too far from being a total farce. That of course was perfectly all right with the children themselves, or at least most of them. Among the old timers for whom the Children's Village was originally created, only the hard core remained --i.e. those hardest to place with foster parents abroad. They were a wild, uncivilized bunch. Among the later additions there were some nice kids but frequently demoralized by the former element. Most of the teenage girls were openly and sometimes brazenly seductive.

My first scheduled class, perhaps as a break-in assignment, was teaching mathematics to some of the toughest elements in the village. They were a group of "teenage" boys, but many obviously past 20. My romantic notions of teaching algebra and geometry in a well-ordered class environment dissipated fast. First of all, it took a good week or two, with all the psychological tricks I could think of, even to gain their acceptance--it was clear from day one that with this bunch the traditional teacher-student relationship based on respect and discipline would never work. I had to become their "friend". When we finally established some rapport it developed that these kids could hardly add and sub-tract; the "high school mathematics" that I ended up teaching was at the level of the multiplication table. Even that was possible only after I succeeded, by a lucky break, to get rid of the worst troublemaker in the class. He was a Ukrainian boy of about 18, nicknamed "Tarzan" because he was a genuine savage. Actually, he was probably a psychopath. One day I called on him to do some exercises on the blackboard and when I attempted to correct some of his figures he personally assaulted me in seething fury and actually tore the shirt off my chest. Characteristically, the outcome of the affair was the mildest reprimand for Tarzan and refusal of reimbursement of the torn shirt for me. He was not even taken out of my class. A few days later Tarzan got in trouble with the Bad Aibling police and jailed. Except for this coincidence, I probably would never have gotten rid of him at all.

My frustrations as teacher in Bad Aibling were numerous and my successes few and far between. Among the latter I must count a cute 15-year old Lithuanian girl by the unlikely name of Florida Stonkuta. She turned out to be quite musical and progressed to the point of being able to give a modest recital at the end of the school year. Another educational success was a group of Czech boys in their late teens slated for early emigration to the United States whom I had in an English class. First, gaining their cooperation was difficult. They ignored me totally, or pretended not to understand German and answered me in Czech. After the initial struggles which required super patience and sense of humor, I could prevail by appealing to their own self-interest in learning the language of the land they were to live in, and we started to make some progress. In the end, we became friends and I was appointed to serve as the escort person who took them to Munich for their emigration proceedings and eventual departure.

An amusing episode that sheds some light on the general cultural level of the teaching staff in Bad Aibling was during a lunch break in the village cafeteria. I was sitting with Mr. Iwanski, my principal, when the mail was brought in. I had a postcard from my friend John Spitzer who was already

on his way to emigrate to Canada, and was about to embark shortly in an Italian port. He had the opportunity to make a side trip to Rome and the card he sent me showed the classic view of the Roman Forum, with the ruins of the palace of the Vestal Virgins, the characteristic three columns of the temple of Castor and Pollux, the arch of Septimius Severus, and so forth. It was the picture customarily adorning virtually every book on ancient history or Latin grammar. When Mr. Iwanski saw the picture he shook his head in startled dismay.

"Omygosh" said he. "I did not realize that Rome was that badly damaged during the war!"

I remained on the teaching staff of the Children's Village until August 31, 1951, when the facility was dissolved. It was about time; the number of children in the village had diminished from about 300 when I came to less than 100 in the course of 6 months, through aging or emigration. The staff numbered at least twice the latter figure. During the first few weeks of my employment I formulated enthusiastic class projects for the true education of my students but these for the most part remained unrealized. The children lacked the background as well as the motivation. Attendance was on the whole erratic and Mr. Iwanski frequently combined, redistributed, or otherwise broke up the classes according to contingencies created by the diminishing numbers, and in complete disregard for any degree of continuity. Babysitting with some disjointed exercises or storytelling during each period was the only realistic way of handling classes and eventually I had no choice but to conform to the general pattern. At least it gave me time to study, and soon after my departure from Bad Aibling I passed the Final Examination in Chemistry with a grade of "befriedigend" [halfway between good and satisfactory]. I could now commence thesis work; but before I get into the account of that, it is high time to pay attention to a progression of concurrent events of highest personal significance.

## C H A P T E R   T H I R T E E N

-----  
M A R R I A G E

HINDSIGHT is difficult to avoid when one writes about events of 40 years ago, especially if dealing with such a sensitive subject as a marriage which ended in the midst of tragic disease 23 years later. Nonetheless, I shall make a conscientious effort to express my feelings as they were then. I am being aided in this endeavor by the preservation of my personal notebooks and the complete correspondence files between my parents and me for the pertinent years.

The very idea of getting married in my situation as it was in 1951 must have appeared preposterous, and I was aware of it. I was a virtual vagabond with no funds, no finished education, no fixed abode, not even a recognized citizenship; and virtually no means to rear, shelter, and feed a family. In spite of all this, the Agnes Biró episode in Vienna demonstrated that I was emotionally ready to get married. I can only explain it by my total confidence that my existential drawbacks were temporary. I was looking into the future with a great deal of optimism and I was positively craving the warmth of the nest. It was clear that, once I found a suitable and willing partner, the developments that were likely to follow could well become unstoppable.

The Courtship

On Saturday, November 4, 1950, i.e. only a few days after I had moved into the Hospital Bogenhausen, my roommate Dr. Deutsch the pharmacist asked me casually if I cared to join him and his date that night to go to the movies. His date was Zita Wania, the medical technologist, and she wished to bring her roommate along which gave Dr. Deutsch the idea that he might do likewise. Zita's roommate turned out to be Dr. Elizabeth Hanak, who in spite of her degree was then performing secretarial function in the hospital. Medicine had become a hopelessly overcrowded profession in post-war Germany--the needs of the war caused too many people to enter this field in the early 1940's and when the war ended it became hard for young doctors to find a civilian position in medicine. Dr. Osterweil, Director of the hospital, took advantage of this situation by employing a "medical secretary" (i.e., an M.D. doing secretarial work) in addition to the "administrative secretary" in his office. I had nodding acquaintance with Dr. Hanak already since I had to pass by her desk when I had my interview with Dr. Osterweil.

The movie we saw was "The Four Feathers", an English adventure story with Ralph Richardson. It was a pleasant evening and I found Dr. Hanak sufficiently attractive to ask her a few days later to join me at a scientific symposium at the Deutsches Museum (the famous collection of science and technology on the Isar island in Munich), held there to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the institution. Max von Laue, Werner Heisenberg, and other such luminaries were among the speakers. Dr. Hanak accepted, and we enjoyed

the symposium very much. It turned out to be her birthday, and on the way home I insisted that we celebrate with a drink in a small bistro.

I found out that Dr. Elizabeth Hanak was from the Czechoslovak industrial town of Moravská Ostrava, as was Zita Wania. The two women were in fact girlhood friends. Somewhat to my surprise I also realized that both were Gentiles. I had automatically assumed that employees at the Jewish Hospital in Munich would be Jewish but that was not necessarily so. "Ethnic" expellees from the east also existed in the refugee community of West Germany and in spite of their Slavic-sounding names, both Dr. Hanak and Miss Wania were raised in the German language in Czechoslovakia, were therefore identified as ethnic Germans after the war, and expelled. Dr. Hanak's parents lived in Hollstadt, a small village in northern Franconia. I also learned that Dr. Hanak was engaged to be married. Her fiancé lived in Graz.

Nonetheless, some days later Dr. Hanak returned my invitation and asked me to join her and a group of friends on a car trip to Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Some acquaintances of hers who owned an automobile were planning to drive down one Sunday; Zita and her new date Dr. Herman Aub were in the party; and there was room for one more person. I jumped at the opportunity. Not only was I enthusiastically interested in the sightseeing aspects of the trip but the invitation also seemed to signal the development of a certain rapport between Elizabeth and me that I found most welcome.

The Garmisch-Partenkirchen excursion was a mixed success. The touristic features were enjoyable; we visited the Eibsee, the Olympic ski jump stadium, and made a wonderful foray into the Partnachklamm gorge which was unquestionably the most exciting piece of alpine scenery that I had seen up to then. On the other hand, my fond hopes for romantic excitement remained unfulfilled. Elizabeth and I had barely opportunity to talk. Zita virtually monopolized her attention, speaking to her mostly in Czech which the rest of us did not understand. The couple who owned the automobile kept pretty much to themselves and I was for the most part reduced to chatting with Dr. Aub who was a nice enough chap but certainly not the reason why I was looking forward to this trip. As a crowning disaster, I became carsick on the way home. There was no denying that, as a romantic diversion, the whole event was a nonstarter.

During subsequent weeks, my attempts to get a date with Liesl (as Elizabeth was affectionately called) or even only to meet her by herself, were mostly struggles to pry her loose from Zita. The two women had an exceptionally close relationship that was, it seemed, exploited by Zita who clearly called all the shots. Gradually I became aware that she was actively campaigning against me, badmouthing me behind my back, and plotting to make Liesl unavailable for dates. Whether this was a protective maneuver to keep Liesl's engagement unsullied, or another expression of the professional hostility she had developed towards me in the meantime, remained uncertain. A third and very real possibility was that Zita's attachment to Liesl had a Lesbian element. Zita was an intense, high-strung, scheming person whose interest in men did not much extend beyond winning their affection, and who changed boyfriends almost weekly. She attempted to influence Liesl in that direction also and when she realized that a courtship from me would interfere with that attempt, she became quite furious. Once, in the privacy of their room, she physically assaulted Liesl and bit her in the neck like a vampire. Liesl registered these happenings in innocent and bewildered consternation and gradually understood that her best course was to steer clear of Zita.

If Liesl had her evil spirit in the person of Zita, she also had her guardian angel, so to speak, in the person of Mrs. Wolfertshofer, the other secretary in Dr. Osterweil's outer office who became Liesl's confidante and who was a levelheaded and kind person. Mrs. Wolfertshofer took a dim view of Zita's domineering relationship with Liesl and it seemed that she did not think much of Liesl's so-called engagement, either. The latter was without a doubt a strange relationship. The fiancé, Hans Mariacher, had been a fellow student at the University of Prague during the war with whom Liesl had developed a relationship hardly more than a youthful romance. Hans was eventually called up in the German army and just before he was taken to the front, they had a typical wartime engagement. Hans fell into Russian captivity; was released only in 1948; and settled at that point in Graz, Austria, where his mother held some real estate. Liesl and Hans had met only a few times after the war, all of them brief occasions. The engagement, although dutifully acknowledged by both parties, was a lukewarm affair with no firm plans for a wedding. Liesl was a "sitting duck" for romantic conquests and once Zita was out of the way the relationship between us took its inexorable course. By mid-December 1950 we were mutually deeply in love and made plans to spend New Year's weekend together at an alpine hideaway in Ruhpolding, recommended by Mrs. Wolfertshofer.

As I got to know Liesl better, my admiration of her increased. I saw her as a guileless, dutiful, and totally wholesome individual who seemed to be not only free from the baser instincts of humanity such as deviousness, greed, promiscuity, but was genuinely puzzled or shocked if she encountered such vices in others. A certain naïveté in her interpersonal relations was her characteristic failing, well illustrated by her relationship with Zita but also evident in the way she handled her long-protracted and long-distance engagement with Hans.

We realized that we had many shared interests. Our professions of medicine and chemistry had of course numerous overlapping segments, but Liesl was also enthusiastically interested, if initially a little less well versed than myself, in my intellectual hobbies of music and art. We also shared a love of travel (theoretical at that point, because of mutual lack of funds). I registered this apparent convergence of interests with delight but in retrospect I would have to say that, had I been interested in card playing or horseracing, chances are that Liesl would have immersed herself with full enthusiasm in those hobbies also. As our relation deepened, her devotion to me became virtually boundless, and her habits and preferences quite adaptable. She seemed to have the capacity of supreme submission to, or sublimation in, the personality of her beloved. I watched these developments with elated fascination. When about mid-January 1951 Liesl announced to me that she considered her engagement with Hans as terminated, I basked in my victory but not without a vague sense of unease. The implications of the situation were all too clear. Liesl was not a person to be trifled with.

I introduced Liesl to my landlady Mrs. Schmidtner as my fiancée, but that was at that point an exaggeration. There were no spoken commitments between us. I wrote to my parents that I had met a girl who was THE perfect wife material--but then added that the lucky fellow who would reap the fruits of this opportunity would almost certainly not be myself. There were a few clear-cut problems with our getting married, even apart from the obvious drawbacks I had as a suitor. First, there was the matter of our ages. Liesl

was 3 years older than I and the birthday she had on our first solo date on November 9, 1950 was her 29th. Furthermore, she was a Gentile. This did not matter all that much to me but everyone in the Jewish refugee community of Munich, including my two close friends John Spitzer and Andrew Brandstein, found this very objectionable. Differences of background of any sort are certainly points to be considered in any marriage and so soon after the collapse of the Third Reich any non-Jew within the German sphere of influence could not help but have absorbed some of the racist propaganda of the Nazis who considered Jews as subhuman. It was conceded by everybody who knew her that Liesl was too pure a soul to have been affected by any such hatemongering, but she had parents, siblings, relatives--how would it feel to become suddenly a member of that family?

Liesl and I discussed these matters and everything else of potential concern thoroughly. We gave each other detailed background narratives--I can remember how we walked around the streets of Bogenhausen on the long dark evenings of December and January for hours on end, oblivious of cold and snow, talking about these things.

Liesl was born and raised in Moravská Ostrava, where her father Franz Hanak was a minor official in the giant steel works of Witkowitz (one of the major industrial concerns of Central Europe). As a young man, Mr. Hanak might have found it hard to classify himself ethnically. His first language was German; his surname referred to a small rural population group in the Moravian-Silesian border regions but in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the expression "Hanak" was sometimes derisively used to apply to all peasants of Bohemia. Liesl believed that her paternal grandmother might have been Russian, with the maiden name of Seremedjeff, but from other family members I later heard this name stated as Seremek, which would suggest South Slavic origin (the county of Serem is in the Serbo-Croatian border regions of Yugoslavia). At any rate, the grandmother died early and had apparently no lateral relatives.

In the years following World War I, Franz Hanak married Marie Gerhaber, daughter of one of the oldest German families of Kladno (an industrial town about 20 miles west of Prague). Marie was of Austro-Bohemian descent on both sides, her maternal line bearing the family name of Nahke. Liesl was the first of 4 children born to this marriage. Everyone in the family spoke perfect Czech but the home language remained essentially German. Liesl was just graduating from high school when the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia took place and the Hanak family acquired Reich citizenship.

Inquiry into the family's doings during the Nazi period required obvious tact. Most people would have just as soon forgotten their involvements, if any, in that respect and the more there was to cover up the worse was the memory. There were embittered souls among the Holocaust survivors who considered all Germans as automatically tainted in this respect but one had to admit that absolute refusal of all cooperation with the Nazis was not realistically compatible with personal safety for a German national. There remained the question of whether it was really unavoidable for ethnically mixed families such as the Hanaks to apply for citizenship after they came under German jurisdiction with all that it entailed, and to participate in various civic activities that of course inevitably had a Nazi orientation. Liesl assured me that no one in her family was ever in the Party and that they were opposed to Nazi ideology as much as possible under the circumstances. She also denied any sort of family involvement with

such youth groups as the "Hitler-Jugend" or the "Bund Deutscher Mädchen" (although I found out later that that denial was not quite truthful). I also asked, more or less casually, if there were any mental disease or other hereditary disease in the family and she denied that also.

Liesl was admitted to medical school of the University of Prague in 1941; she lived during the war years with her maternal grandmother in Kladno and commuted daily to Prague (it was during these rides that she met and became friendly with Hans Mariacher, who studied chemistry at the University).

The war's end caused chaos in Czechoslovakia. Enraged nationalist groups rounded up all German-speaking elements for confinement in detention centers where conditions very much resembled the Nazi concentration camp. Liesl was dragged away from the histology laboratory of the University and just about when my ordeal in Gunskirchen had ended, hers in Prague had begun.

The entire Hanak family remained in internment for about one year, closely corresponding in length to my detention by the Nazis. The important difference was that, while the conditions of my captivity were initially relatively tolerable and became gradually worse, the conditions in the Czechoslovak internment camp started out harshly but became gradually better. During the first week or so, they were herded like animals and got food only twice. Then forced labor began; they were deployed to do agricultural work. From November 1945 they got occasional furlough passes. Ironically, when "at large", they had to wear a big yellow "N" on their clothing (for Němec, i.e. German) and were not allowed to use the sidewalks. The Germans certainly got a good dose of their own medicine but why innocent bystanders had to be included in the retribution remained a good question. In early 1946, conditions became better, with Liesl getting a work assignment in a marmalade factory. They were released from detention in June 1946 and Liesl worked for a while as nurse in a hospital. Eventually, the whole family received expulsion orders and ended up in West Germany.

Liesl concluded her medical studies at the newly established University of Mainz and was awarded the M.D. degree in December 1947. Subsequently, she worked in various hospitals in ophthalmology, psychiatry, and from 1949 as resident physician in a private sanatorium in Oberölkofen, near Munich. She considered the latter the medically most valuable part of her experience but the sanatorium changed hands in 1950, and an entire new staff was installed. It was at that point that Liesl had a chance encounter with her girlhood friend Zita Wania who persuaded her to seek the medico-secretarial job at the Jewish Hospital Bogenhausen where we met.

I learned these details of Liesl's personal history bit-by-bit during our nocturnal walks, and I told her mine. We were struck by the remarkable parallelism of our experiences. The fact that we both were totally innocent victims of group hatreds became a further link between us. By the time I took my IRO job in Bad Aibling in March 1951, it was mutually understood that we were serious about each other and when I spent a week in Munich with my Czechoslovak student group in early May, we formally resolved to get married that very summer.

The hurdles that remained were, how to break this news to her family and how to break it to Hans. The family already had some inkling that something was afoot when Liesl insisted, in the face of strong parental

objections, to cut short her Christmas visit there in order to spend the New Year with me. By Easter she finally confessed everything point-blank, and drew thereby a storm that is memorable to me even after all these years.

To say that Liesl's parents were outraged is to put it mildly. That their daughter would go back on a formal betrothal of long standing was bad enough. That she would thereby forfeit a settled and well-ordered future with a likeable and compatible young man of highly respectable family background, made it worse. Finally, that she would do all that for the sake of a *nobody* and a *have-nothing*, gave the situation an almost bizarre cast. The fact that that have-nothing nobody was Jewish, to boot, was the icing on the cake. It truly seemed to the family that Liesl had gone out of her mind. I can remember the stern and solemn letter of Mr. Hanak, addressed to "Dear Daughter" (a formal salutation not otherwise routine in family correspondence), telling her that she obviously lost her bearings, asking her to drop everything instantly, and ordering her to come home forthwith. The letter closed with the rather poetic exclamations, "Damned be Munich! Small children, small worries; big children, big worries; fully grown children, full worries!"

Liesl gave a reasoned, low-key, and very respectful answer. She pointed out that her engagement to Hans had become after eight years emotionally stale. She also wrote a few nice things about me and pleaded that they should not judge me without knowing me. More correspondence followed, and it was eventually resolved that I should come and introduce myself to the family during the Whitsuntide long weekend towards the middle of May.

I traveled to Hollstadt with considerable apprehension, as if I were going to a particularly critical examination. I met Liesl's parents, her sister Paula with her new husband Burkard Renk, and one of Liesl's two brothers, Victor (the other brother, Willi, lived in Heidelberg and could not come).

From the point of view of getting to know each other, I found the encounter quite unsatisfactory. I expected searching questions into my past, inquiries about my future plans, and other frank discussions, none of which materialized at all. My conversations with Father Hanak were mostly platitudes. Quite frankly, he did not make the best impression on me; perhaps the fact that he was physically unwell had a part in that (he constantly complained of various aches and pains). Mrs. Hanak and I barely saw each other during the visit. She was incessantly busy in the household and when she attempted to sit down for a moment she was sternly ordered around by her husband who appeared to be quite a domestic tyrant. Victor was clearly more congenial and I had the impression that he was giving me eye signals that he approved of his sister's decision. Paula and Burkard, however, remained strictly neutral and rather on the cool side towards me. If my visit to the family was an examination, I left without knowing whether I had passed or flunked.

I inquired from Liesl whether my being Jewish was a problem in gaining acceptance. She assured me that it was not--that is, it would be if I were still of Jewish religion because her parents were very strict Catholics. But since I was a baptized Catholic also, that settled the issue for them. Of course, I must be prepared to go through a regular Catholic church wedding.

That was one of our lesser worries at the moment. An important hurdle still remained: Hans. Characteristically for the rather lukewarm relations between them, Liesl and Hans had not communicated much since I appeared on the scene (except for banal Christmas and Easter cards) and Hans was still totally unaware that his engagement was on the rocks. I told Liesl that in my opinion she should break the news to him in person. Events proved that advice to have been a grievous mistake; but I wished to be scrupulously fair and considerate. Perhaps I also wanted the reassurance that Liesl's attachment to me could survive a personal encounter with her former fiancé. Thus, Liesl took off for Graz around the end of May.

Liesl's farewell trip to Hans Mariacher turned out to be an unbelievable ordeal. Upon hearing that Liesl wanted out of the engagement, the formerly lukewarm suitor suddenly turned into a possessive lion. He simply refused to acknowledge the new situation and physically dragged Liesl to buy replacement engagement rings (the originals were lost in the war). Every imaginable form of psychological pressure was applied and she could barely manage to pry herself loose for the return trip by reluctantly agreeing that the decision was not final.

A barrage of letters followed, 10 to 12 closely scribbled pages every day. Hans must have neglected all other activity in order to make up for past omissions but it was of course too late. The letters were on the whole commonplace, uninspired, and extremely repetitious. From the point of view of winning back his girl, they were written in poor judgment and became almost counterproductive. Hans's widowed mother also got into the act, writing Liesl to have mercy on them because her son would not survive a refusal and in that case her own life would also become worthless. She also wrote Liesl's parents in the same vein. So did Hans himself, in which he hinted that he would be quite prepared under the circumstances to take an illegitimate child "as part of the deal" [in Kauf nehmen]. That was finally too much even for Father Hanak who at that point commented that he was taken aback by this abject beggary which was self-humiliating in the extreme and insulting at the same time, and as a consequence he could no longer insist that Liesl should return to Hans.

However, the ordeal was far from over. One day Liesl got a telephone message from Vally Penka, an old friend then living in Salzburg, that Mrs. Mariacher had arrived for a surprise visit and would proceed to Munich unless Liesl was willing to come forthwith and meet her there. She did, and the torment continued. Mrs. Mariacher felt responsible for the drawn-out engagement because she had influenced her son in the direction of postponing the wedding until all existential hurdles were out of the way and it seemed that she was now catching hell for this. The amends she was willing to make were quite bizarre and if I can believe the accounts of this encounter she begged Liesl on her knees to forgive her and come back to her son. Hans had not eaten or slept since this crisis broke out and if Liesl truly dropped him it would mean the end of him and of her, too. This torture, with all possible psychological variations including several telephone conversations with Hans in Graz, continued for an entire day. In the end, Liesl was so totally flustered that she wasn't sure what was actually agreed upon--she only knew that she wanted to stay with me, and she fell around my neck weeping from emotional exhaustion when we met again.

Hans also wrote me personally a short, polite, and utterly naïve letter, in broken Hungarian, no less, in which he asked me to "release" Liesl.

Finally, at some point he showed up in Munich in person. I happened to be at Liesl's when he arrived. Our encounter did not lack drama but the pathetic overtones dominated. The poor fellow was truly off balance and he made a pitiful impression. I attempted to keep the discussions reasonable; allowed the two of them to have a private conference while I left and I also took Hans for an hour-long walk, trying to calm him. He was a beaten man and took it very hard. That was Liesl and Hans' final farewell. Of course, over the years, Hans found his consolation, married someone else, and made a respectable career as chemist for one of the major companies in West Germany.

### The Wedding

Concurrently with these dramatic developments, the concrete plans for our wedding were moving forward. Once Liesl's parents reconciled themselves to the inevitable they made arrangements at their local parish in Hollstadt for our nuptial mass which was set for the morning of Sunday, August 4, 1951. We also had a civil wedding before a municipal magistrate in Munich on July 12, 1951. For various reasons it was not practical to schedule the two ceremonies closer together and we reassured the Hanak parents that we were going to consider the civil marriage only as our formal engagement with the church proceedings to be our real wedding.

I can remember getting up in the morning of my civil marriage day in Bad Aibling, taking the early train to Munich, buying the bridal bouquet at a florist, and hurrying to the "Standesamt II" [Municipal Records Office No.2] where our marriage ceremony was to take place. We were to meet at 9:45 A.M. in front of the office. Liesl arrived in a simple but elegant pleated gray skirt with lacy white blouse. She blushed with excitement when I presented the bouquet of pink roses to her and she was very lovely. Our two witnesses, Mrs. Schmidtner and Mrs. Wolfertshofer, also arrived shortly and punctually at 10 A.M. we walked up to the "marriage room" where a city officer, on behalf of the Mayor, performed the ceremony which was brief, dignified, and pleasant. Afterwards we adjourned to Mrs. Schmidtner's house where she had a small reception for us. Some friends from the Hospital Bogenhausen and the IRO Children's Village were invited and we spent a few pleasant hours. It was a touching gesture from Mrs. Schmidtner with whom I had originally a purely business relationship as her tenant.

Our church wedding 3 weeks later was a more complex and from my viewpoint less pleasant affair. Perhaps it would have helped if I could have had my own parents present also--but that was of course utterly impossible. By 1951, totalitarian repression in Hungary was so complete that I could not even get a telephone connection with my parents when I attempted to introduce Liesl by live voice (the long distance operator informed us that my parents' number had "no clearance" to receive international calls). Being without a single relation of my own among a houseful of wedding guests from the other side, all of whom were gaping at me with more or less frank amazement, was a bit unnerving and it soon developed that we had a few differences of opinion regarding the details of the wedding attire also. I thought that the lovely gray skirt with white blouse that Liesl wore at our civil wedding was just perfect and wanted her to wear that in church also. That was out of the question as far as the Hanak parents were concerned. She had to wear the traditional white wedding gown with long train and veil, which was already rented for the purpose. What was worse, I was expected to wear formal evening attire of swallow-tailed coat with white tie, gloves, and top hat, no less. I had never worn even a tuxedo in my life up to that point and felt that

I would look ridiculous in such an outfit. Not only did I consider rented garments generally gauche for such an important occasion, I was additionally aware that wearing white tie to a morning wedding was a *faux pas* according to traditional rules. If anything, the correct formal attire for the occasion would have been a cutaway. But, of course, small village sophistication did not encompass such refinements and the parents wanted us to wear what the local customs demanded. We had a long and almost bitter argument; the compromise we reached was that Liesl had to wear her formal wedding outfit but I was allowed to wear black business suit.

A broader circle of Liesl's family was present, including her younger brother Willi whom I had not met before, and the relatives he lived with in Heidelberg, Aunt Poldi and Uncle Franz. Aunt Poldi (Leopoldine) was my father-in-law's sister. Her husband, Franz Kluczka, was in the offset printing business and had Willi working for him. I learned that Willi virtually grew up with the Kluczkas who were a childless couple and had frequently "borrowed" Willi from the Hanaks for extended periods during childhood. The Kluczkas were on the whole more easygoing, more informal, and "hang loose" type people than the Hanaks and much of this attitude had rubbed off on Willi. Mr. Kluczka was the only family member of the older generation who found work after their resettlement in West Germany. Everybody else, including my father-in-law, remained unemployed and were now living on a very small government pension.

My mother-in-law had three sisters of whom the oldest, Emma, was married to a Czech national by the name of Bedřich Novák and was still living in Czechoslovakia. There was a large assortment of cousins in the Czechoslovak branch of the family none of whom could of course come and none of whom had I in fact ever met.

The next sister in the Gerhaber family was Ida, married to Thomas Übelacker, formerly a barber in Kladno. They had two sons, Adi and Rudi, and a daughter, Hilda. The Übelacker family were residents of Öhringen in the Hohenlohe area of Württemberg. They could not come to the wedding either, for reasons connected with the mother's health. I learned that Aunt Ida had occasional problems with her nerves, generally attributed to the postwar stress of persecution and expulsion.

The youngest Gerhaber daughter was Paula Greger, a childless widow who then lived in Rudolstadt in the Soviet zone of Germany. In those days, it was still possible to get inter-zone travel permits for important family occasions and Aunt Paula was present at our wedding. She was a pleasant lady markedly resembling my mother-in-law. With Burkard's mother and a few other guests, the whole wedding party comprised twenty-some persons.

The church formalities started on the day prior to our wedding day. Liesl and I had to fast, and we had individual private sessions with the priest for confession and preparation for the wedding mass. My confusing religious history was of course not communicated to the priest. The frequent flip-flops were a potential embarrassment. Other people fought and died for their faith; I switched them back and forth like used shoes. The question could be asked, did I really believe in anything?

The honest answer was, and still is, not really, and certainly none of the detailed dogma of organized religions. The petrified rigidity of Jewish religious practices and the philosophical obsolescence of Roman

Catholic doctrine were equally repulsive to me. On balance, its more intimate involvement with European history and art made Christianity a shade more attractive but that was countered by my essentially Jewish upbringing. In such circumstances one easily develops a cynical attitude and I could act as a Catholic when political considerations suggested it; Jewish when refugee conditions made that more advantageous; Catholic again for the sake of my bride and in-laws. These switches required a measure of quiet confidentiality vis-à-vis the fanatics but Liesl was well aware of my attitude and on the whole shared it. In fact, I was amazed by her contempt for the institution of individual communion and absolution which I considered as the relatively most attractive feature of the Catholic religion--a sort of cut-rate psychiatry. On the few times that I had gone to confession previously, I had always treated it seriously. So, on our way to our pre-nuptial exercises, I asked Liesl:

"Well, are we going to confess our "sins" we committed together?"

She stopped in her track and looked at me in baffled amazement. "Are you out of your mind?" she asked. The idea was out of the question; it was none of the priest's business and she did not think much of the priest's ability to keep confessional secrets, either. So, our "confessions" were limited to banalities such as the number of times we missed mass. Even so, we received rather stiff penances and were left kneeling in the sacristy to say prayers for an hour and a half.

The wedding next day was a nice enough affair for a village church. Schubert's German Mass was played on the organ by special order of the Hanak parents who knew that to be one of Liesl's favorite pieces of music. After the mass, in the bridal procession to the Hanak residence, I was required by local custom to throw handfuls of money at "the people" lining the road; it was of course only children who were present and they nearly trampled us underfoot in their struggle for the coins. The festivities at home lasted all day and all night and also by local custom we were expected to ignore and neglect each other completely and spend all of our time as host and hostess, respectively, entertaining the guests. I am afraid we soldiered on the job badly. We both were dead tired and by early evening we hid in one of the bedrooms and fell asleep fully dressed on top of the bed in each other's arms. My mother-in-law came in to raise us very indignantly. I could barely wait until the party was over. We were to depart next morning for our honeymoon.

#### The Honeymoon

Actually, we had two honeymoon trips: one to Salzburg and Innsbruck after our civil wedding and another to Cologne and Heidelberg after our church wedding. We even had a third pleasure trip shortly thereafter to Hamburg and Hannover which we jocularly also referred to as our "third honeymoon". The reason why we could afford such travel extravaganzas was that I had a friend working in the transportation division of the Children's Village in Bad Aibling. Mrs. Németh was one of those typical "DP"-s who had lingered in West Germany since the end of the war. I think her husband was involved with the Arrow Cross which however did not keep her from becoming quite friendly with me and she was in a position to furnish me with "travel orders" every time I wanted to go to Munich. These travel orders were for official trips by occupation personnel and associated agencies such as the IRO. They were accepted on the trains as regular first-class tickets. The

control of these travel orders was apparently quite loose and, knowing my enthusiasm for sightseeing, Mrs. Németh gave me as a wedding gift a whole bunch of blank travel orders which I could fill out any way I wanted anywhere within West Germany.

Our first goal was Salzburg, where one of Liesl's girlhood friends, Vally Penka, then lived. Her apartment was the site of the dramatic encounter between Mother Mariacher and Liesl just a few weeks earlier and now we were invited to spend a few days of our honeymoon there. The fact that Salzburg was in Austria was no big problem--Liesl was accustomed to crossing the border illegally and had done it numerous times in the recent past. In fact, in the postwar years when the papers and permits required for regular border crossing were hard to obtain, "informal" border traffic was frequently the only practical way to travel. Liesl knew of a spot between Bayrisch-Gmain and Grossgmain not far from Bad Reichenhall where the border crossing involved only wading a small torrent. We took the train to Berchtesgaden, spent an enjoyable day there visiting the salt mine and taking a cruise on the Königssee, and then sneaked over to Salzburg by the aforementioned route. It amused me to cross international frontiers with such nonchalance. It was in pointed contrast to the harrowing experiences I had at the Iron Curtain.

The Penkas received us cordially and we spent a couple of enjoyable days in Salzburg. We had vague plans to make a circuit tour of Western Austria by taking the train to Kitzbühel and Innsbruck and then sneak back into Germany in the Karwendel-Wetterstein area. But the Salzburg-Tyrolean border was at that time also the demarcation line between the American-occupied and French-occupied zones of Austria. Were there any formalities at the zone boundary where we as illegal travelers could get in trouble? The Penkas assured us that there were not. The only internal boundary where documents were still checked was supposed to be that of the Soviet zone.

So, we took off for Kitzbühel on the morning of July 15 and were enjoying the beautiful alpine scenery through the train window. Suddenly we heard an ominous voice from the next compartment:

"Document control. ID cards, please."

We looked at each other in alarm. Before either of us could speak, an officer was at our compartment, with the same call. I had my old Austrian ID card on me that I had received in Vienna a year-and-a-half earlier. It had expired, and as alien document it did not entitle the bearer to cross zone boundaries without a special permit, anyway. But at least I could hand over something and hope for the best.

The officer looked at the document with interest. It was something different from the run-of-the-mill. He overlooked the big stamp on the face stating: EXPIRES ON AUGUST 30, 1950 [one year in the past]. He turned to me:

"This ID-card does not entitle you to cross zone boundaries without visa."

"I did not realize that. I am sorry."

"Where are you traveling?"

"To Kitzbühel. Just for a day of sightseeing."

"One minute, please." The officer left with my ID card. We were sitting there, nearly petrified. Liesl, who had no Austrian documents of any sort, whispered to me:

"And what about me?"

"He'll forget you", I answered. That was at least my hope. The officer seemed to be quite immersed in the unusual problem. Presently he returned and handed me my ID card with an attached slip.

"Here you are. You have 48 hours visiting permit for the French zone. Next time kindly procure this before you commence your trip."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

The officer saluted smartly and left.

We were speechless for several minutes. The first thing Liesl managed to say was,

"I can't believe this."

We were too awe-stricken even to rejoice; when we arrived in Kitzbühel a few minutes later we were walking mostly in silence. The complications of getting caught, possibly jailed, extradited, and all that on our honeymoon, no less, would have been painful. We were thanking our guardian angels. But the Austro-German border was still ahead of us and now we were filled with some apprehension.

We spent several hours each in Kitzbühel and Innsbruck sightseeing, and then took a local train to the border station, Scharnitz. According to the map, we could walk over from there into the first town on the German side, Mittenwald, in about an hour. It promised to be a beautiful high alpine walk. What we did not realize was that all this was on the floor of a narrow V-shaped valley, with the rail line and the highway crowded together at the bottom, and slopes of the mountain dotted with dwarf pines flanking the valley steeply on both sides. The only way to avoid the border checkpoint was to proceed high up on the mountainside, fully exposed to view from the road. It was already about 7 P.M. and maybe we should have waited for darkness, but that also had its dangers in unknown terrain. We decided to press on. We were progressing cautiously about 500 ft above the road, taking cover behind the dwarf pines where possible.

At the exact moment when we stepped on German territory we heard a shrill whistle sound and a German border guard materialized from behind a bush. He motioned with a grin that we were to follow him down to the guard station.

So, we were caught. The only consolation was that it was on the German side of the border so that, ourselves being German residents, it promised to simplify matters somewhat. Eventually, we could see how naïve we were in choosing that route. Our progress was conspicuously visible from the guardhouse and one guard just walked up to intercept us.

Our interrogation was a lengthy affair. The guards were obviously happy to have a distraction. When it turned out that we were honeymooners there was hilarious laughter. At the same time, the fact that we were "better people", i.e. myself a teacher, my wife a physician, instilled a certain considerateness. Even in a petty criminal proceeding, the typically German respect for socio-intellectual status could not be quite suppressed. We were invited to partake in the snack the guards had at dinnertime and the sergeant in charge said that normally we would be released after a protocol had been taken but he had no authority to do that on his own and the commanding officer had already left for the day. He had no choice but to have us locked up for the night. He added consolingly that that was just about the only way to have a roof over our heads anyway--Mittenwald was bursting with vacationers and we could not possibly find a vacant hotel room locally.

We were taken by car to the town jail of Mittenwald and introduced to the jailer there as "honeymooners". The turnkey was quite incredulous and demanded to see our marriage certificate; when I showed it to him he was also quite amused and locked us up in a solitary cell together. He even came by sometime later to inquire if we were comfortable enough or did we want an additional blanket. We reassured him that we did not; and when all was quiet, with us lying there in the slammer cozily in each other's arms, we burst out in uncontrollable laughter. The whole situation was just about the most comical of our lives.

So, after Miskolc, Bruck-on-the-Leitha, and the Rossauerlände in Vienna, to say nothing of Mauthausen and Gunskirchen, I rounded up my international jail experiences in Mittenwald. Next morning we received a decent breakfast and by 8 A.M. we were in front of the commanding officer who had us sign various documents. We were fined 25 DMark apiece for the offense of unauthorized border crossing but since paying it on the spot would have caused hardship, collection of the fine was suspended. (Characteristically for German thoroughness and organization, the sum was deducted from a scholarship payment I received years later from the German government in order to complete my studies.) By 8:30 A.M. we were free, and decided to follow our original travel plan as if nothing had happened. We took the train to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, then bus to Ettal and Oberammergau, spending a few hours in each place. By evening we were back in Munich or Bad Aibling, respectively.

Our second honeymoon trip after the church wedding to Würzburg, Frankfurt, and down on the bank of the Rhine was relatively quite uneventful. We visited beautiful Cologne Cathedral, the Beethoven house in Bonn, the Deutsches Eck in Koblenz, and the fascinating "Kaiserpfalz" [imperial domain] of Worms. We also stopped in Mainz where Liesl showed me the university institutes where she graduated. Finally, we arrived in Heidelberg and stayed there with Uncle Franz and Aunt Poldi for a few days. The beauty of this old university town delighted me. We took a stroll on the Philosophenweg and visited the famous observatory on the Königsstuhl hill. The similarity of the site to Salzburg was quite conspicuous.

Our "third honeymoon" was in October 1951 in connection with my brother-in-law Willi's wedding. The bride, Erika Hellmuth, was a peasant girl from the village of Pülfringen, a tiny hamlet in the Odenwald mountains. The wedding was memorable for me mainly for its pointedly Bruegelesque atmosphere. The bride, her parents, and most of the local wedding guests were characters straight out of the *Peasants' Wedding* and/or the *Peasants'*

*Wedding Dance*, and the locale as well as the festivities were a striking example of the genre represented in these paintings. It was really quite amusing, at least for me; but I gathered that the Hanaks, who in spite of recent hardships were quite rank-conscious of their middle-class status, were not at all amused. Liesl's marriage to me was by then water over the dam, and now the family talk was over this new disaster. The new relations were certainly nothing if not rustic, but the newlyweds gave us a good lesson in how to behave at one's own wedding. Merrymaking went on all day and all night, with bride and groom tirelessly entertaining all the guests without a trace of weariness and without seeking a moment of privacy. Erika incidentally turned out to be a very good wife to Willi and a thoughtful and dutiful daughter-in-law to the Hanak parents even after Willi's sudden tragic death in a traffic accident some 3 years later.

Following these festivities we were off on our Northern German trip, and my brother-in-law Victor, fascinated by our time- and cost-efficient sightseeing schedule worked out in advance, also joined in. We spent a couple of days in Hamburg, staying in a colorful little hotel on the Reeperbahn (the world-famous red-light district of town) where no eyebrow was raised when the three of us took one room. We walked around the old town, visited the Planetarium, and took a harbor cruise. On our way back to Southern Germany we stopped in Hannover and in Hameln, visiting the Herrenhausen gardens and the Pied Piper's house, respectively.

Among the most impressive sights in all of Germany was the horrendous destruction visited on the cities. Much of Cologne, Hamburg, Frankfurt was completely devastated, as were Munich and Nuremberg. Rebuilding activities were progressing feverishly, but a stroll through the inner districts of these cities was still generally very depressing. Curiously, the date of the final blows was invariably early 1945--when continued resistance was already hopeless, anyway. Historic Germany could have been mostly saved if the anti-Hitler insurrection in July 1944 had been successful. In all further warring, the Germans were truly just rushing to their own ruin like a bunch of crazed lemmings.

#### Married Life

Our married life started in earnest on September 1, 1951 when I moved from Bad Aibling back to Munich. The Hospital Bogenhausen, like the IRO Children's Village, was in a state of liquidation and both of us were on unemployment compensation. Liesl had a sublet room in a small apartment in the Trogerstrasse, and with the reluctant permission of the landlady I moved in. Actually, asking for permission was just a courtesy because the room was "beschlagnahmt" [confiscated] by the housing authority and the tenant had no control over it. She got even by being unpleasant enough to both of us. However, she had a live-in boyfriend, Mr. Heinz Gruchot, who turned out to be an abstract painter. After it developed that we were enthusiasts of modern art, he became quite friendly with us and when we moved out about a year later we received one of his gouaches as a parting gift. Unfortunately, Mr. Gruchot did not make it to world fame but I found his art interesting. The painting I have from him looks rather like an early Vasarely.

Our early marital relations were idyllic. Liesl was the model of a devoted wife who treated me lovingly, agreed with me on everything, kept an impeccable house, and even made efforts to cook for me some of my childhood favorites in the Hungarian cuisine for which she asked postal instructions

from my mother. It is not for me to say how well I succeeded in reciprocating these attentions but she certainly seemed to have an enthusiastically positive opinion on everything then. We could manage marginally on our unemployment compensation incomes that were eventually followed by a modest academic stipend to me from the German government [Ausbildungshilfe].

After passing my Final Examination at the University, it was time to commence Diplomarbeit [thesis work]. By mid-November 1951 I had obtained a place in the Laboratory for Clinical Chemistry of the medical school under Prof. Dirr, and the thesis subject was to be, "Peptides of Arginine". Arginine is one of the more complex amino acids with a terminal guanidine group which tends to hydrolyze during conventional procedures of peptide synthesis. Therefore, arginine peptides, although clearly of biological interest, could not be obtained by *in vitro* methods then known. Prof. Dirr, who was an M.D. with some, but not much, chemistry training, needed these substances for clinical experiments of his own and gave me the task of working out the pioneering method of synthesis in the framework of a Diplomarbeit. I was to work under the supervision of Dr. Hering, an organic chemist in his 40's who was Chief Assistant in his laboratory.

It did not take me long to find out that Dr. Hering was not going to be of much help. He maintained an unfriendly and totally uncooperative attitude towards me and referred me with every question to the library. It took me several weeks of relentless literature search to come up with a scheme that had, on the basis of chemical analogies, at least a theoretical chance of success. It was a rather complex project proceeding through the amino acid ornithine, accomplishing the peptide synthesis at that stage, and introducing the labile functional group after the peptidization. It was a 22-step procedure, requiring the isolation and purification of that many chemical intermediates along the way, none of which were hitherto described. It looked like a mammoth project but I was inexperienced, enthusiastic, and figured optimistically that maybe some part accomplishment along the way might be eventually accepted as the finished Diplomarbeit project.

It was not to be. My work in the Clinical Chemistry Laboratory was a long series of frustrations. Common reagents or solvents became suddenly unavailable when I needed them; my half-ready intermediates were removed from the refrigerator "for lack of space", exposing the preparations to ruin. There was plenty other such interference with my work on a virtually continuing basis. All fellow workers in the lab became eventually highly uncooperative with me. It was not difficult to figure out that all this was orchestrated by Dr. Hering who, it seemed, had a strongly Nazi background and considered it an insult to have to work with a Jew. At some point after the New Year, I went to talk to Prof. Dirr and hinted that I felt that my progress was being sabotaged. He was notably cool and made a counter-hint that according to the reports he had received about me I was totally incompetent as a chemist and my alleged academic background abroad was more than likely fraudulent. Heated words followed, with the upshot that I was asked to quit forthwith and leave the Clinical Chemistry Laboratory in the middle of my work. Of the 22 experimental steps, I had accomplished 2 but neither of the preparations was rigorously characterized as yet and at least one of them apparently decomposed for lack of refrigeration. With respect to any scientific accomplishment after almost 2 months of work, I was back exactly to square one.

Of course, I was furious and went to complain to the University authorities. The Chemistry department had a new Chairman in the person of Prof. Huisgen, a young man in his 30's and protégé of the Geheimrat Wieland. Dr. Huisgen had been Wieland's graduate student and the Geheimrat was so impressed with him that he had passed over several senior professors (including the biochemist Prof. Lynen, who later won the Nobel prize) in order to nominate him for the chairmanship. Prof. Huisgen was a friendly, energetic, and strikingly youthful man who listened to my complaint with amazement. He looked at my lab workbook in which the 22-step procedure was sketched out and whistled between his teeth.

"Is this what you were expected to accomplish as your thesis work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whoa. It's a murderous piece of work [Mordsarbeit]. Did Professor Dirr expressly approve this plan?"

"Well, not exactly. I never had the opportunity to present it to him. All he told me was that he wanted arginine peptides synthesized. The rest was up to me. Dr. Hering saw my plan and said that I had better check out the feasibility of each step in the literature."

Professor Huisgen lifted the telephone and called Prof. Dirr in my presence. I heard his end of the conversation.

"Hello. I have the student Mr. Révész here in my office and he is telling me that he was booted out of your lab after two months for alleged lack of progress with his work."

(Silence.)

"Well, if he doesn't know chemistry, he wants to learn chemistry. Isn't that what he is here for? Isn't it our function to teach him?"

(Long silence.)

"Why, that's absurd. The project seems to be enough to keep a team of experienced chemists busy for five years!"

(Silence.)

"Thank you. We'll take that up at the next faculty meeting." Prof. Huisgen slammed down the receiver with an obvious show of irritation. He turned to me with a vaguely apologetic mien.

"Sooner or later we'll have to phase out our collaboration with the institutes of the medical school. Those gentlemen have no idea of the complexity of the chemical tasks they demand. Your project was totally impractical to serve as thesis work. I am sorry about your time loss, but you'll have to start anew."

I considered mentioning that there was more to my problem in the Clinical Chemistry Laboratory than questions of competence or size of the job. There was deliberate harassment, with apparently "racial" motivation. It occurred to me that I could blow up the thing into a cause célèbre. But

I thought the better of it. Causes célèbres of this sort were common in Munich in those days and not always fully compelling. Public opinion was getting a bit tired of this and if I was going to get my second chance anyway, I decided to leave good enough alone.

Professor Huisgen took me to one of the private professorial labs in his institute and introduced me to Professor Bertho. The latter was an older man whom I already knew by sight. He was a specialist in amino sugars, and when we sat down for a work planning conference it developed that he wanted me to accomplish the synthesis of glucose diamine, which would be the first diamino sugar in existence. It was a vastly simpler task than the one with arginine peptides but nonetheless a respectable piece of work consisting of 4 heretofore untested steps.

First, I had to procure starting material that was not without its amusing aspects. Glucose diamine was to be prepared from glucosamine, a substance that did exist in nature: the shells of crustaceans are a polymerized form of it (chitin) and can serve as its source according to a 19th century recipe. So, my first task was to collect lobster shells for a laboratory-scale acid hydrolysis. Naturally, to buy fresh lobsters for the purpose would have been ludicrously outside of the affordable and I can remember going to the back door of the luxury restaurants of Munich that were just emerging from war-time hibernation: the dining rooms of the big hotels Vier Jahreszeiten, Bayrischer Hof, and so forth. I talked to the maître d's and explained my mission. They were very forthcoming and I ended up with huge bags of cracked lobster shells cleared from tables; in preparing the batches in the lab I came across several intact claws. The diners apparently did not realize that the best morsels were inside these structures. With the fellow graduate students in Prof. Bertho's lab we had a small feast from these leftovers before I confined the remains to hydrolysis. It was my first taste of this delicacy.

I worked in Professor Bertho's lab for almost exactly one year. It was a completely different experience from my work in the Clinical Chemistry lab; Prof. Bertho helped me greatly with the planning of the work and supervised my experiments closely. That is naturally the normal way of guiding the thesis work of graduating students who, after all, are beginners in the art. I accomplished the project successfully. With full characterization of each intermediate, it involved the preparation of 9 new compounds never before described in the chemical literature. My finished thesis was submitted to the University of Munich in early 1953 and my Diploma of Chemistry is dated April 11, 1953. The work was subsequently published in *Liebig's Annalen*, a prestigious journal of chemistry, under the title "Über 1- $\beta$ ,2-diamino- 3,4,6-triacetyl-D-glucose". After my seminar paper about the geochemistry of soils that had been pulled from the Hungarian periodical *Élet és Tudomány* just before publication because of my defection in 1949, this became my first scientific paper actually in print.

My experience in the Dirr-Hering laboratory and a few other such happenings raised the question of the prevalence of residual Nazi attitudes in post-war Germany. In the refugee community it was easy to live in virtually total isolation from the indigenous population, and to many Holocaust survivors the question did not matter at all. The worst was automatically assumed. As a person married to a Gentile, my attitude had to be obviously different but for the same reason I could also hear occasional opinions and comments not meant for Jewish ears. We maintained regular contact with the

Hanak parents and visited them in Hollstadt for the Christmas holidays in 1951, 1952, 1953. Of course, I was eventually accepted as full-fledged family member but understandably the Hanaks saw no reason to advertise my Jewishness to neighbors and friends. I had plenty of opportunity to hear conversations that made me wince.

The least that can be said of the Germans of that generation is that they were bad losers. There was seething fury against the victorious Allied powers, especially against the "Amis" (Americans) who were accused of winning the war by unfair means. The material superiority of the U.S. Army was bitterly resented and battle tactics that I personally found most admirable because it placed higher value on human life than on war matériel, came in for some ludicrous criticism. "Schlappschwanz" [limp-tailed] was a favorite term of derision applied to the Americans behind their backs, implying personal cowardice because e.g. they did not advance on a stronghold until artillery barrage had totally pulverized it. Then, of course, it was supposed to be "no big deal" any more, and therefore the American soldier did not really deserve the accolade due a victorious hero. Naïve judgments of this sort were offered with great vehemence and it was easy to see that in the view of most common Germans, a completely "fair" match between them and the rest of the world would have ended in German victory, as it should have by right. It was a replay of the German national mood after World War I, when the German Army was also considered unbeaten and unbeatable and the collapse attributed to subversion of the home front by Jews, Marxists, and the other demons of emerging Nazi ideology.

As for the end of World War II, the atomic bomb was just stolen by the Americans from German laboratories when the project was all but finished. The so-called concentration camps were not really different from prisoner-of-war camps elsewhere; the Jews were, after all, enemies of the Third Reich. The gas chambers and crematories existed only in Allied hate propaganda and were built at the camp sites after the war (this charge was based on the one at Dachau which was reconstructed for show purposes during the occupation).

Obviously, it was not always easy for me to keep my peace during these conversations. In the house of the Hanaks I had to exercise restraint in consideration of my in-laws, but I have one particular exchange in memory when I did seize the opportunity for a quick diplomatic repartee.

It was on the day of the funeral of Cardinal Faulhaber, Archbishop of Munich, who was a celebrated anti-Nazi. It was Cardinal Faulhaber who drafted the papal encyclical "Mit Brennender Sorge" [With burning worry] for Pope Pius XI in which totalitarian forms of government and the doctrine of complete submission of the individual to the state were severely criticized. The Cardinal was much harassed by the Nazis but remained at his seat throughout the war. On the occasion of his funeral procession in late 1952, Professor Bertho regaled us students working in his lab with a story he said he heard from trustworthy ecclesiastical sources.

When the Americans occupied Munich, the commanding general was said to have paid a visit to the Cardinal and asked him reproachfully how it came that he did nothing against the horrors of Dachau (site of the large and notorious concentration camp just outside Munich). The Cardinal was supposed to have answered:

"General, I was no more in a position to do anything against Dachau than I was in a position to do anything against Dresden." (Dresden suffered one of the severest Allied air raids in early 1945, when meteorological conditions colluded to cause an immense firestorm in which thousands of people lost their lives.)

There were expressions of satisfied approval on everyone's face in the lab on hearing the Cardinal's clever counteraccusation that somehow rubbed me the wrong way. I decided to play dumb and asked:

"Why Dresden? What happened at Dresden?"

Professor Bertho answered factually but with an undertone of bitterness for the inhumane attack on civilians and for the boundless savagery of destroying such an ancient city from the air. It was again implied that this was no honest way to fight a war. I replied:

"Oh. I did not realize that Dresden was coventrized."

There was stunned silence. My remark hit the bull's eye. "Coventrize" was a verb invented by Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels, after the devastating air raid on Coventry in Central England on November 14, 1940. Everyone could remember the screeching voice of the Propaganda Minister on the radio, threatening the British furiously:

"Wir werden alle ihre Städte *coventrisieren!*"  
[We are going to "coventrize" all their cities!]

There was no more talk about Allied atrocities in the lab that afternoon.

By early 1952, an event of great family significance occurred: Liesl became pregnant. On the whole, she carried her pregnancy well and there was little interference with her daily activities to the very end. Our landlady in the Trogerstrasse watched Liesl's growing belly with horror and it was clear that, if we cared about domestic tranquility at all, we had better look for another place to live. By that time the refugee community of Munich had shrunk considerably through emigration, and it became possible for me to claim space in the student housing unit on the premises of the Funkkaserne ["Radio Barracks", so named after the military unit for whom the place was built during the war; it was now converted into an emigrant processing facility under aegis of the IRO]. In September 1952 we spent a pleasant vacation week with the Jewish Student Federation in Urfeld am Walchensee in a beautiful alpine environment, then moved into our modest room in the "Studentenbaracke" [Student Shack] of the Funkkaserne in Freimann, about a ½-hour tram ride from the center of Munich.

The Studentenbaracke had a strange assortment of inhabitants. All were more or less of student age but less than half were actually studying anything. The unit was under nominal control of the World University Service and its Director was a young American, obviously naturalized, who turned out to be one of the more unpleasant and mean individuals I had met in all my life. His name was Ivan Meyer and his original nationality was uncertain. He claimed to be a died-in-the-wool American but his English was heavily accented, quite faulty, and except for some slang expressions learned on site, certainly inferior to mine. He tried to compensate by continuously

displaying his U.S. passport in his shirt pocket in semi-visible fashion. It was his only asset and he knew it.

There was also Joe Bognár, the former Hungarian army officer who wore his dark green shirt (uniform of the Arrow Cross) conspicuously and shamelessly. His favorite conversation subject was the treatment he used to mete out to "spies and saboteurs" (i.e., obviously Jews) during the war. There were several other shady figures among the residents, including some characters from the Möhlstrasse, and it did not look like particularly edifying company. The saving grace was a young Hungarian couple, Victor and Mitzi Korenika, with their newborn baby, Gaby. The Korenikas and we became fast friends and we outlasted all other inhabitants as the Studentenbaracke gradually dissolved during 1953. The Korenikas and we lived in such close camaraderie that we almost merged households and I think I can say that I never had a closer, more intimate, and more harmonious friendship than the one with Mitzi and Pubi (as Victor was affectionately called). This friendship has lasted throughout our lives and I still never miss visiting or at least calling whenever I am in Europe. It is worth mentioning that Pubi and I started the hobby of photography together but while it remained a hobby with me, Pubi became a professional who now owns one of the prominent commercial photography studios of Munich.

Otherwise, our circle of friends had thinned out considerably. By late 1952, most Jewish students in Munich with whom we used to be friendly had emigrated and the only close buddies remaining were Ervin Erdös and Tibor Diamantstein (characteristically, all three of us married German wives). Ervin used to be a particularly frequent guest of ours at the Funkkaserne and with him I had another long-lasting friendship that continued after our emigration.

While living in the Funkkaserne I had my last non-professional job. Several of the Studentenbaracke residents supported themselves by working nightly in the press plant of the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the major independent daily of Munich, and when an opening developed through emigration of a fellow student I joined the ranks. The work consisted of servicing the big rotation machines that spewed out the printed papers in bunches of 25, and tying the stacks with a string. Towards the morning, one rode in the newspaper trucks beside the driver and unloaded the papers at the various regional distribution points. It was probably the most monotonous and boring job I ever held, but it paid, and Liesl and I never suffered want even after our unemployment compensation and/or my academic stipend had expired.

I can well remember the night of March 1/2, 1953; I was at my job at the Süddeutsche Zeitung when news of a historic event reached us. I was working at the rotation machines and the printing presses were suddenly stopped after a run of only a few hundred papers. It was a most unusual event; we stood around idly for an hour and a half while a new edition was being prepared. When the machines started up again we were stunned by the new headline with the biggest and fattest letters that I had ever seen in a newspaper:

STALIN: SCHLAGANFALL  
DER ROTE DIKTATOR LIEGT IM STERBEN

[STALIN HAS STROKE  
THE RED DICTATOR IS ON HIS DEATHBED]

We celebrated. I recalled the death of Hitler in the spring of 1945 that was followed by total collapse of the Nazi regime within a week. Some of us had vague hopes in that same direction but it was clear that any consequences would follow less promptly in this case. Nonetheless, we had put one step behind us and we were in an upbeat mood especially when we heard the alleged details of the happening: according to the rumors that circulated in Munich, the stroke was precipitated by a dramatic confrontation between Stalin and his lieutenants following the totally paranoid orders relating to the so-called "Doctors' Plot" (an alleged conspiracy to commit medical murders by the Kremlin's court physicians, many of whom were Jewish) and associated promulgation of wildly anti-Semitic measures. Kaganovich, the Jewish member of Stalin's inner circle, allegedly threw his party card at Stalin's feet in outraged protest. Furiously, Stalin ordered KGB chief Beria, also present, to arrest him. Stalin supposedly suffered his stroke when Beria refused to comply and he realized that he was facing a palace revolt. There was of course no way to verify how much if any truth there was to this story.

Many years later, when the personal reminiscences and memoirs of the Stalin era became published, some elements of this story became confirmed, although with a different set of characters from what was rumored then. Kaganovich and Beria were both utterly spineless toadies who would have never dared to oppose their master in this manner. In fact, Kaganovich was said to have been the first to sign the *petition* on behalf of all Soviet Jews, *asking* to be deported, as protection against "public furor". The person involved in the dramatic card throwing scene was Voroshilov, the only survivor of the Old Guard, and the only person with enough integrity to protest the growing tendency towards more and more anti-Semitism in Soviet policies. He also steadfastly resisted Stalin's continuing pressure to divorce his Jewish wife. Other persons present and giving support to Voroshilov's stand were Molotow and Mikoyan, but not Beria. It was the firm stand of this trio that provided the final shock precipitating Stalin's stroke, which became fatal only because there were no competent physicians available in the Kremlin to provide efficient first aid. So, Stalin's death was in a sense self-inflicted by his own paranoia in pursuing the imaginary "Doctors' Plot".

This episode incidentally provides an interesting comparison between the Nazi kind and Communist kind of spiritual oppression. The Nazis could not have cared less about the response of the persecuted; in fact, the more desperate the better because the spreading of panic was a tool in their method of total control. The idea of making the victims *petitioners* of their own victimization was a peculiarly Stalinist feature of persecution and in a sense it added insult to injury.

From the personal point of view, the crowning event of the season was the birth of our first child in the Frauen-klinik [Ob-Gyn department] of the University Hospital of Munich, on October 19, 1952. It was a girl and we christened her Eva Beatrix.

## C H A P T E R   F O U R T E E N

-----  
E M I G R A T I O N

FROM DAY ONE of my life in the free world, the problem of resettlement was of course constantly on my mind, even though marriage and graduation provided temporary distractions. In Austria as well as in Germany, I was in provisional sojourner status under IRO protection. It was clear that I could have continued this status until I acquired certain squatters' rights and perhaps even became a citizen; but I never seriously considered remaining in these countries permanently. The scars of past wounds were too deep, the proximity of the Iron Curtain too immediate, and at any rate economic conditions in Central Europe in the post-war years were unattractive. I had left Hungary with the vague intent of emigrating overseas and Liesl readily identified with this general aim after our marriage.

The one country of the world where I could have gone as a matter of legal entitlement, provided that I reaffirmed my adherence to Judaism, was Israel. There were multiple reasons why I did not elect to do that. Most important was perhaps that my emotional identification as belonging to a Jewish nation was a little too tenuous. Although ethnically and culturally I could readily identify as a Jew, religiousness, even of the non-Orthodox variety, could never gain a foothold in my personality and Zionist patriotism also left me essentially unexcited. Superimposed on all this were my vague guilt feelings for my apostasy and my gradually acquired academic interest in Christianity. All these made me somewhat uncomfortable in self-assertive Jewish company. When I finally ended up marrying a Gentile, and in a Catholic church, no less, any option of choosing Israel as my future abode could be forgotten for good.

There were a few Western European countries where I would have liked to live but these plans never got off the ground. A country with strong attractiveness because of its prosperity and long tradition of staying out of political trouble was of course Switzerland. Mr. Kun, my dad's former boss at the Foncière Insurance Company and husband of my "shipmate" Valerie, resided there and made some efforts to secure admission for me but wrote me in March 1950 from Zurich:

"I am working on a potential solution for you here...  
[but] I might as well try to get water out of a rock.  
I have to deal with hard-nosed people who are not  
moved by humanitarian arguments. Your story is  
considered a played-out record here and the  
insensitivity is boundless...I am sorry, my friend,  
but it would be irresponsible for me to encourage you".

France also held attraction for me and I had several friends living there. However, my old girlfriend Suzanne Muhr wrote me in June 1950 from Paris:

"The French spirit, which I learned to love through poets and painters, and the attitude of French authorities towards foreigners, are two completely different things...The situation is extremely difficult and your notions of being able to study in Paris, or otherwise to establish yourself here, are nothing if not naïve."

Sometime later I also considered settling in Sweden but that, too, came to nothing. All in all, at the time I left Vienna in August 1950, and even at the time of my marriage one year later, my score for progressing towards a permanent resettlement anywhere in the world was exactly zero.

#### The Aborted Attempts

Unfortunately, from the point of view of joining the great post-war migration of displaced persons, my arrival in the free world was ill-timed. A "displaced person" (DP) was defined by the IRO as someone uprooted and carried away or chased away from his usual domicile during or immediately after World War II. In order to qualify for inclusion, one had to be in that status on a certain date in 1947, or 1948, or 1949--the deadline was moved several times as the original regulations were amended in order to encompass political refugees from the east, but these amendments were eventually protested by the Soviet Union on the grounds that escapees across the Iron Curtain were Fascist saboteurs unworthy of assistance. After 1949, further extension of eligibility was successfully blocked by Russian veto. Most countries structured their post-war immigration policies on the basis of IRO rules and for want of a few months' presence in the west, I found myself fighting a distinctly uphill struggle with respect to overseas resettlement.

Under the circumstances at that time, emigration to the United States which would have been my first choice by far, was out of the question. Admission to that country was governed by laws which were administered impartially but rigidly. Not qualifying for DP status meant that I could apply only as a regular petitioner for immigration under the quota law of 1924, which for Hungarians meant a waiting period of decades. New laws were rumored to be in the draft stage but their provisions and enactment were as yet uncertain. For practical purposes the door to the United States was closed.

With the other potential host countries, conditions were generally much less well defined, with room left for local consular judgment that also meant the possibility for influence peddling and/or bribery. As one who had neither connections nor money, that still meant tough going for me. Generally, one first had to secure a work contract or affidavit of support in the intended host country, on the basis of which a "landing permit" was issued. Then came the batteries of medical and security examinations which typically took weeks or months. Eventually, if everything was favorably concluded, one got a "preliminary visa" or "intent to issue a visa" which enabled one to apply for a travel document from the country of temporary residence. The actual visa was entered into that document, usually with time limitations. Cost of transport had to be concurrently applied for from charitable organizations such as the Joint. The time requirement for all this was typically one-year-plus, and even though I had always more than one iron in the fire, things were moving slowly.

I believe that the first actual emigration document in my possession was a "Contrat du Travail" to Morocco, issued on behalf of the Intrade Textile Company in Casablanca. A distant cousin of mine, Eugene Türkl, was employed there and when I wrote him from Vienna about my arrival and utter indecisiveness as to future plans, he immediately went to work to help me. Even so, I was already in Munich when the papers arrived. It was understood that the job offer with the textile company was a mere formality and once I was on location I would seek employment in the chemical industry. That also meant that I had better acquire my degree first--in Morocco, there would not be much opportunity to study chemistry on a level comparable to European universities. Although the exotic adventure of Morocco intrigued me, sober judgment prevailed and I postponed acting on this possibility until after my graduation. By then, there was a fundamentally changed emigration scenario and the idea of Morocco was dropped.

The bulk of my friends including the Fenyös, Szilágyis, Andrew Brandstein and Ervin Mohay emigrated to Australia and were writing very encouraging reports from there. The country was prosperous, wages even at the starting level sufficient to live on, and the public generally friendly to the "New Australians" as the immigrants were amicably called. Ervin Fenyö (now Forrester) immediately intervened at the local Jewish welfare organization to get me the required documentation for a landing permit. These things of course take time, and by the time the document arrived in Europe I was about to get married. The permit was for my person only and not extendable to a wife. In fact, since it was made out to me as a single man, it lost validity upon my marriage. Further efforts were initiated immediately to get me and my wife a new landing permit but these efforts dragged on, with no visible progress for the next several months or years. I think that the sponsoring organization got miffed by my marrying a Gentile.

During my stay in Bad Aibling, a new and seemingly interesting possibility developed. I learned that the newly independent Republic of Indonesia was recruiting professional personnel, including chemists, to revitalize the country's sagging industry. Three-year contracts were offered, with various extra inducements such as free transportation including annual home leaves. I applied, and got involved in extended correspondence with the Indonesian High Commissariat in The Hague. It seemed that I fulfilled all their expectations and was to commence my stint upon attainment of my degree in chemistry, with a starting salary of 1,000 Indonesian rupees per month. Even though this was obviously not a final solution to my resettlement problem it sounded exciting, and for a while I was prepared to start my professional career in that country.

While I was working in Prof. Bertho's lab I learned that a former classmate of the professor settled decades earlier in what was then the Dutch East Indies. Even though they had not been in touch for many years, Prof. Bertho found his old friend's address and permitted me to write him and ask for advice.

Answer came with great promptness and it was a devastatingly candid description of the situation in Indonesia. The country's economy was said to be in shambles, inflation was rampant, and the thousand rupees salary offered me was not worth much any more. Moreover, public safety was terrible and while during the Dutch administration one could confidently roam around alone even in the most remote areas of the country, now anyone out after dark anyplace was at risk of getting mugged. There was said to be particular

hostility towards Europeans. The letter writer himself was planning to abandon the country shortly and he advised that accepting a contract of the kind I wrote him about would be sheer madness.

So much for my plans for Indonesia. Sometime in 1951 or 1952 there was another brief flurry of excitement when a New Zealand immigration commission arrived at the IRO in Munich with intent to screen and select a number of people for admission. New Zealand had held itself generally aloof from accepting immigrants after World War II, in sharp contrast to other English-speaking overseas countries. That was in spite of the fact that the island country, comparable in size to Great Britain or Japan, held only 1/20-1/30 as many people. The New Zealanders were reputed to be more British than the British, and they viewed mass admission of East Europeans with disdain. The present opportunity was said to be only for certain selected professions. I was interested, and confident that chemistry would be among the desired skills. That turned out to be not so. The Commission wanted agricultural workers, mainly sheep shearers, lumberjacks, and other such highly rustic tradesmen. My application never got past the pre-selection and the excitement died down.

Many years later I had an opportunity to visit New Zealand as a tourist, and to marvel at the scenic beauty of that country but I also had to view its pronounced provinciality with a degree of condescension. By refusing to avail itself of the unique chance to get a shot in its economic arm by promoting the influx of technically and commercially competent immigrants when they were available, the country relegated itself to permanent cultural backwaters. This stood in particularly sharp contrast to Australia, which became, in no small part due to the "New Australians", a progressive, vibrant, and very exciting country.

Other than Australia, the most important target country for emigrants of my kind in those days was Canada. I personally considered Canada the second most desirable goal (after the United States). Its proximity to the United States and its relative closeness to Europe were obvious advantages in my mind and I even considered the country's bilinguality an asset. In addition to my basically Anglo-American orientation, I was also a Francophile, with basic knowledge of both languages. Being able to maintain contact with both cultural spheres sounded good. Several old friends, including Joe Kennedy, John Spitzer, and Paul Steiner already lived in Canada and it was the latter who successfully prevailed on the Jewish welfare authorities there to provide me with a "landing permit".

When this document arrived in Munich in the late summer of 1951 and turned out to be extendable to my new wife, I was overjoyed. The processing of Canadian immigrants was progressing briskly at the IRO Resettlement Center in Ludwigsburg and it seemed that our turn would be coming shortly. Confident that we were spending our last weeks in Europe, I started making inquiries at the University whether completion of my degree by some sort of long-distance agreement were possible in case my work there had to be suddenly interrupted by emigration.

Our summons to Ludwigsburg arrived towards the end of October 1951 and we were to check in at the IRO Resettlement Center there (on the premises of a former military barracks) for a period of about 10 days for processing, which included health checks, security checks and (if everything went well) the making of arrangements for transportation. One returned from Ludwigsburg

to the former domicile only for a few weeks to pack and to liquidate the nontransportable belongings. It seemed that we were going to be on our way before the year was out.

We arrived at the Ludwigsburg facility on November 1 and the first day was taken up by local registration, allotment of sleeping quarters and meal tickets, and establishing a rough processing timetable. We were presented to the Canadian immigration commission on the next day, received appointments for various medical examinations, and for interview with the security screening board. Of course, we were buoyant; as a medical person Liesl knew that we had no problem with any disease that the Canadians considered an obstacle to immigration (especially tuberculosis) and as for the security check, we were obviously going to pass that with flying colors.

My security examination lasted a whole afternoon, with the interrogator going through my entire life history in great detail, especially the segment since 1945. I explained the situation at the University of Budapest, my gradually hardening resolve to escape, how I was caught at the railroad station of Miskolc, my jail sentence, my second try which successfully got me as far as Bratislava, and my forceful return from there with 800 fellow escapees which I assumed the Western intelligence agencies must be aware of. I also narrated how my study passbook got confiscated; how I collected individual certifications of my university record after that; the agony of the "ship voyage"; and the last try with being nearly caught at the Austro-Czechoslovak border. All that was written down by stenographers while I told it and answered interspersed questions. I felt that it was an unusually harrowing story well told, and that I deserved some kudos for not faltering along the way and for being able to sit there now in all glory on the threshold of my Canadian immigration. Liesl had her interview separately and although she too was questioned regarding events after 1945, her examination was much shorter than mine.

We were scheduled for some medical examinations on the following day but a note was brought to our room early in the morning, advising us that our projected processing was being interrupted and we were to see the Commissioner at noon. We figured that in view of our obviously robust health maybe the continuation of the health checks was being waived. I also secretly believed that maybe the Commissioner wanted to congratulate me for my steadfastness after having read the transcript of my testimony. We went to our appointment in good spirits.

The interview with the Commissioner was short and to the point. He regretted to inform us that, since we did not fulfill the conditions of being admitted to Canada, our application for immigration was being rejected.

I thought I had not heard right. "Wha-what? What did we not fulfill? What do you mean, rejected?"

The Commissioner repeated the statement in a louder voice and with an air of finality. The interview was at an end. I staggered out of his room as if I had been clubbed on the head. This must be an error. They must be confusing us with someone else. From the clerk in the anteroom we received our "rejection slips" clearly made out in our own names; we tried to inquire about the reasons and could only hear again that "we did not fulfill the conditions".

Not since my breakdown in the Bruck-on-the-Leitha jail had I been in such a vile mood as that afternoon. Having the door to my future slammed shut before my nose with such suddenness was a jolting experience. We spent the rest of the day inquiring about possible appeals or protests, or how we could prevail on the authorities to reexamine our case, because the decision was obviously based on some error. It was like trying to breach a stone wall with bare hands. There was no error, no appeal, and no protest. We did not fulfill the conditions of being accepted into Canada, and that was all there was to it.

My first theory was that we somehow flunked the health test. Back in Munich, with Liesl's medical connections, we reiterated and reexamined all the X-rays, serological tests, and other health checks to which we were subjected in Ludwigsburg and found everything in perfect order. Concurrently we also received word from the emigration desk of the Joint that, according to their information, our problem was "security". I thought that that must mean Liesl; perhaps she was a Nazi party member before 1945 after all and was lying to me about it! Now the Canadians found it all out and would not let us in.

Apart from her indignant denials, this theory did have a number of weak points, not the least of which was that our pre-1945 life histories were barely gone into during the interviews and the security concern was clearly the potential Communist connections rather than former Nazism. Absurd as it was, I had to reconcile myself to the fact that the suspected security risk was myself, and the detailed escape history that I presented almost with a note of pride was simply not believed. The situation was made particularly infuriating by my positive knowledge that among the fellow refugees in Munich there were several former Hungarian Communist Party members who got disillusioned with the party at some point, escaped, and recently successfully emigrated to Canada by passing the very same security examination which I had now flunked. For a "battle-hardened" individual like myself, it was not all that hard to recognize the former "true believers". Heightened sensitivity towards potential stool pigeons used to be the first rule of survival in Budapest. One could recognize Communists from certain mannerisms and even from the idiom they spoke which was full of Russianisms and other un-Hungarian grammatical constructions they picked up in party school. Perhaps naively, I expected Western intelligence experts to be familiar with these giveaways and exercise a selection process based on awareness of the situation. I was stunned that, at least for Canada, that was obviously not the case.

Naturally, I was irate and the very name "Canada" became a dirty word in my vocabulary. I swore never to set foot in that accursed country and I had visions of myself, Walter Mitty-like, being an internationally famous scientist some decades in the future when I was going to get invited to a Canadian university to give a guest lecture. I would of course haughtily decline, saying that "if you did not want me then, you can't have me now". On a more immediate level, I went to consult with the Joint and had a few "post-mortem" conferences with the resettlement experts there. I told them that I could find corroborating witnesses for every material statement I made during the security interview and insisted that I was going to make a formal appeal, complete with affidavits, to the Canadian government. Very realistically, the Joint experts advised against this. The case of one young couple was simply not important enough to reach the higher levels of decision-making and the intermediate echelons would not reverse a security

decision made on the site. I must chalk up this fiasco to experience. They said that some aspects of my escape story did sound fantastic or improbable and/or suggestive of being subject to potential blackmail or coerced collaboration by Communist spymasters. They also thought that I overestimated the expertise of Western immigration officials if I expected them to be aware of such events as the collapse of the Bratislava Brikha in September 1949. In the future, I had better use a little more discretion in dwelling on every detail of my strange escape story with so much completeness. In the meantime, I must forget about Canada. That was supposed to become easier as fundamental changes were soon expected in U.S. immigration policy.

#### The Final Dilemma

The McCarran-Walter Act which re-defined eligibility for U.S. immigration was passed by Congress in June 1952. In many ways, the new law toughened the conditions under which immigrants were to be admitted but it also contained an amendment to the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 designated as Section 3(c), which made special provision for the "double-persecuted", i.e. displaced persons who missed the deadline of the old law because they were repatriated after the war but returned to the west when they found the political situation in their homeland intolerable. The provision was tailored clearly and specifically for people like me, and my next hurdle was to procure some kind of sponsorship for us. The law required that the financial security of new immigrants be guaranteed by a U.S. citizen with adequate means or, preferably, by a recognized charitable organization or agency. I requested assistance from the Joint, but that turned out to be easier said than done for a "mixed" couple. It was explained to me that most American Jewish congregations, notably those in New York or Chicago, did not sponsor part-Gentile families. However, there were a few which did, and after we ascertained that we had no other realistic choice (my New York cousin was not a citizen yet and Catholic welfare organizations could not be counted on in this respect at all) I requested to forward our application to whichever local organization would care to consider it. The Munich Joint did write a warm recommendation in our support, stressing that as a professional couple (chemist and physician, respectively) and both of us already speaking fair English, we were least likely to depend on charity for long after arrival. By early 1953 we received word that we had agency sponsorship from the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit, Michigan.

Naturally, I had heard of Detroit already as the automobile capital of the world and as one of the major U.S. cities. We hurried to consult references and learned further that Detroit was regarded as one of the better-designed towns of America with plenty of tree-shaded boulevards and well-groomed parks, and site of the fastest-growing educational institution of the country, Wayne University. It all sounded good, and we were excited about it all--if only we could successfully pass the security screening this time. The past experience with Canada certainly filled us with apprehension, although it was said that U.S. procedures were less arbitrary than those of Canada, with reasons for rejection stated and appeals possible.

It was mid-summer 1953 when we received notification from the U.S. Consulate General in Munich that our case was coming up for processing. We had to report for various medical examinations and were summoned for consular interview on August 19. We were advised to bring a valid passport or other travel document and visa fees in the amount of DM 35 per person with us,

so it seemed that they were planning to give us our immigration visas that very day.

I gave a lot of thought to the question of how to testify during our security hearing and of course I received plenty of well-meant but often naïve advice from virtually everybody who knew us. The recommendations ranged from oversimplifying the story of my escape down to admitting only the last and successful try, all the way to detailing all the preceding events and then some. The attitude of public officials in the United States was supposed to have changed greatly during the past year or two due to exacerbation of the cold war and the anti-Communist witch hunt within government circles, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. Whether this was good or bad news for us was not clear. At any rate, I resolved to answer all questions with scrupulous honesty but to volunteer nothing beyond what was expressly asked.

In actual fact, our examination by Mr. Robert Bruce, U.S. Vice Consul in Munich, was not unfriendly, much shorter than the interrogation by the Canadians, and unlike the latter, was given to Liesl and me together. Allegedly, the real security investigation had been concluded already and if we were summoned at all that meant that we had passed it satisfactorily. There was not much concern with the details of my escape and the questions concentrated on the dates of movement from country to country, whether or not we were ever members of the Communist Party, and perfunctory questions of whether we were, or intended to become, paupers, prostitutes, professional criminals, or other such individuals statutorily excluded from U.S. immigration. We assured Mr. Bruce that we were not and it seemed that the interview was just about successfully concluded when, almost as an afterthought, he asked if we were ever rejected from immigration by another country. True to my resolve, I unhesitatingly admitted our Canadian episode. The Vice Consul dismissed us by saying that the decision in our case would take a few weeks and we were not to make any preparation for the trip until further notice.

That was bad news. We expected to receive our visas that same day and the delay could mean only one thing: further security investigation. Evidently, the Americans were going to find out from the Canadians why we were rejected--something that I would have dearly loved to know myself. I was extremely distressed by this complication and reproached myself for being too honest--would it not have been better simply not to recall this whole incident? At any rate, the damage was done. On the other hand, all was not lost; there was no rejection as yet, only a delay.

The problem was, we had had it with delays and there was a special reason why another one at that point was highly unwelcome. Liesl was pregnant again, with delivery expected towards the end of February or the beginning of March, and we were hopeful to have our resettlement accomplished before the birth of our second child. The American immigration would have worked out just fine, had it not been for this sudden problem. We certainly did not have much time to lose.

Some weeks previously we had made casual contact at a party with an official of the Tolstoy Foundation, a charitable organization for Russian refugees, established after World War I. Russian refugees having become few and far between in the 1950's, the Tolstoy Foundation extended its operation to encompass other Eastern European nationalities subjugated by the Soviet

Union after World War II. The official told us that his organization was running an immigration program to Brazil, and tried to interest us in that scheme. We were at that time impatiently waiting for our U.S. processing and took only vague mental note of this possibility. After the developments at our interview, with the U.S. immigration suddenly looking questionable, we felt renewed interest in this option.

I went to the Tolstoy Foundation to inquire about the Brazilian opportunity. I was received with a courteous friendliness that amazed me. We refugees in contact with authorities or organizations were accustomed to be treated like a lower form of life, with hours of waiting in anterooms, being talked to with a note of contemptuous disdain, and a general attitude by all Westerners that we used to call in Bad Aibling "the Great White Sahib complex". There was no trace of this at the Tolstoy Foundation. My acquaintance chatted with me amicably, expressed pleasure that I had decided to follow his advice, and offered me a refreshment while I filled out the Brazilian visa application in his office. The Foundation would be forwarding it to the Brazilian Consulate and let us know of further developments.

Just a few weeks later, and well before any decision by the U.S. Consulate General, the Tolstoy Foundation notified us that there were positive developments with our Brazilian visa application. We reported back, learned that the Brazilian Consul wished to interview us, and an official of the Tolstoy Foundation was to be also present. He offered to drive us over in his own car. That may sound today as nothing more than common courtesy but at the time, and in the context of how other organizations including the Joint used to treat us, it appeared as an extraordinary gesture. We felt like Very Important Persons when we stepped out of an elegant automobile in front of the Brazilian Consulate. Our interview with the Consul was brief, pleasant, and ended with prompt approval of our visa application, handshakes, and best wishes for the future.

We had a slight technical problem: our passport, actually an international travel document for displaced persons, was at the U.S. Consulate General and the fact that they had not returned it when our processing was interrupted there, was one of the few encouraging features in that whole situation. I was supposed to have brought our passport for the Brazilian processing and muttered some excuse for not having done so. Now I was asked to bring it within a few days so that they could place the Brazilian immigration visa stamp into it.

There was still no word from the U.S. Consulate General and I invented one excuse after another why I could not present our passport at the Brazilian Consulate. We finally received summons to see Mr. Bruce during the first week of October. Our interview was longer than before and focused much more sharply on the one question of whether I was ever a member of the Hungarian Communist Party. Although he did not say so explicitly, it seemed that the Canadians had answered his inquiry by stating that they had information to the effect that I was. Of course I repudiated the charge with the greatest possible indignation and said that I was totally bewildered about how such an accusation could have originated at all. I insisted that I was never a member of any party or political organization and was in fact known on campus of the University of Budapest as an outspoken opponent of the Communist regime. It was for that very reason why I had lost my teaching assistant's job and became eventually expelled from the University before graduation. I said I hoped that the United States had the intelligence capability to

verify every material fact in that situation. The Vice Consul listened, asked questions, had me tell events connected with my escape in considerable detail, and commented that if I could produce some *documentary evidence* of not having been a Communist, it would be helpful. In the meantime, he is going to continue his investigation about me. We must have a little more patience for the final decision.

Of course, patience was the commodity in shortest supply in our temperament at the time. Liesl was in the fifth month of pregnancy. It was no longer a question of going or not going; that decision was made when our Brazilian immigration was approved, and the only remaining question was, *where*. Unless our U.S. immigration was positively resolved within the next week or two, it was to be Brazil.

That was a very difficult mental reorientation to make. We both spoke fair English but no Portuguese; culturally and emotionally, we both had a strong "North Atlantic" (i.e., West European-Anglo/American) orientation while South America left us pretty much indifferent. There was also the question of acclimation to the tropics. On the other hand, getting into a barely developed but immense country of fabulous potential wealth sounded exciting. We had both read Stefan Zweig's enthusiastic book about Brazil written in the 1930's and the gentlemanly treatment we received from the Brazilians now certainly contributed to an excellent impression. I had two Tapir friends, John Stricker and Julius Vajda, living in São Paulo. We were also aware of Rio de Janeiro being widely regarded as the most beautiful city of the world. We kept humoring each other about the advantages of the Brazilian option until we weren't sure any more what we really wanted most. I retrieved my passport from the U.S. Consulate General with some excuse (without withdrawing our pending visa application there) and presented it at the Brazilian Consulate. Our immigration visa was duly stamped in, dated October 22, 1953. It was to remain valid for 3 months.

Concurrently, I also tried to procure something along the lines Mr. Bruce asked for, to prove that I was never a Communist. I had an old friend working for the Radio Free Europe in Munich as News Editor: Steve Sárkány. He used to be a language and literature major at the University of Budapest at the same time when I was a chemistry student, and he was vaguely aware of my political orientation during the Communist takeover. At my request he wrote a very strong character reference for me and sent it to the U.S. Consulate General. When I brought back my passport there (with the Brazilian visa already stamped in), Mr. Bruce spotted me and asked me in for further questioning. He did get the letter from Steve Sárkány. He said that what he needed were not letters of recommendation but some *documentary evidence* that I was not a Communist.

It is amazing how much difference a visa stamp in one's passport can make in a person's self-assurance and negotiating style. I was no longer the humble supplicant abjectly currying a gracious favor. I became much more nonchalant, with my head held higher, my voice more firm. I told the Vice Consul with a note of sarcasm that, had the Hungarian Communist Party issued documents to nonmembers certifying that status, I should be most happy to present it. I hoped it did not come as a surprise to him that such documents were not in fact issued. I said it was not quite clear to me how I was supposed to prove a negative.

Mr. Bruce listened with a distinct note of astonishment. He was evidently not accustomed to this tone from visa applicants. He mumbled something apologetically about his hands being also tied, and asked for just a few more weeks for a last check before the final decision.

I mentioned to Liesl my latest interview with the Vice Consul in briefest and most casual terms. By tacit mutual agreement, our possible U.S. immigration became a virtually taboo subject. We were not to eat out our hearts with what might have been; we were to concentrate emotionally on Brazil. I was planning to purchase a Portuguese dictionary, phrasebook and grammar. The Tolstoy Foundation was already in the process of reserving ship passage for us: we were to depart from Genova on December 9, with arrival in Rio de Janeiro sometime around Christmas.

Early November I went to the U.S. Consulate General to inquire about progress, if any. There was none. Mr. Bruce had not received yet the investigative report he was waiting for but he was willing to talk to me anyway and had me reiterate some of the details of my escape story and expulsion from the University--perhaps with intent to catch me in contradictions. Of course, he did not succeed in doing that. To the contrary, I interwove with my story expressions of disappointment over U.S. intelligence: how we in the resistance in Budapest used to encourage each other that all the misdeeds of the Communist bosses were on record *somewhere* (meaning Western intelligence agencies) and that full accounting for them would be demanded someday. Now, out in the West, I said, it was painful for me to realize how little U.S. authorities knew about conditions behind the Iron Curtain. Otherwise, they would know who the real security risks were and people like me would be received with open arms rather than with absurd and insulting accusations of Communism. I also said that I was aware that the account of our Canadian rejection might cause problems and friends did warn us not to admit that. I chose to be honest about it because if dishonesty was the only way to get an immigration visa here, they could keep it.

Just how much impression all this made was difficult to judge. Mr. Bruce assured me that it would take just a few more days and he would have the final decision. I went home, firmly setting November 15 in my mind as the last-ditch deadline for the U.S. option. Further indecision was technically impossible: we needed our passport for securing the transit visas in order to board our boat for Rio. Liesl was in the sixth month of pregnancy. We were already in the process of liquidating our belongings.

On November 16, 1953 I appeared at the Immigration Section of the American Consulate General again and demanded to see Mr. Bruce, even though I had no scheduled appointment with him. I stood in his office door, pushing aside a feebly protesting secretary, and said, approximately:

"Mr. Vice Consul, excuse the intrusion. I know you want us to wait, but we cannot do that any longer. You have kept us on tenterhooks for three months already. That seems like an adequate time to get to the bottom of such a mean and groundless accusation as that which has been leveled against me. I have a pregnant wife and our new baby is not going to be born in Europe. We shall not miss other opportunities because of your procrastination. I need a decision within 24 hours and if you cannot give it I shall voluntarily withdraw our application for immigration to the United States. That's all. Thank you, sir." I made an about-face and marched out resolutely without waiting for an answer.

I would not be surprised if the office staff witnessing this performance still recalled it today, 40 years later. I imagine it did not happen too often that a petitioner for immigration presented an ultimatum to the U.S. Government. I went home in a dejected mood, and said to Liesl that I had probably cooked our goose today. At least I had the luxury of letting them have a piece of my mind. It did not matter anymore; there was nothing to lose.

Next day, November 17, 1953 in the afternoon, I went in again to collect our passport. How exactly I would "withdraw" our application as a grandstand play was not quite clear but before I even had opportunity to think about that, I ran into Mr. Bruce in the corridor who said:

"Mr. Révész, I'm glad to find you here. Your case is OK. We decided to award you and your family the immigration visas. Kindly consult with the secretaries regarding the technical steps to be taken."

Curiously, I experienced no sudden surge of euphoria or outburst of joy when I heard these words. Even though it was the realization of my dreams since the dark cell in the Miskolc jail, and the very communication I was fervently hoping for during the last several months, the long wait had made me blasé and my first sentiment was a rather supercilious "So, you came to your senses, after all." Of course, I did not say that aloud and thanked the Vice Consul very politely. The "technical steps to be taken" consisted of leaving our passport at the Consulate General for the time being because they had run out of their immigration visa allotment for the month of November. We were to be among the first to receive our visas from the December allotment, two weeks hence. Could I believe this, or were there more complications in store for us? Anyway, what were the Brazilians going to say? What was the Tolstoy Foundation going to say? Most importantly, what was Liesl going to say? Lately, she seemed to be more and more enthusiastic about the Brazilian option or did she only pretend that in order to cheer me up?

These were my thoughts as I was riding the tram back to our apartment in the Funkkaserne. When I blurted out the news at home, there was first incredulity, then skepticism. Pubi and Mitzi Korenika, our next-door neighbors and virtual family members, particularly felt that to throw away the Brazilian option at this late stage, and without the U.S. visa actually in our possession, was too risky. Something could still happen and we could find ourselves "between two chairs on the ground". We debated the situation half the night and came up with the decision to opt for the U.S.A. after all. The advantages were just too overwhelming and as for the visa not being physically in our passport yet, I decided to give credence to an express promise of the U.S. Vice Consul. Next day I called the Tolstoy Foundation to cancel our trip to Rio and also called the Joint, reporting our success and requesting transportation to the U.S.A. They already had notification regarding us from the Consulate General and offered their congratulations. Our transport to America would be sometime around the New Year, and by air.

The award of our American visas was something of a local sensation, and our friends including Steve Sárkány and Ervin Erdös came to celebrate with us. The details of what had transpired behind the closed doors of the U.S. Consulate General remained of course a guessing game, although some elements of the situation were obvious enough. My initial security

investigation by the U.S. intelligence services turned up nothing unfavorable, or we would have never been called to the processing to begin with. After I admitted our Canadian rejection, the Vice Consul felt the need to find out the reasons, and contacted the Canadians. Response came back stating that they had information about me being a Communist. Where that came from and what it was based on remains a mystery to this day, but the Americans must have had some doubt about the dependability of that information or they would have given us the short shrift, too. Mr. Bruce's repeated willingness to talk to me and ask for counterproof signaled the typical American penchant for fair play, as well as perhaps a personal good will towards us. I have no way of knowing what sort of additional security investigation he requested and whether or not it had yielded any answer at all by the time I presented my "ultimatum". It cannot be denied that the Vice Consul was somewhat on the spot: those were the days of the Alger Hiss trial, the convictions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and the lifting of the security clearance of a scientist of the stature of J. Robert Oppenheimer. According to Senator Joseph McCarthy, Communist infiltrators were being aided and abetted by built-in collaborators in the federal government. My New York cousin Hugo wrote me after I triumphantly informed him of the eventual success of our U.S. immigration:

"This was the surprise of the year--to tell you the truth. Never in my life was I ever so stunned over the completely unexpected news. I almost gave up hope and already saw you on a boat sailing to Brazil. Just today, when I left my office I talked to one of the big shots of the Joint and we both agreed that there was very little hope under the present extremely rigorous circumstances. You would not believe what measures are being taken here to prevent infiltration of potential spies and Communist fellow travelers after all the bad experience they had in previous years...Once the ominous specter of "security risk" was raised, I would not have wagered a red cent for your immigration visas. Every person coming from behind the Iron Curtain is to a certain degree suspicious, and consular officials are held personally responsible for any softness towards visa petitioners who turn out to be leftist after arrival...Reading your amazing report of your interview I cannot but express my profound admiration over your firm and resolute attitude ...It was the [Vice] Consul's discretionary right to grant you or refuse you the visa and he simply must have been impressed by your staunch appearance however impudent it might have been."

Our immigration visas were duly issued without further difficulties when the new contingent reached the Consulate General. They are dated December 4, 1953. By then, we were fully immersed in our preparations for the trip.

### Farewell to Europe

A few days later we received a letter from the U.S. Operations Mission in Frankfurt, informing us that, by request from the American Joint Distribution Committee and with concurrence of the U.S. Department of Justice, the people of the United States, under the President's Escapee Program, would pay for our transportation. We were assigned to Flight No. 1295 of the Transocean Air Lines, a charter company specializing in refugee transports. We were to depart from Riem Airport of Munich right after the New Year--the actual date of departure was postponed twice, from January 4 to January 5 to January 6. As far as we were concerned, it was the last chance and pushing it at that: according to the rules, pregnant women past the 7th month were no longer eligible to be included in transports.

A potentially disastrous complication occurred during the first week of December. A young woman acquaintance with her 4-year old boy came to visit us and the Korenikas one afternoon. Next day we were notified that the little boy had broken out in measles. We quickly calculated that if our daughter Eva Beatrix, for whom we started using the nickname "Trixie" at about that time, caught the disease it would break out just in time to make our departure with Flight 1295 impossible. Any later transports were out of the question because of Liesl's condition and if we waited until a new baby was born and ready to travel, our immigration visas would expire and we could start the whole procedure anew. It was a truly nightmarish scenario. A lot was riding on being able to do something about Trixie's potential infection. With Liesl's medical connections we succeeded in procuring measles immunoglobulin, a rare preparation at the time and not normally available for prophylaxis except in very special circumstances. Trixie was duly immunized, with fervent hopes that it was done in time. About ten days later Gaby Korenika came down with measles, prompting us to remove Trixie from our premises in the greatest hurry--if she escaped infection the first time around, we surely did not want her to catch it then. For a day or two, Trixie was Mrs. Schmidtner's stepdaughter. But soon we received word that she, too, had broken out with the disease. Fortunately, as a result of the immunization, Trixie had a notably attenuated version with no prodromal stage, fast fading of the eruptions, and virtually total recovery within a week. The disaster was averted.

We spent the holiday season saying goodbye to Liesl's family and relatives. We visited briefly in Heidelberg, Öhringen, and then spent Christmas and New Year in Hollstadt and Bad Neustadt, respectively. In Heidelberg we met my brother-in-law Victor's new fiancée Inge and the Öhringen visit was memorable to me for two reasons. First, it was in Öhringen in late 1953 that I first saw operational television. That was a brand-new technology in Europe then and the West German state of Baden-Württemberg where Öhringen is located, was a bit ahead of Bavaria in having regular broadcasts. There was no television programming in Munich as yet. We marveled in a hotel lobby over this exciting new amusement.

The second reason why I poignantly remember our visit in Öhringen is less pleasant. It was the first time that I met Mother Übelacker, Liesl's Aunt Ida, in person; I understood that she could not come to earlier family gatherings because of her health and I also knew that she had a "nervous breakdown" after the war. What I saw was a different story. Aunt Ida was a woman so grotesquely obese that moving her from bed to chair or to the bathroom was a formidable family project requiring at least two helpers.

She was also in the most abject and agitated mental depression one can imagine, invariably in tears, and with a facial expression reflecting constant panicky terror. It was a most upsetting spectacle and from the equanimity with which family members treated her I gathered that this was a well-accustomed situation. It also developed that she had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals for at least the past 8 years. I could remember that in our mutual pre-marital briefings I expressly asked Liesl whether there were any mental disease in her family and she denied it. I reminded her of that denial now with a note of reproach; how could she disregard such a blatant problem with her mother's sister? Liesl was flustered and said that she did not think the matter was pertinent. It was the first chink in the shining armor of the spiritually perfect person that was my perception of Liesl then, although I did not foresee the portentous significance of the situation for our own future.

Christmas and New Year were spent pleasantly with the older Hanaks and the Renks. Paula and Burkard also had a baby, named Harald, just a month younger than Trixie. The two cousins, 14 and 13 months old, seemed to have a good time together. The Renks also had a new car, the first such luxury item in the family, and Burkard took us for a day-long joyride to the cities of Coburg and Lichtenfels and to the pilgrimage churches of Banz and Vierzehnheiligen [14 Saints]. It was our last sightseeing excursion in Europe before our emigration.

The last days in Munich after our return were hectic. We spent nearly all of our remaining money on last-minute purchases, mainly on wardrobe. We were allowed to take 50 kg luggage with us on the plane; the rest was to be crated and sent by ship. I had two sizable wooden boxes made to hold our belongings and as I viewed those I could not help but remember my elation 3 years earlier when I arrived in Munich with a whole suitcase-ful of personal effects instead of the tiny briefcase I had carried from Budapest. My possessions had undergone another quantum jump since then, to say nothing of wife and daughter. I still have those two crates standing in the garage as sentimental mementoes of family history.

Last-minute excitements included problems with some trifling baggage overweight; whether scientific and medical books could qualify as "tools of trade" which were exempt from the weight limitation; and whether at the pre-boarding medical examination Liesl was, or was not, past the 7th month. When all these problems were resolved and we boarded the bus taking us to Riem to our flight, I could wipe a drop or two of nervous perspiration from my forehead. My very last D-Marks were spent at the airport to get a photograph of us boarding the plane. At last, we were on our way.

#### America, Here We Come!

Flight 1295 lifted off from Riem Airport on Wednesday, January 6, 1954 at noon. The plane was totally filled with passengers, most of whom seemed to be Ukrainian or Polish. It seemed that we were the only ones speaking any English. In view of our baby and also because of Liesl's condition, we received seating in the front of the plane that was a little roomier than other rows, but there was no separate seat for Trixie. The plane was of course a mid-century turboprop, much slower than modern jets, and total flight time including two stops was estimated at 26 hours. It was Liesl's first flight in her life and my second (in 1947, I once flew from Budapest to Szeged within Hungary).

Our first stop after about 4 hours of flight was Shannon, Ireland. While the plane refueled we were ushered into a dining room and served a decent meal. Afterwards, I walked around the airport, ogled the duty-free shops, and even tested a side door--could I just walk out and enter this country without any passport formalities if I chose to? I could have: the door was unlocked and unattended, and just a few yards away on the highway a bus was loading and unloading passengers. I was impressed by this negligent informality. We were in the free world.

The trip across the Atlantic was in total darkness and, except for the last segment, uneventful. We were to land for refueling in Gander, Newfoundland, around midnight local time but just before landing a storm caught us and there was pretty miserable roller-coastering for about an hour. Eventually, the pilot announced that Gander Airport was inaccessible because of the storm, and he would take us to Stephenville, about 150 miles to the west. All of us were pretty much shaken up upon arrival but a good breakfast made things look right again. Daylight was breaking already when we got under way from Stephenville and I can remember recognizing Cape Cod from the air--it was a heartthrob to have my first glimpse of our future homeland.

We arrived at Idlewild, New York (the future J.F. Kennedy Airport) around 9:00 A.M. on Thursday, January 7, 1954. In contrast to the rigmarole of getting our visas, the customs and immigration check after arrival was swift and pleasant. There was no Ellis Island-type herding and waiting; in fact, Ellis Island had closed for good just a few months before our arrival. The controlling and checking out of immigrants would be henceforth done exclusively in connection with visa issuance. In a way, I regretted to have missed this historic facility.

My cousin Hugo and a representative of the Joint were on hand to meet us; there was a joyful reunion. The whole planeload of people with their escorts were transferred to buses and unloaded in front of Pennsylvania Station in the heart of Manhattan, from where we continued by taxi.

Hugo was the older son of my maternal grandmother's brother David Kolman, and brother-in-law and uncle, respectively, of the Bratislava Kolmans whom I had visited during my escape. He used to live in Vienna, escaped from there to Budapest after the Nazi annexation of Austria, and we knew each other well. He emigrated to America after World War II with a new wife, Riza, and worked as business manager of a hospital in Brooklyn. We had maintained regular contact and he watched my efforts at emigration anxiously. Now we were invited to spend a few days with them before proceeding to Detroit.

The Colmans (the initial was changed from K to C when they arrived in the United States) lived in a tiny but cute apartment on West 98th Street, between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive. We spent most of the first afternoon resting in their apartment and talking. I can remember that the television broadcast a concert by the New York Philharmonic, playing Brahms' First Symphony. That music will remain for me forever associated with the New World, much more so than the symphony of Dvořák by that name.

Later, Hugo and I went for a stroll in Central Park and next morning I accompanied him on the subway downtown. I alighted at Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan while he continued to his office in Brooklyn. Liesl

and Trixie stayed at home with Riza. I spent the entire day of January 8 walking from Battery Park to West 98th Street; I just wanted to soak up New York and dampness, weariness, chill meant nothing to me. I was just delighted to be in New York. I had a fair idea of the city's layout from Idealopolis days and in preparation for this visit I had a rather ambitious agenda of what to see. We were to remain Uncle Hugo's guests for 3 days. Naturally, Liesl had limited capability to participate in the sightseeing program but she, too, joined me to visit the highlights while Trixie could be left with Riza who proved to be a lovely and kind lady.

Upon landing in the United States, our entire cash assets were five dollars and one cent. The five-dollar note was what we had converted from our next-to-last DMarks in Munich after all the shopping was finished, and the one-cent coin was a souvenir I received from someone as a gift. Hugo insisted on lending us 200 dollars for a start in the New World but I was determined not to break that prior to arrival in Detroit and left it with Liesl while I was roaming in the city.

Actually, five dollars went far in those days. A subway ride was a nickel. A substantial noon snack I had at a "luncheonette" on Union Square was 35 cents. I can also remember my first "splurge" in the United States: Guidebook to the American Museum of Natural History. I was browsing covetously at the sales counter of the museum when a young saleslady came over and said, encouragingly:

"It's the guide to the whole museum and it's awfully good [sic]. Only one dollar."

My sales resistance melted and I made the purchase, investing a fifth of my total funds. It was my first commercial transaction in the English language and the No.1 U.S. acquisition of my library. I still have the volume; I imagine it's slightly outdated by now.

In 3 days I managed to visit most tourist sights of New York and Liesl came with me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the United Nations, and a few other spots. I also went to the office of the Joint, thanked them for all the help, and took possession of our train tickets for the night train on January 10/11 from New York to Detroit.

We found the trainride exciting; the comfortable Pullman coaches with adjustable upholstered seats and warm-water washrooms were a far cry from what we were accustomed to on European trains. We had to change in Buffalo in the early morning and I can remember that I was stretching my ears, trying to hear a background roar--in some geography or travelogue publication I had read during my childhood (obviously, some local version of the National Enquirer) it was stated that the thunder of Niagara Falls could be heard as far as Buffalo. I actually imagined that I could hear something, if it were not for constant interference by other noises originating closer.

As we pulled out of Buffalo I naturally assumed that we would be rounding Lake Erie and was surprised to see us cross a large body of water that could be only the Niagara River, and pass by the stations of Fort Erie, Simcoe, St. Thomas. According to my recollection of geography we were now in Canada but there was no indication of that on the train at all. Formalities were apparently confined to passengers boarding or getting off--another stunning example of the breezily carefree attitude prevailing in the free world.

It occurred to me that, unintentionally, I was already in double violation of my angry resolve made after the Canadian rejection, not to grace that country with my presence, ever. As it happened, a few days before I had found myself in Newfoundland, and now I was in Southern Ontario. I observed all that with a chuckle. My anger had subsided; now that my No.1 resettlement objective was being realized, I could afford to be generous. I decided to forgive Canada. The memory of my Canadian debacle did serve to put the essential fairness of U.S. procedures in sharp focus and it helped to make me an ardent U.S. patriot.

We had a pleasant and very complete breakfast in the dining car of the train at 90 cents apiece. By around noon we were in Windsor, then entered a long tunnel. Before I realized what was happening, we were at the Central Railroad Terminal of Detroit, Michigan.

We got our belongings together and stepped on the platform. We spotted a lady carrying a sign with our name; she was Mrs. Schackne of the Jewish Welfare Federation. She greeted us effusively, expressed appreciative surprise over our relatively good English, paid tribute to the cuteness of Trixie, and packed us and our luggage into her car, an immense Buick. She drove us to our pre-rented sublet room in the near-northwest side of Detroit, at 3301 Blaine Street. There, we were received by Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Rubel, an elderly couple formerly from Vienna with whom we immediately established warm rapport. We stayed in their home for only 3 weeks but our friendship continued for decades, and turned into the most durable association I have had in the New World, passed on to a second and even third generation. By custom dating back to 1954, we still celebrate Thanksgiving Day together every year with their descendants, which I find an appropriate reminder that being able to live in this country is indeed something to be thankful for.

My elation of having become an American resident knew no bounds. I simply could not wait to become "Americanized" and I started using the name I invented in the Miskolc jail, "Andrew L. Reeves", virtually from day one of our settling in Detroit. I was indifferent to the comic ring this name must have had when applied to a recent arrival with a distinctly continental accent, and I did all kinds of things that were unnecessary or slightly ridiculous for a brand new resident. I filed a "Declaration of Intention" to become a citizen even though that was no longer required for eventual naturalization; I registered with the Selective Service to make myself available for military induction if called upon; I even wanted to file an income tax return for 1953 and was disappointed when it was not accepted because I was not even in the country yet at any time during the tax year. Those were certainly the honeymoon days with my new country.

My enjoyment of being a United States resident was substantially enhanced by the ominous news from Hungary, where Communist oppression of the population was going from bad to worse and was at its peak just about when we made our transatlantic trip. I was of course in constant postal contact with my parents and although mail was obviously censored (it took 3-4 weeks for a letter to arrive from Munich to Budapest or vice versa), we developed our own secret code of communication in order to convey "sensitive" news items. For instance, the expression "sick" meant someone still believing in Communism; "well" meant having recognized that the doctrine was a fraud. In 1950 and 1951 there were still a few family members who were "sick" but as time went on these became fewer and fewer. My cousin

Vera and her husband Andrew Hajós (they were married in 1951) became "well" sometime in 1952; cousin Mary and her husband Dr. Miklós Roth about a year later. Cousin Erzsi's "health" also improved substantially when she became capriciously transferred from her glamorous executive position in the movie industry to a third-rate desk job with a food canning outfit. Several other neighbors and acquaintances whom I remembered as being fanatically devoted to the official political line became disillusioned sooner or later and in 1953 my mother could write me in quiet irony:

"Public health has never been better around here than it is these days...although there are a few malingerers it is becoming hard to find a truly sick person. Mr. and Mrs. Sámuel [formerly the party delegates for the block] are in excellent health now and so is Mrs. Bernáth [another neighbor]. It is really marvelous what the Socialist public policies have accomplished in this country."

In my family circle in Budapest, there were celebrations when we got our U.S. visas and it was pretty obvious that everyone, even the former party faithful, were green with envy. I sent a postcard home from Stephenville in Newfoundland after we landed there in the storm and complained about how unpleasant the trip was. My mother answered:

"I am carrying around your postcard, the one you wrote us while under way, telling us about the bad time you had on your flight. I am trying to solicit a little sympathy for you, but let me tell you, it's a hard task. I simply cannot find anyone who is willing to shed a single tear for you... That's how heartless people are around here."

Summary: Retrospect and Prospect.

I was 29 years and 3 months old when we arrived in the United States and the event signaled the end of the *Sturm und Drang* ["Stress and Turmoil"; an expression borrowed from German literary history] period of my life. While the "Rock" in the title of this work which almost crushed me means Nazism, with the story of my liberation from it, the "Hard Place" which gave me no acceptable quarter stands for Communism, and my difficult escape from it. It was a bitter and exhausting agenda, not made any easier by the fact that in the end I even had to struggle against being identified with the latter. But all that was ancient history now; I stood on the threshold of a new life and was looking into the future with unbounded optimism.

From a perspective of four decades and in the knowledge that Eastern European Communism eventually collapsed under the weight of its own misrepresentations and inefficiencies, it is easy to take a detached and tolerant attitude towards that system now. At the time, however, I was an ardent and embittered foe of everything that smacked of a compromise with what I considered to be the supreme evil of our times. I even saw a possible point in the allegations of McCarthyism: I could well remember how in the late 1940's in Hungary we were utterly exasperated with what we interpreted

as the hopeless naïveté of Western governments in apparently swallowing Communist propaganda claims and seemingly accepting the "People's Democracy" as a form of genuine democracy. It was not too great a leap to conclude from this that perhaps some American Government officials were personally receptive to such claims.

I can specifically remember my first visit to the Foreign Language Section of the Detroit Public Library where I would of course head for the Hungarian collection. I was first impressed and delighted by the size of that collection but my delight changed to disgust and outrage when I found the shelves stacked with Communist propaganda volumes. There were all the speeches of Comrade Rákosi; the annotated transcripts of the Mindszenty trial and the Rajk trial purporting to prove their guilt; and other such blatantly political material that I had more than enough of, and was trying to flee from, when I escaped Hungary. I went to complain to the Chief Librarian, trying to explain my point to her. She was a distinguished-looking elderly lady who listened to me tolerantly and then patiently explained that suppressing views one did not agree with was not the American way of handling things. She did admit that she did not know what these books were (the volumes were a gift from the Hungarian Legation and she had no one on her staff who could read them) but she also said that she was not prepared to withdraw them. I suggested angrily that the least she could do was to put them in the "Fiction" category rather than with "History", and left. Interestingly enough, the volumes I had specifically objected to did get quietly removed from the public shelves a few days later. They remained listed in the catalogue.

Today, I would be no longer upset if I found this sort of material in a public library. In fact, I have myself become an avid collector of them, both of the Nazi kind and the Communist kind. Of course, it does take some perspective to view these historic phenomena *sine ira et studio* ["without rancor or design"] and my academic interest in them developed slowly over the years.

So, what can be said, *sine ira et studio*, about Communism as a political system? Mainly, that originally it was not a political system at all. Communism was an economic system with fabulous sociologic projections. Communal ownership of all means of production and a planned economy in place of selfish market forces were said to eliminate wasteful competition and generate a prosperity that would erase or blur the boundaries between the social classes and eventually even between the nations. These noble goals, promising Utopia within one's own lifetime, gave Communism a certain appeal among the naïve enthusiasts, including some uncritical intellectuals who should have known better. The theoretical foundations of "dialectical materialism" were impenetrable enough to confuse all but the most astute minds. In certain circles, flirtation with Communism became intellectually "chic".

Of course, prior owners of the means of production (the "Capitalists") could not be expected to hand over their property without a fight, and it had to be taken from them by force. The gentler souls among the naïve enthusiasts viewed this as a flaw and swallowed hard--some became disillusioned. Unfortunately, the losses to the movement were more than made up by new adherents who could not have cared less about economic doctrine but were attracted by the espousal of violence. The "Capitalist" label was elastic and could be expanded at will to encompass "kulaks", recalcitrant

proletarians, unimpressed intellectuals, and even non-Michurinist scientists. All these were eventually lumped together as "class enemies". The typical Communist party member in Hungary in the years 1947-49 could be characterized as a social sadist, one who *enjoyed* the infliction of anguish on fellow citizens. This is where Communism and Nazism met and became in some respects almost undistinguishable. Drones of the low echelon Arrow Cross who hoped to continue to ply their old trade under a new banner became Communist party members, as did some totally embittered Holocaust survivors who viewed the new situation as an opportunity to strike back. History created some very strange bedfellows. Of course, when it came to competition for leadership positions within the party between the "naïve enthusiasts" and the "social sadists" it was preordained by temperament as to who would win and who would lose. At some point, Communism did become a political system the essence of which was total oppression of the populace and the most ruthless eradication of all dissent. Post-Mao China eventually became the best practical illustration of this: the so-called "Marxist-Leninist" principles of economics may be quietly abandoned or changed out of all recognition (while continuing to pay lip service to them) if absolutely required by a collapsing economy, but the police methods of oppression--never.

This state of affairs bred a third type of Communist: the "Apparatchik". The objective of the apparatchik was to fit into the system, such as it was. If lip service was required for concepts he may or may not have understood or shared, he gave lip service. If enthusiastic adulation of glorious leaders was required, he adulated enthusiastically. If "management" of a company or of any other societal unit required slavish following of orders from above without the slightest personal initiative or judgment, he did that, too, and if spying on one's fellow workers or neighbors was required, he did that, too. Eventually, all citizens in a "People's Democracy" had to become apparatchiks to some degree and when Peter Rádi told me in the fall of 1949 that I would not fit into the societal pegboard of the Communist state, perhaps he recognized my poor aptitude to become an apparatchik. I should be grateful to him.

The greatest irony of course turned out to be that the very goals of Communism, namely general prosperity with blurring of the distinction between the social classes and even the "withering away" of national boundaries are well on their way in the "Capitalist" world today while the Communist countries were still hopelessly bogged down in general poverty, pollution, relatively decent living standards only for the select few, and national boundaries resembling a military frontier. Of course, the airtight seclusion of Communist societies had to be maintained precisely for the purpose of concealing this disparity from the populace. When the Iron Curtain was finally breached in 1989, the first stunned impressions of Eastern Europeans of the West was characterized as "The Shock"--giving birth to the most poignant joke of the century: the spirit of Karl Marx hovering over the world and whispering:

Proletarians of the World, Forgive me!"  
 [A pun on the closing words of the Communist Manifesto:  
 Proletarians of the World, Unite!]

Forty years are only an eyewink in human history but the better part of a person's life. Insignificant as Communism may be in the perspective of the centuries, it ruined countless lives and it would have ruined mine

if I had not put all my chips on the chance of a successful escape from it. If I ever had regrets for leaving Hungary, it was for having missed the glorious moment of the Great Revolution of 1956--but that, too, was ultimately drowned in blood and treachery. By then, I was comfortably ensconced in American life and was facing other and less historic challenges. But to narrate those is another story.