

The eye witness – this is how I saw it

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In Memory of My Dear Éva

Chapter 1

Introduction – Preamble

The other day I ran across a dirty crumpled diary. Under its cover I read : "1944 – dr. K. Gy. ksm. 706/1". As I browsed through the scattered entries and jottings, the memories of those days came back to me. It was almost thirty years since our "unit" was in retreat. We were transported by cattle car at Gödemesterháza in Transylvania. A small German detachment following us blew up the railroad tracks blocking the Red Army's advance.

We were full of hope, home-ward bound at last with the Soviet forces to our rescue. Home...? What will we find "at home"...? The older ones from the unit came from East of the Tisza River – the younger ones were from Pest. During our time at labor camp, our families were resettled and forced into ghettos. By June the Hungarian Gendarmerie had them in locked cattle cars on their way to "camps". We knew none of this.

Our trip in the cattle cars was interrupted by air raids. Under the watchful eyes of the guards we would be forced out of the cars and away from the railway tracks in search of shelter in the farmers' fields. As we approached the interior, our numbers reduced and the commander ordered the guards to shoot at escapees and the train moved on...

We pass freight cars with nailed down windows, doors padlocked and chained, on the parallel tracks. Through the windows and doors we see weeping mothers as they try to get air for their little ones. We could not talk to them as we were surrounded by the Gendarmerie, bedecked in their plumed headgear. From the sounds of pleading and moaning, it was obvious that they were suffering and begging for water... This was our introduction to Nazi brutality. The shock diminished our hopes and yet we still had expectations of being reunited with our families.



It was 1944, the fifteenth of October, when Horthy's proclamation was announced to our regiment, but this optimism was not to be long lasting. The following day, Ferenc Szálasi¹ took over and it was back to the "prisoner of war" status. Our company commander turned his hostility toward us. His aid, ensign Zoltán Tóth who ordered the torturing and made old boys climb trees and crow like roosters fortunately did not stay with the regiment.

At the time our physician was Dr. István Sipos² dentist from Békéscsaba. He was attending one of our sick comrades and insisted that the chap be transferred to a hospital – his only hope for survival. The commanding officer anxious to be rid of the problem filled out the forms for immediate hospitalization. Dr. Sipos together with his brother Endre Sipos, a chemical engineer transported the sick man on a makeshift stretcher. Some days later it was evident that neither would return...they were reported. Again there was no medical doctor. There was a doctor with a law degree³ and a professor of law from the university. As I had been in the same cattle car as Dr. Sipos, where the medical supplies were kept, the commanding officer assigned me to the position. I became the division's doctor and I was given an armband with a Red Cross, a military cap, a leather coat with a belt and jodhpurs, as in my cadet days. The outfit created quite a new look, which some time later proved to be useful. There was a delightful young first year medical student from Debrecen who was in the health service – Pubi Blum as well as a dental technician from Bihar. The latter was very popular because of his "weli-greased palms". He was nicknamed "the Bull".

At the end of October and in the first days of November, we lived on the open tracks at the outskirts of Bodrogolaszi awaiting orders. These were beautiful autumn days. I was trying to convince a colleague from days gone-by, that we too should "get lost". My "bag" was all packed with its bare essentials. The grapes at Bodrogolaszi and the religious peasant grape-pickers would be very useful.

¹Miklós Horthy and Ferenc Szálasi - Horthy was aide-de-camp to Francis Joseph, emperor of Austria-Hungary. He became Hungary's regent in 1920. In 1944 he tried to negotiate a surrender to the USSR, but Hungary was taken over by the Nazis. Szálasi was appointed Prime Minister on October 16, 1940 due to German pressure. He established a regime of terror with the Arrow-Cross (Nazi) gangs. In 1946 he was sentenced to death as a war criminal.

²Dr. István Sipos and Vera (Babus) Szamek attended dental school in Italy. Jews were not admitted to universities in Hungary during this era.

³In Hungary lawyers are addressed as doctor (Dr.) as we do Ph.D.'s

However, my friend Bandi always pulled out at the last minute. The thought of making the escape alone seemed too risky. Risky? My wonderful twenty-two-year old wife and her parents had been taken away – deported. Surely, after the arrival of the victorious Red Army we would be reunited.

"Bull" placed the dentist's drill on the cattle car door. First he did the fillings for the men and then some locals began to appear. Soon patients came for dental and medical care, as there was no longer a doctor in the village. He escaped to Pest some weeks before. Pista Sipos had a well-equipped pharmacy. Somewhere in Transylvania the pharmacist had fled to Pest and we took baskets of "specialties" menthol and other supplies from the drugstore. Among Sipos' "assets" were two Muller type prescription manuals with diagnostic information and applicable drug dosages. Women came from the village saying: "This hurts, that hurts. Please doctor, bless our home with your visit" Then the health service procession would set out – me, "Buli" and the dental technician - with the laundry basket of assorted bottles and jars of medical supplies. The high quality medication yielded positive results. The ladies disclosed painful areas in their respective bodies in total undress and the "doctor" tapped where indicated or listened, glancing into the Muller manual he would dispense the required remedy. The fee was of the utmost importance and was not forgotten. They brought eggs, bread, "szalona" (bacon) in bread baskets and sometimes a great surprise. Of course we shared all this with our buddies. Because of this health service, we were well regarded. On one occasion, before "office hours" there was an emergency in the village. Horses while pulling a wagon had gone wild. The driver was crushed against the wall. I concluded that his leg was broken. Being the "surgeon", I had "Bull" initiate the procedure. The three of us placed the slats on the farmer's leg. A few days later our troop moved on and of course we could not remove his cast. This was written up in the journal on November 14.

Chapter 2

The Episode in Putnok

Our troop was stranded. We were at the Slovakian border a few kilometres from Sajólénártfalva (now known as Lenartovce in Slovakia) railroad station. We could not move on as there were so many unit ahead of us because of the retreat. The trains were packed and at a standstill. It was evening. A train pulled in on the adjoining track. There was quite a commotion – lively conversation. Some fellows from our car went over to return much later. They were very noisy – probably drinking. I fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning, Károly Varga, the corporal in charge of one of the divisions begged me to help him. He had become almost blind. "What happened, corporal? You were fine yesterday."

Last night's train had a container car. The soldiers from the trains nearby jumped aboard to sample the booze. Varga joined in and filled up his pals' flasks. They were drinking somewhat watered down alcohol. Varga was even drinking it in his coffee and now... I tried to check his vision with my fingers stretched out. He did not see them. Then it struck me. The corporal had been drinking wood alcohol - methyl alcohol. Considering the quantity consumed, he was now in a very critical state.

I immediately consulted my Muller prescriptions. The recommended treatment was natrium hydrocorum. I sent him on his way to the company commander for sodium bicarbonate and had him drink a concoction I prepared. I asked permission to accompany Varga to Sajólénártfalva to have him seen by the village doctor. Varga's life could be in danger!

Luckily, Varga was a favourite of the usually very tough commander. I was told to go with Varga and we set out in the direction of the Sajólénártfalva station. Before we reached the building, I noticed the Red Cross Rail Car and guided Varga to it. Fortunately, the train had to stop and I pushed Varga on. The officer on duty

directed me to his commanding officer. The officer rioting my outfit, presumed that I was a medic. "You cannot be serious" he said. "This hospital train has just come from the battle front and I am in charge. He is obviously dying. This would certainly effect my rating. I forbid him to come on board. We will pump his stomach and that's all". He called his assistant. "We three will attend to it." I was included in this threesome. We made Varga lay down, stuck a tube in his mouth. We kept turning him back and forth, but with little success.

"He has absorbed it! Take him to the closest railroad station to the officer in charge and have him transferred to the hospital."

"Yes sir!" I must be polite and I don't want to spoil his rating. Its only a matter of the life of a human being! I had to go back and report to the officer in charge. He issued a permit allowing us to leave. Then we were directed to a corporal, who used to be the office boy in the ornithology department at the Debrecen University. We tried to hitch a ride on the highway. I have my little pack, which is always ready for departure. Varga is lifted on to the back of a truck. The corporal and I plunk ourselves down beside him – direction Bánréve, the local railway station. The corporal stands up – starts retching. We put him against the wall of the truck and hold his head.

The Girls' Academy at Putnok is now a hospital for emergency and that is where we are heading. Apparently it is already full with patients being treated for methyl alcohol poisoning. We given a form, which the corporal takes and off we go. A bit further on there is a fork in the road. There is a tough-looking soldier directing traffic – "Gendarmerie" according to the metal tag shirt. I address him in German.

"Lebensgefährlich"... "Please help us". Well, he did stop the very first vehicle – a little DKW. There are three already inside. The empty seat is piled high with all sorts of stuff. It looks like "mission impossible." They notice Varga's desperate condition and indicate that they will take one passenger. They make room for him. The corporal says. "There is no saving Varga, but go with him Let him sit on your lap" – and hands over the papers. The corporal is to return to his regiment and report the situation to the second lieutenant and we part.

After six uncomfortable kilometres with Varga on my lap, the driver suddenly brakes. "Hier sind wir, also schnell, schnell heraus wir müssen weiter gehn" (We are here. Hurry up, get out fast, we have to keep going.) It was not easy getting out with Varga. He stretches out his hands groping. But it was just a few steps to the famous girls' institute before we are inside the gate. We are directed to the basement of the two storied building. The entrance is in the shape of a tower... Down below are the hot showers for disinfecting. We had to wait a bit and we see the

poor souls standing like until they fall – blacked out. Their bodies are hauled away on stretchers... Amazingly, Varga could take it – he was solid. The papers were taken from me and they were ready to send me back to my unit. I see a familiar face – Dr. András Sáró, the young doctor from the hospital in Csaba. He had been transferred. He remembered me and was ready to help. I asked that I be allowed to stay. Actually I had plans.

"Well, there is not much hope for that" said Dr. Sáró. "The hospital is absolutely packed with the methyl alcohol patients and there is no anti-toxin... so many are dying. That container car passed through the countryside and passengers, artillery and privates fell prey to the substance..."

Seeing my worried look, Dr. Sáró obtained permission for me. I spent the night in the surgical ward. He even managed to get a bed for me. Varga was transferred to the wing of the hospital on the first floor. His bed was by a window. Originally it had been a classroom. The floor was covered with straw. Methyl-alcoholics everywhere in convulsions, screaming with pain – their intestines burning from the poison – their mouths foaming. They were all blind.

Next morning bright and early, I look in on Varga. The chap in the bed next to him had died. They were just taking away the corpse. Varga was prepared for the worse. He wanted to give me his wallet with some papers a final message for Jucika his wife and his family in Békés. I was not to mention wood alcohol... It was hard to see Károly Varga in this state, but I tried to convince him that he would surely make it – his strong constitution and the medical care would restore his health. I refused to take his things, assuring him that he will tell his wife what he had gone through. Well this seemed to have a positive effect on him. I offered to go to the market and get him whatever he wanted. With great difficulty he muttered "lots of cucumbers". I brought him the cucumbers and dropped in on him several times during the day. The hospital was not equipped for the large deluge of methyl alcoholic patients. I understood that they were working on an antitoxin (copper sulfate) to neutralize the poison.

I had to look for lodgings. This was not all that easy with my semi-legitimate status and the Nazi Party in operation in this district plus not having any contacts. As I went along the highway to town, I see an artillery officer coming out of a house with all his belongings. I approach him and learn that he is moving out and his room would be available, especially as I am associated with the hospital. The Baris would be honoured to have a doctor living in their house, especially as Mrs. Bari is in poor health.

The old couple welcomed me and I was directed to a little bedroom crammed with furniture. There was a small couch between two beds. "This is where the

artillery officer slept." Mrs. Bari said, "We heard that there is no room in the hospital. Perhaps for a while this could be convenient for the doctor and maybe you could give me a check-up. I don't feel too good". We discuss the war and old Mr. Bari claims that Hitler will now come up with some incredible weapons. He knows. His son has a restaurant in Sajóecseg and is a member of the Nazi Party...

In the meanwhile the hospital succeeded in producing the anti-toxin. After much suffering, the survivors slowly recover and regain their eyesight. They escaped death. The joy amongst the patients was overwhelming. Within a few days the toxin was absorbed thanks to the injections. The hospital was to be transferred. They had to relocate. All the equipment must be moved. Only the critically ill would be taken. The others would have to return to their regiments in a burst of happiness, Varga says that he can see again and would be able to leave the hospital.

Listening to the news on the radio, I concluded that the battle front was approaching and this was the reason that the hospital would relocate. The Soviet troops cannot be too far. To learn more, I went to the market square to the bookstore where I bought a map. One side had a topographical map of Hungary – the other side showed the counties. Actually it must have been a school map. Only the larger towns were shown. It was not all that helpful. On the sixth day at Putnok, we were told to report to the office at the hospital, and to be prepared to leave. We had our papers with instructions to return to the regiment. Now I understand why they were inquiring about the location of our unit...

Six days – what a long time it seemed... The regiment must have crossed the border. Their destination was no secret. They were heading toward Germany. They could already be prisoners of war in one of the local camps. So my reply as to the location of the unit had to be rather vague. "As far as we know, probably at the Budapest – Kőbánya railroad station." The clerk told us to return for our passes at noon.

Varga went back to the ward, getting ready for the journey. I said goodbye to Dr. Sáró with the hope of meeting again in Csaba, where I would be able to show my great appreciation. On this basis, I requested medicine for Mrs. Bari which I gave to her along with helpful instructions regarding her medical problem.

It must have been about noon when I reached the hospital. I noticed a company of engineers marching and on the left side, an older soldier, the lieutenant their commanding officer. We recognized each other – Ferenc Székely. At one time he was the manager of Csaba's commercial bank. He was an old acquaintance.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he asks as we embrace. This created quite a disruption in the procession as well as on the sidewalk. I quickly explained my

situation. He told me to take my place at the rear and guaranteed my safety. We would return home to Csaba together. "Yes, yes, absolutely."

"I cannot abandon the chap at the hospital."

"He'll make it together with his troop. The doctors are back in Csaba! Our heroic mayor, Gyula Jánosy, who grovelled for the Germans has been shipped to Arad. Your uncle Oszi Szamek, is at the hotel Panonia, physician, for the Romanian Embassy. He is known as Dr. Szamekiu. The whole family is there too.

There was no question, Feri was ready to sneak me through, but I could not abandon Varga.

How wonderful it was to learn that my relatives had not been deported! Oscar, the dentist, was the Romanian Embassy's physician! Incredible! Feri presented a new perspective.

I thanked him for his kindness and we parted with the hope of being reunited once again in Csaba.

Varga took a long time in coming. . . He must have missed the way.

"I am so grateful to you for all you have done for me. Had you left me with the regiment, I would certainly not be in this world." We headed toward the railroad station and plunked ourselves in the third class waiting room. It was pouring outside. I told him that according to our pass, we were to head toward Pest. However, should "Our Father Joseph" decide to change sides it would be our best bet to make a detour and say that we are going to Pest. He would not be able to take the jolting of a train and certainly not a horse-drawn wagon. We would walk – very very slowly. With a bit of luck, we would walk into the Soviet lines. Varga understood the strategy. The ram stopped by early afternoon and we set out along the railroad tracks.

Chapter 3

A Day in the Village of Hét

November 21, 1944. Notes from my diary: "Village of Hét. Supper and lodging at Mr. György Lökös. I am sick."

It was getting dark after we passed the first town after Putnok. We did not want to go any further. There was a long journey ahead. The wall of the former parish hall had become the weighing-in station. Soldiers who arrived by train were standing around. The chef was giving out food. We had been given rations and some supplies at the Putnok station, but we accepted their hospitality. While we were standing in line for the handouts, someone came over to us and said "You should never stand in line in the dark. Where do you want to go? Come with me. Be my guest. My wife is preparing supper. You can sleep at my house."

"Sometimes miracles happen" I tell Varga loud enough so that the good man should hear. Meanwhile we are guided along in the dark

"Well we did have some very rough times" said the old man. "Everyone has a cross to bear. My only son died a hero at the River Don. He was twenty-one years old. We know what war is. We try to help whenever we can. Come along. This is my house."

He leads us to a spacious room. There is a big table in the middle covered with a table cloth. The room overlooks a veranda and porch. His wife greets us as if we were family she had not seen for a long time. She showed us her son's room, which looks out on to the street. We see a framed life-sized photo of the soldier son.

"We will be eating right away. I'll set the table." There were two girls already seated. The older one, Piroska, must have been about fourteen and seemed rather shy. But Etel was quite the opposite jabbering away. She said that she was in the third grade. We sat down and joined them.

It has been such a long time since I had sat at a table like this. When did I last sit on a chair? Well, two months ago. Quite extraordinary.

In the twenty-second of April, an official telegram arrived at the military headquarters. Permission had been requested for me to attend my step father's, Dr. Emil Bíró's¹ funeral on the following day. The company was at Hajdúhadház. I was given a three-day pass. I traveled overnight via Nagyváradi. The funeral was set for 8.30am. I went straight to the cemetery from the station. My wife, my mother, my sister and relatives were all there. This was my last time with my Éva. She only stayed at our home until the end of the month. Troubled times were ahead.

After the funeral, I sent a wire requesting an additional three days. The next day permission was granted. Our life together was extended by three days. Oh we did not want to – we must not be torn apart. But there was no hope. After three days I had to say goodbye to my precious world. . .

Our hostess really treated us – rich greasy foods. . . which my stomach was no longer accustomed to. Little Etel sat across from me and she kept the conversation going. Her mother was proud of her. She came first in her class.

"What are you going to be when you grow up?" I asked.

"Well, perhaps an actress or maybe a teacher" was her reply. In the meanwhile, our hostess kept urging us to eat. "Please make yourself at home. . . eat. . . eat. . ."

Wine was served and we became quite chatty.

Then I asked Etel : "Can you tell me the name of the hill behind us?" (I had to make plans for the next day.)

"I don't know the name, but behind it is Királd."

"Királd?" asks Varga and jumps up as if a pin had been stuck into his rear end. "My sister-in-law from Békés has relatives there – retired miner in the community. Sir" – Varga was now back in time. He was in the artillery during the air raids when I enlisted in Erdély (Transylvania) on August 31, 1940. – "Please let me go for one day."

"Come on" I said "from now on we stick together. I'll go with you its not far." "Great! – Yippee!" – shouted Varga.

We got up from the table. Etel showed me the family's pride and joy the beautifully bound album of Pest's Newspapers for that year and suggested that I take it to my room to read before going to sleep. If I hadn't been careful, I would have let out a shout too. The little darling presented me with a guide and an update

¹Dr. Emil Bíró was Cornel's second husband. He was a lawyer. Gyuri refers to him as Emil bácsi. This was Zsuzsi's father, Gyuri's step father. (The term bácsi, uncle, is used when addressing relatives or friends - néni is the feminine version). Cornel was Sasa's and Jolán's sister

on the news, which would enable me to plan the next stage. There were maps of all the counties and districts in detail. There will be no sleep for me tonight. I will work out plans for our trek.

There was no sleeping – not because I was mapping our journey, but because of the feast. I was on the run all night long. "The Place" was quite away off – near the chicken coop. Then I did a scandalous deed. I tore out the maps that we would need for our journey. Next day we set out before noon.

Chapter 4

Caught in Királd

It was the week of November 22 when we set out to Királd. We headed in the direction of Bánréve where we arrived at noon. We checked in at the railroad station as required and picked up our rations. Our passes were stamped enabling us to proceed. We inquired about train departures and were informed that there was no scheduled train to Ózd. They suggested that we hurry and climb aboard the empty freight car heading toward that direction. The train had started rolling but we managed to jump on board the last wagon before the cabooses where the brakeman was unwinding the cable. He even helped us up and assured us that he would let us know where to get off.

We did the half-hour trip to Center on a beautiful spring-like day. Then we jumped off and cut through the tracks, reaching the foot of a very high mountain and the other side of the mountain was the miners' community. We had to make many stops during the steep climb. It was hard for Károly. He was out of breath in no time. We spent about an hour and a half at this egging each other on. I was enjoying it so much, as if we were on an excursion in the Bükk mountains. After we were over the mountain ridge, we sauntered down to Királd feeling great. We would be safe in this God-forsaken part of the world. No one would find us. We reached the other wide of the mountain and entered a forest – then on to a road with soldiers everywhere. They were resurfacing the road. A job for soldiers in sickbay. They did not bother us. We went by them as if we were on an important mission and pretended to ignore them. Only when we felt safe did we inquire about where the Czakós lived. They pointed to a little hill, where some of the retired miners lived. We had to cross the tracks again – the Eger-Putnok Linet – up some stairs and there we were. Károly recognized the Czakós and they were anxious to hear about their daughter, but Károly had not been back To Békés

for some time and had no news. We were assigned the Czakó's tiny bedroom. Mr. Czakó moved to the couch in the corner of the little kitchen.

"Whatever we have, we share. There are plenty of potatoes and here is milk. In other words we will be alright. The battle lines are moving forward. Don't go any further. This damned war will be over very soon" according to Czakó bácsi.

His optimism was based on the fact that one of the neighbours is back. He was a sergeant, a Russian prisoner of war in Szarvas - just released. The Királd police took off about ten days ago. When Károly and I were alone, I said "this is great but we must not be a burden to our hosts. . . one or two days then onwards." Yes, but next day I could not even get up. I was still suffering from that fantastic feast that we consumed at the Lökös'. I lay flat on my back the whole day. Next day the sergeant who had been a prisoner of war dropped by. He confirmed everything that Mr. Czakó told us. Within a week or two the Russians should be here – then out with the Germans and Szálasi's party.

Czakó néni was feeling very sorry for me and trying to make me feel better with a concoction of rose-hip tea mixed with chocolate, cocoa and paprika! She made me drink this all day, but it did not help. The doctor from Királd visits the miners on Tuesdays and Fridays. This was Friday. I hope to be cured.

We set out – but first to the barbershop to be more presentable for the doctor. As we make our way across the train tracks, we see the gendarmes adorned in their rooster feathered hats bicycling down hill to the highway. The situation looks grim. "We must hurry straight to the doctor's office – it should be alright, you just got out of hospital. We have the stamp from the Bánrév Station and it was only two days ago when I got sick. He will understand. No problem."

This is how I tried to keep up our spirits and we changed our plans. Forget the barbershop – straight to the doctor's office, the check-up extension of permits and then to the barbershop. By the time we reached the doctor's office, the police were out of sight. In case they return, there will be plenty for them to do and they won't bother about us.

There was a tremendous line-up in the big waiting-room. We recognized the soldiers who were working on the road and a lot of other sick people. Rather than lining up, they chose to sit on the benches. We were the last ones. It will be hours before our turn will come. The line was moving very slowly. We were trying to see how many there were ahead of us. Well, some time our turn will come.

Suddenly a loud bang. The glass door to the outside bursts open and two policemen rush in. They head straight for us and start screaming. "You rotten stinking Jew. You think you are an officer? And you stupid peasant are you working for the Jews? Put down your gun! Stop fooling around. Show me your

papers." My military pass makes matter worse.

"Aren't you ashamed, corporal, letting this Jew from the camp push you around?"

I tried to explain that I had been helping the corporal. I could have abandoned him and now we are returning to our regiment. I show him the Bánrév's station's stamp. "He was discharged from the Putnok hospital the day before. Then I became ill and I am here to see the doctor. I need medicine so that we can keep going." They take the military passes and Károly's gun – which are never returned. They push us out and take us to the nearest gendarmerie. As we head out I wonder how the gendarmes found us so quickly at the clinic. Someone must have squealed on us. Károly chatted at the Czakó's about me, his officer. The Czakó's certainly could be trusted. Károly is their own flesh and blood.

The gendarme in charge was middle-aged – handsome. His name was Fekete. The officers escorting us had to report to him, and we were to be given a hearing. The formal interrogation was to take place later. We were taken into the next room which was separated by curtained glass doors. You could hear voices from the other room. We were not alone. There were eight others – we were all in the same boat. The chief offender was the gendarme-in-training, who had deserted. The gendarmes picked him up when they were coming back from Bóta. He was young. They told him if he had no valid excuse or an I.D. he can expect the worse – to be hanged from a tree by the road. These taken into custody were mostly members of the cadets and draft dodgers, some soldiers and a worker from Ózd – János Földes. The culprits were called in one by one to the other room. The staff officer began the proceedings. We could hear as he dictated the evidence. . .

Czakó néni's remedy was beginning to work!

While waiting for our turn at interrogation with officer Fekete, we were frisked. I was thinking that I should separate myself before from the guilty ones. The question was how? I had to do something fast before the Pesti Hírlap with the maps that I had "borrowed" from the Lökös' were discovered. That's all they would need to prove our plan to escape. We had time. A gendarme in the adjoining room would call the name as each person's turn came. I staggered to my feet asked to go to the washroom. An old gendarme appeared with his bayonet and led me to the outdoor toilet. Luckily he was discrete and permitted me to close the door. I checked through the crack and saw that his back was turned. I dropped the papers into the hole with a great sigh of relief. Back we went, escorted by the gendarme with the bayonet.

Just then I could hear one of the patrol officers through the glass door. They could not locate one of the managers of the mining operation. . . No trace. . . In the meanwhile Károly and I discussed our strategy. Our stories are not to conflict.

"Should I come first, listen carefully to what I say."

It was dark already, when Fekete, the officer in charge called me

"I understand in civilian life you are a lawyer. What you have done is serious. Now let's get down to details. Tell me have you broke away from you regiment?"

After this anything I said was recorded.

"What were you doing in Hét and Királd?"

"Well, lodging in one place, just following orders in the other. In Királd we visited relatives that we had not seen for a long time. I became sick. This is why we came here to go to the doctor, but we were caught by the police. He called us names and dragged us here. My intention is stated in the papers. I am to escort the corporal back to his regiment and report to the officer in charge."

"Again, I request to see the doctor. If the doctor confirms my illness, then I would not to disciplined, but would merit recognition of distinguished service for carrying out my duty, despite life threatening state of health, to enable the corporal to return to his regiment!"

Fekete listened and was quite sympathetic. I had hopes that he would be on my side, but no decision was made. Then Károly was called in and gave the same story.

The gendarme escorted us to Hatház, to the Czakós. Before we went inside, the gendarme said: "Get your things and pack up, don't talk to anyone in the house. "

The Czakós greeted us. Mrs. Czakó teary-eyed. Czakó bácsi, whispered that the gendarmes had been looking for the sergeant. That's why they came to the Czakós. They noticed our things piled up in the corner and questioned as to our whereabouts. The Czakós had no choice but to tell them the truth. Mrs. Czakó even offered them same tea, but the gendarmes were in a hurry.

We waited with our buddies, who were all lined up in the yard. We were twelve. Before we set out, the warning was: "Whoever tries to escape, will be shot!"

Two gendarmes in the front – two in the back. I had no idea where we were going in the dark. Soon we were in the woods. Not a soul around. According to our buddies who were from around here, we were heading toward Ózd and from the sound of rippling water we assumed that we were around the Sajó area. The gendarmes forbade us from speaking to each other. Though actually we did not much feel like it. As we approach the town named for its iron works, there is an ominous feeling in the air. Beside the main road, there is a school and we stop there. It has become the Gendarmes' County Barracks. They order us to stand two meters away from each other then "about turn, hands behind your neck". We

are lined up in the corridor facing the wall. They call us all kinds of names, threatening us and warning that from now on the Nazis will be our commanders. Even the gendarme-in-training is given a hard time.

Károly was beside me, but keeping the distance ordered. We seemed to be standing in position forever. When I was certain that the gendarme was not too close, I told Károly that at the right moment we should move nearer to each other. I did not want to get into more trouble and I wanted out! There was the Putnok experience with the map, and there was more evidence to be rid of – the other map which I had purchased, which could still be useful. Károly took the forbidden object, bless him! Should they find it on him, it would not be considered as serious an offense. He hid it in the lapel of his jacket. What happened next was a most horrible nightmare.

They brought us to one of the classrooms. The benches were all piled up in the back, only the teacher's desk was in place. The gendarmes were standing in front of the windows that looked out on the yard. Three others positioned themselves at the desk. They had sticks and they were in charge. Then they began to shout and scream: "deserters, traitors, communist scoundrels, stinking Jews, double crosses" – on and on. All hell broke loose. Next came the orders to strip and to take everything out of our knapsacks. We had to undo our shoelaces. Those who would not cooperate could expect to be beaten. We were stark naked. Eight gendarmes rushed in and made a circle around the desk. Then the "sacrificial lambs" were called forth. We were made to stand within the gendarmes' circle. They were having a great time kicking and throwing us about. Very soon my turn came. We were exhausted in the "leap frog" exercises and crawling on all fours. What will be next on their agenda? I cringed in horror at the thought.

Mercifully I fell asleep.

It was still dark, when the wake-up call startled me early in the morning, as I was sound asleep on the floor. Every part of me ached. We dreaded the thought of more of this agony. I did not think I could take any more in my condition. I called in sick at the gendarme's office.

"Don't bug me, or you'll get it. The gendarmerie is not a sanatorium. There are no sick people here". We were brought back to the hallway – to the open gate, where two gendarmes on horseback blocked the way.

Chapter 5

On the Road Again

We have no idea where we are going. We are escorted by the cavalry.

This is going to be a very long march and we have been given the usual warning: "whoever tries to escape will be shot." Some of the gendarmes on horseback guarded the front, the others the rear. The guys who were familiar with this area thought we were heading toward Hangony. Our procession kept getting longer and longer. The ones behind the gendarmes just could not keep up. The gendarmes galloped back and tried to hurry them up. This gendarme cavalry was not the same corps that was with us overnight. They seemed more humane. The men who were lagging behind were brought to the front to set the pace. That is how I got to the front, right behind the gendarme on horseback. Károly stuck with me, and said:

"That man looks so familiar, he's probably from Békés" pointing to the gendarme in front of us.

The sergeant seemed friendly when I approached him. He broke the rules when he started to chat with me. Gendarme Szabó had been stationed in Szolnok, where he did his training. His family lives there. Now he lives in Békés and there were many people he knew even my colleague, the tough Dr. Lajos Telegdy, the Békés lawyer. The gendarme was so surprised. I got him so excited that he went back to tell his comrades.

Uncle Lajos was quite something. He was extremely meticulous about our cases, even to a simple amendment. . I inquired about Lajos' daughter, educated in Chamonix, who became Dr. Ferenc Heim's wife. Heim was a lawyer in Csaba for Almássy of Gerla and for the Count Wenckheim of Corva. In 1944 he was appointed prosecutor. This certainly impressed sergeant Szabó, though he never met or heard of Magdi or Feri Heim. . . But this broke the ice. . . and I soon learned

that we were heading in the Hangony direction to Feled. We had about forty kilometers. We arrived in the evening... non stop – the gendarmes pushed us on up over the mountain and down the mountain. It was up, up, up. Our littled troop reached one of these rises, hill of boulders, shrubs and little fir trees. János Földes was behind us. He was not in uniform and he was looking for the right spot on the mountain where he could hide and just take off. He wanted to reach the partisans who were not too far away. It appeared to be a good plan, but a dangerous one. I tried to talk him out of it Földes was in his prime. He was experienced and sure of himself. He asked those in front of him and those behind to cover for him so that he could disappear and not be noticed. After a few kilometers when they call the roll, he would be far away. He was familiar with each tree and bush.

He stepped out of line as if to tie his boots. He waited a bit and at the right spot fell into the next line, round a corner he left the path and took off like a rabbit on all fours. The troop was just a few minutes from the top of the mountain.

Before we reached the top, one of the gendarmes took a head count. His comrade checked. Someone was missing, János Földes, the labourer from Ózd.

"He should not be far!" the gendarmes say and quickly they get organized. One gendarme, gun in hand, heaps us together. The other gallops away at great speed searching the other side of the mountain returning without results. Then they switch. The other one who was guarding us, sets out with his gun determined to find the escapee and ready to kill. Before long János is found and tortured. He is tied to a horse, head all bloody, clothes torn. We were prepared for the worst – they would follow through with their warning: "whoever escapes will be shot"... fortunately this did not happen. Földes was brought to the front just behind us, handcuffed, dragging himself along. On we went, without food or water. It was dry and clear. Before dark, we approached the mountain ridge, both police at the rear, keeping watch, Károly and I at the front. In the distance, we could see a small settlement. Could this be our destination? Suddenly we see a speck approaching us – the first human being during this long hike. Who could this be – someone in uniform? We look back at the gendarmes, but they're not interested. They are riding side by side, chatting away. Károly and I step aside so that we can get a good look at the approaching officer. Officer? Soldier? Its hard to tell his rank as his overcoat hides the stripes. He is all equipped. A leather case for his map, an other for his binoculars. On his side a bulging leather bag and a furlined cap on his head. We are getting closer and we see his rank – second lieutenant.

"Where are you coming from?"

"From Ózd."

"Is it far? Have the Russians arrived?" – he is very excited. "Where are you off to?"

"To Feled".

"I don't envy you – the military camp with that bloodthirsty guy from Újvidék, the Lieutenant Colonel Hubay".

I shudder when I hear the name. It was 1941, the "unfriendly days" of Újvidék, where I completed my legal assignment – I hardly made it back. In the meantime the gendarmes caught up to us, chatting away with the officer.

I was in a state of shock. Gendarmes do not associate with officers. But later they did explain that officers can address gendarmes, who are not of the same rank. The gendarmes saluted the lieutenant colonel and we went our separate ways. By now we were quite close to Feled. We arrived exhausted. It was very late.

Chapter 6

The Camp at Feled

Our gendarmes on horseback escorted us to the fenced-in camp. We were lined up in the yard, awaiting our orders. After quite some time the infamous lieutenant colonel turned up. He began by yelling and shouting at us "You're garbage" and saying that he will certainly transfer us to the proper place as soon as possible. Our gendarmes were replaced by a pitiful bunch of soldiers, who treated us very kindly. They took us to our "dormitory" – a large barn – the best places were already taken, but everyone managed to find a cot. It was hard to tell the guards from the prisoners. They were a pathetic bunch longing to be back home. They lacked the courage to desert. Our buddies just hung around. There was no way that they could get back to their squadron. They just gave up.

There were some sergeants in the troop. This was discouraging for the guards but offered a ray of hope for the hostages. We began to talk to each other and get acquainted with the ones already there and the new arrivals. We talked about the Russian oppression, our longing for peace and end the war. We wondered about the future, the new world to come. Just a couple of weeks and the Russians should be here!

The only difference between the prisoners and the guards was that the former were relieved of their guns and equipment – even their belts. Supervision was lax – without belts there was no risk of anyone trying to escape – the guards and their dogs outside would quickly take note. We were exhausted from our all day hike, but we were pleased to talk to our companions in misery. Next to my cot was Sergeant Molnár. He was tired of being confined-anxious to get out to visit a friend and have a drink or two. If I would only lend him my "spare" belt he could leave and be back by morning. His exit and re-entry would be no problem. I was obliging and let him have my belt. Next morning there was no sign of

him. At roll-call, it was apparent that someone was missing. A soldier squealed on me, saying that the one from the labour camp helped him and supplied him with the belt. What a great way to start the day! Not only had Molnár taken off with my belt, but I was accused of helping him break out. The orders were to go to the garrison's headquarters for interrogation and was assigned to the work crew of the day. The job required carrying cauldrons to one of the houses in the village where the camp's kitchen was located. Our little procession is stopped by an officer and I am taken away for interrogation to another building. We enter a room where artillery officers with red collars are seated around a table. They are young. They hear me out and smile about the story of the "lent belt". It seemed plausible that I would not have parted with my belt, had I known that my new acquaintance, the sergeant Molnár, was not planning to return it to me. The case would have been closed, but the officer in charge reported that at 16 hours the previous day second lieutenant XY could not be located. No doubt they were referring to the officer we met coming to Feled. By now he must have reached the partisans. Of course I did not say anything, but I felt this was the right time to tell them about the atrocities the gendarmes in Királd subjected us to, that they forced us to come to Feled rather than let us return to the regiment. They were surprised. One of the young officers inquired about my military service prior to the labour camp period. There was some cross examination about when and where I had completed my service. I gave forth like clock work: 1931 to 1932 active service with anti-aircraft defence; 1938 gunner at the Citadel followed by an observation post at Kissvábhegy; then in 1939 on November 9 with the enlisted men in Kassa at the Pétervásár school; 1940 December munitions officer with the local firing squad. I was demobilized on August 31, the day the Transylvanians marched in. Then came a rather naive question: how did I get here? I wondered what was next tom Károly and me? I was told that we would be transferred to Losonc within twenty four hours by rail, after which further plans will be made. The interrogation ended in a rather compassionate tone. I brought the good news to Károly – "we will be leaving soon." A new arrival of prisoners was squeezed into our dormitory. What a racket! A sergeant major was brought to our section – János Curilla, from Csépany, close to Ózd. He was quite concerned what would happen. There was a sergeant major from the 2018 Regiment. He pretends to be well-informed and keeps asking for a clerk from the office... there is even a barber. At last, the time has come for the haircut we missed in Királd! The night was a short one. Roll call was at dawn. Everyone is up. We are anxious about what will be next. Besides our little troop there are twenty others getting ready. Outside the men are being lined up by the gendarmes bedecked with their hats

adorned with the rooster feathers.

We are cold – it is dawn as we march along the winding streets of Feled. At last we reach the station with our gendarme escorts. We board the train for Fülek where we transfer on to the Losonc train. We see the wounded on Red Cross stretchers and we realize how close we must be to the front line. Russian soldiers appear with bandaged heads, arms in slings. . .

Chapter 7

The Jail in Losonc

It is still early morning when we get to Losonc. The gendarmes close in on us at the station and we are lined up in rows of three in front of the rail yard. Our procession passes by the passengers who look at us with compassion, some with tears in their eyes. Later I understand their concern. On the main street we see human beings that were strung to acacia trees – dead. Fixed, to their battledresses were placards "This is What We Do to Traitors and Deserters".

As we march, people stand at the edge of the sidewalk, some kneel and cross themselves. Then we realize where the gendarmes are taking us... The huge buildings and barracks are enclosed with iron bars... there is no one in the yard. Sentries who direct us to the entrance in the back of the building replace the gendarmes. We go up the spiral staircase to the rear. On the first floor in the corridor we are split up. The iron gates of the cells squeak as twelve of us are shoved in – a tight squeeze, barely a meter wide – half of us stand, the other half sit. In the corner, near the gate, there is a slab where I sit or stand. We wait – we don't know what's coming.

There is a tiny opening – high up on the wall, which cannot be reached. Surviving here for any length of time would be impossible. Then somebody begins to open the lock. A lance corporal steps in to fill out forms on everyone. When completed, I am brought out to the hallway.

"Where are we actually?" I ask.

"This is an assembly camp". The sign in the front of the building indicates "Administration Office" and to our shock we are told that the criminal court is in the back. The guard tries to comfort us and says "With a little luck, you might just make it."

Then he begins to talk about himself. Apparently he was a musician. He

played the violin in the theatre orchestra. He hates what he is doing and would love to be back in Váradi. I tell him about Éva and about Ernő Szegedi, her piano teacher and another of his pupils, György Faragó. Now we have become good friends, and he lets the others out of the cell so that we can wash. He promises that our cell will be the first to be liberated.

I had a hundred pengő note hidden in the lining of my boot, ready for any emergency. I tried to give it to him, to encourage him to keep his promise. But he would not accept it. "It's the doctor you should thank that he is not confining you to the cell for the night. You will have your hearing today".

Fantastic! We were brought down to the yard and I coached Károly what to say should he be heard before me, so that our stories not conflict. We were directed to the street front building and entered a spacious room with a winding staircase, then to another room with a long table. The clerk seated us – Károly behind me. We were grilled one by one. The captain was at the centre – at each side an officer of a lower rank and a sergeant major as well. . . they wanted to know the company's number, my last stopping point. Then they asked me why I opted for this particular route.

My answer "706/1, Sajólenártfalva, Budapest–Kőbánya."

The captain whispered to the warrant officer at the end of the table. He was told to make note of my statements. I hear Károly sighing behind me. We will be on our way to Germany, not Kőbánya. It was obvious. The officer was verifying my statements in his books, checking the regiment number and then he whispers to the captain that there was no record – then further cross-examination regarding the events that brought about our separation from the company. I explain that my commanding officer put me in charge of health service. This resulted in the rescue mission for the lance corporal, who is present. I stopped a German passenger car requesting transportation to the Putnok hospital. I have papers authorizing this. It was my duty to stay with him until we return to the regiment.

I see that they are verifying my account with the papers I had presented as well as the Putnok hospital's official pass. The records from the hospital were there and this was the last officer's entry. Fortunately there was no record of our getting caught in Királd. (Thank you, artillery officers) But there was still some grilling.

It was obvious from their questioning that they suspected us of deserting. How could they even think that their corporal and this good samaritan could be capable of such a deed – we who are so dedicated to serve our country! But the facts and the situation brought positive results. The interrogation was over.

Károly was next. He was right behind me. He heard every word. I should

have warned him not to mention the visit to the Czakós. But Károly was not put through any grilling – only simple routine questions. He repeated everything I had said and was feeling most confident. But all hell broke loose – Varga came with "Could you please tell me where I can pick up my gun?"

For a moment there is silence then "Oh no, there is something very fishy here! These are the prisoners who were under arrest. I see." Our beautiful testimony has fallen apart. How will we get out of here? But I come up with a reply. "Captain, I swear that the corporal's gun was left behind at the Putnok hospital. He was brought there in a coma. When we left the hospital, the building was being evacuated, and that is how the corporal's gun went missing." Károly realized his terrible goof. He looked at me and I see him turning red – right to his ears.

The Captain replied "Corporal, next time take better care of yourself and your gun" – and we are free! We have our papers, our military passes with the orders – back to the regiment Budapest–Kőbánya railway.

"You may go" - such beautiful words!

We salute and close the door. Károly wants to say something but I hurry him on passed the gate. We run all the way to the barracks and present our papers with the new rubber stamp to the guards and we are off.

We rush along the main street to the railway station. It is early in the afternoon. The next train in the direction of Budapest won't be till nighttime. They don't even know the exact time, so we just walk around. The waiting room is packed with soldiers and refugees. We check to see if any of our comrades are among them - but no. We wonder how things went for them. Károly would rather be on his way to Békés, but what would I be doing in Csaba? My wife and all of her family have been deported except for young brother-in-law. He is probably in some labour camp. . . I take out Éva's last letter so carefully folded. It was written on May 25. I read it - tears in my eyes.

"My darling, I will write you as often as they let me. This is the only way we can stay in touch. We hold so much of each other so deep within us that keeps us together in our hearts in our minds. This is the way it will always be, as long as I am alive. This is how it is, my love. Please write to me as often as you can. Stay healthy and strong in body and soul. Whatever is destined for me, I shall try to be brave and endure - anything so that we can be together again. Do you understand, my love? I shall always be, your loving wife"

I tuck this letter which had gone through censorship, into my 1944 diary. These sentiments were my reason for living through such terrible times. . . my longing

for us to be together again.

Our train left Balassagyarmat station, soon to be stranded when another train pulled in beside us, heading in the same direction. As I look out from the window, I see a familiar face, a buddy from my troop at the labour camp. He tells me the troop is now in Germany – he escaped en route and is trying to get to Pest... and the train moves on.

By noon we are in Vác. Our train is surrounded by the gendarmes with the Arrow-Cross armbands. Its a raid – everyone off! There is a real mob scene. "The train is barricaded and passes checked. The group is separated. Károly and I are allowed back and the train starts off heading toward Pest. We begin to make plans.

First we will go to József Katona street to the Zoltáns. Perhaps we will be able to stay over. Magda Zoltán was Éva's professor. They had tried to persuade Éva to stay with them and not to go down to Csaba where there was a great risk of being deported. That was on March 19, a Sunday, visitor's day at Hajdúház. Éva had come to the unit so that we could be together. Going back by train, she learned that the Germans had already reached Pest. Instead of going to Pest, she went to Csaba via Szolnok, to be with her parents.

As we were traveling to Pest, we had no idea what was happening under the Szálasi regime.

Chapter 8

"Pannonia"

At one thirty on the afternoon of the 28th of November, we arrive at Nyugati (West) railway station. We went out behind the Westend, on to Váci street, and then I saw the light. There were rows upon rows of victims with yellow stars on their clothes, holding their tiny bundles. They were surrounded by the Hungarian Nazi police and its party faithful, who marched them toward the brick factory on Bécsi (Vienna) Road. Only then did it dawn on me that our passes would not be valid in this situation. We would be given the third degree and questioned as to what business we had in Pest when we were supposed to be in Kőbánya with our regiment.

The Zoltán family were not at their Katona Street home. Our next destination was Csalogány Street 38. It was a cloudy day. We walked to Hollán street and on to the Kőrút along the banks of the Duna (Danube). Suddenly I was rooted to the ground. The Margit Bridge had been blown up all the way to the Island. A temporary bridge was installed. The guard is checking the I.D.'s. We manage to get by and reach Csalogány street, but the gate is locked, the shutters closed. We bang away at the windows facing the street. Two German soldiers stick their heads out. I inquire as to the whereabouts of the people who lived there. They point to the sky.

"Sie sind schon oben in Himmel". (They must be in heaven by now.) They roar with laughter and close the shutters...

No, it can't be. Dr. Géza Révész¹, attorney for the Révai Publishing House and his wife, Hanna, owner of the Csillaghegy Library, were such gentle souls. They would be far too prudent to annoy the Germans. Well, we can't just stand here.

¹The Révész' were János's grandparents – Vera's in laws. They survived but not their son – Vera's husband

Suddenly I remember running into Feri Székely in Putnok. What did he say? Oh, yes, the Szameks were staying at the Pannonia. Across the street, the houses were totally destroyed, but a post office was still in operation. I looked up the hotels in the phone book and found the number for the Pannonia. After a purchase of telephone tokens, I choose a safe phone booth on the street.

In Putnok, I somehow did not believe Feri Székely's story. Impossible as it seemed, I had to check it out. I got quite excited dialing it. The receptionist answered and I asked to speak to Dr. Szamekiu, the chief medical officer.

"Just a moment" came the reply. I couldn't believe it. I thought she must be joking. It took some time, before I hear a woman's voice, my cousin Vera, the doctor.

"Gyuri dear, how on earth did you get here?"

"If I can, I would like to tell you in person".

"Well, that could be quite difficult – but try. First go to the Astoria Hotel and call me from there. In the meantime, I'll see what I can do".

Before long Károly and I were at the intersection of Kiskörút and Rákóczi Road before reaching the Pannonia, we wanted to check out the score. There were signs on the hotel's facade – "Solidarity" - "We Stand Alone" – "Magyarország". We were looking at the building where the extremist Hungarian Nazi party's publishing house was!

"Getting in through the front entrance could be a problem. Try the side door... Yes, yes come in that way – we are in no. 315". – said Vera when I called again.

Károly could not get over the traffic – he had rarely been to Pest. I sat him down on a bench across from the Astoria – a good observation point – while I am at the Pannonia.

There was no one at the side door. When I reached the third floor, I see a policeman on duty. He was standing in front of one of the doors in the hallway... , he took no notice of me. I knocked and walked in to number 315. There were four close relatives in the room whom I had not seen since Csaba, seven months ago.

I asked about Éva. All they knew was that she had been deported together with her parents and little sister. "And you?"

"Your mother and grandmother were made to move in with us while we were in Csaba. Then we were arrested and shipped off to the detention centre on Columbus street in Pest, but we managed to get out of there during the summer of the Lakatos regime. That's when Dad became the Romanian Embassy's physician. The ambassador lives here. That's why there is a policeman in the hallway". – Vera tells me all this in very hushed tones.

"Why didn't you tell me all this on the phone?"

"Hey, don't you know what's going on? Even the walls have ears."

"Good heavens! My mother and grandmother are both alive right here in Pest. I must see them right away. What about Zsuzsi?"

"Well, that's quite another story," said Jolán smiling, as she held her little grandson in her lap. "Péter Szőnyi brought her to Budapest and she has been living with his family." What a story. But why wasn't Éva here? Oscar's younger daughter Cicus (Kitty) was staying with her husband Mihály Vasas in Békéscsaba as refugees.

After all this they give me some very useful advice and Oscar slips me 300 pengős. Vera then phoned the Szőnyis, who live on Baross street. Very soon Péter arrives. He is in uniform and greets me with a big smile. He already has a plan of action and we leave the Pannonia together to pick up Károly Varga and go to Columbus street so that we can take the number 67 streetcar. Péter will take Károly to the Vasas couple on Ráday street.

He will housewatch for them.

As I study Péter on the streetcar, he tries to reassure me and that we are in good hands – but I wonder for how long? With his uniform, and his rather authentic looking fake I.D. – he belongs to an underground who live dangerously in their commitment of rescuing victims of the Arrow Cross.

Since last summer, his age group had been called up. There are so many deserters, refugees and other victims. These are the ones he and his associates help. Their specialty is phoney but very authentic-looking papers with seals, prepared by professionals, masters in the art of forgery. On the streetcar, I try to cheer up Károly - "we will be safe for a while." As we pass Mexicói street, Péter indicates that I should get off at the first stop, while they will get off at the next one. We would meet in the dark between the two stops on Erzsébet Királynő (Queen Elizabeth) street. Peter knows the ropes. We walk up an alley – only a few steps.

Chapter 9

The International Red Cross Camp

We come to a block of houses barricaded with boards. This used to be the Institute for the Blind, the Deaf and the Mute. Péter prepared me for the tough guards at the gate. You can neither go in nor out. The guards inside are Jewish labour camp inmates. Once in you are safe. I was to be there for a few days until Péter would have my I.D. There was no time for further explanation. And Károly?" – "Don't worry". I climbed the fence. They both helped me over. I jumped down and within seconds flashlights were directed at me. I was approached and surrounded in no time. They were all labour camp detainees. "How dare you break in? What on earth do you want?" they raged. "I want to see my mother and grandmother and then I'll be on my way." "Do you think you can just drop in like that?" They take me to the "office", where the caretaker of the institute, Mr. Kanizsai, receives me. My papers are checked. He verifies my story and looks up my mother in the register as well as my grandmother. After some questioning as to where I learned about their whereabouts, I am accompanied to the gym on the main floor.

Oszi Stern, the nice-looking young man from Csaba saw me and began to shout my name. He said he would take the good news to my mother so that my sudden appearance should not give her a heart attack. The large room was jammed tight with wooden bunks. There was room for four in each compartment – two upper, two lower for sleeping. I found the two of them in the middle of the room in a lower bunk. I embraced my mother and my grandmother. We just hugged and kissed at such unexpected happiness and we cried and cried – there was no talking. My mother was fifty-seven, my grandmother seventy-nine. Had they been deported it would have meant the end. There was no time for chatter.

Familiar faces smile at me from the upper bunk. Böske Brüll and her daughter Ica. They reach out their hands. Böske was the wife of a very dear friend and

colleague, Dr. Ferenc Fischer. He has been in labour camp since 1943. Böske manages to find some place for me. I was certainly grateful. She seems quite at home at this place. I am dead tired, hardly any sleep the last two nights, since that Monday when they got us up at dawn to take the train to Pest. It has been such an incredible time since then.

November 29.

We are in the camp of the lucky survivors who were ready to sacrifice themselves for Israel and the Holy Land, the Rabbis and their families and many others.

My mother and grandmother belong to the latter. Mrs. Magda Heim whom I have already mentioned, had brought her aunt up here and had her rescued from Csaba's tobacco exchange, the temporary station for the deportees. Magda played the role of the guardian angel. It was her husband, no penny-pincher, with his great connections to the Gestapo who saved her mother and sister. He was very much into rescuing and he did not forget his friends, nor his dentist, Dr. Oszkár Szamek along with Oszkár's family. Mrs. Heim succeeded in achieving her goal.

Lajos Peli from Csaba was the Gestapo's henchman. His troop together with the German and Hungarian Nazis were incredibly cruel. During an inquisition they forced confessions from their chosen victims. They were driven from their homes with no hope of ever returning. They were grilled regarding the whereabouts of their valued possessions such as gold, silver and other treasures.

"If you don't speak up, you'll be shot" and so it was, many perished. Oscar had been subject to the beating and the frisking. A storm trooper took the roll call. Oszkár wondered "What's next? Where will they take me?" He was ordered to give the name of each member of his family and this is how it came about that besides his immediate family, my mother, (his sister-in-law), my grandmother (his mother-in-law) were kept at the police station for two nights. Then the following morning they were ousted from Csaba and sent by train to Pest. When they arrived at the Nyugati station they were marched to Kolumbus street. Had Oszkár suspected that the storm troopers had no further torture on their agenda, he could have saved his cousin Lily and her young son as well. Oszkár would forever be grateful to Magda for the part she played in their rescue.

This is why Éva stayed behind with her parents. My sister Zsuzsi's friends were the Count Almássy family. Their game keeper, Sándor Nagy hid her in the forest. Albeit it was a secluded farmstead, it did not escape the nosy neighbour's eye, who snitched on them. The police took Zsuzsi to the ghetto in Nagyvárád. The inmates were to be loaded on to a deportation wagon. Zsuzsi's presence of mind saved her. It was by accident, that she was put in a cell with corpses. She hid here. When they were clearing the ghetto, the cell was not checked.

The following night she spent in the gendarmes' room, in one of the beds. She woke up with a start, when the gendarmes returned to their room and hid behind a pillar, waiting for them to leave. Looters and robbers came next day to plunder the ghetto. She left with them carrying a chair and climbed over the fence. She set out toward Sarkad. On the way she met a gypsy girl – they exchanged clothes. The rest of the trip was partly by train back to Remete to the forest in the cover of the night. She stayed in a clearing near the Nagy's, hiding in a haystack. As Jóska, one of their younger boys, passed near, she called to him. The Nagys sneaked food to her and sent her telegram from the Gyula Post Office to the "Mester"¹. This is how Péter, with death defying courage, came to Zsuzsi's rescue and smuggled her on to the midnight train for Budapest.

It was Böske who arranged a pass for me at the camp. Now I am legal. Great! In the evening I was told that I had visitors from town and that I should go to the fence. It was Zsuzsa and Péter. We spotted each other at the edge of the fence; they were so young with bright smiles – no sign of the hard times we were all experiencing. Péter asked me for my papers to enable him to prepare my exit from the camp and for a life underground. He assured me that the "Refugee Office" would have my papers next day with the Udvarhelyi's deputy lieutenant's authorization for refugee status in Budapest. A birth certificate would prove my gentile background. My age would be give as past conscription age limit, which was then in effect.

"Your new I.D. will be a real masterpiece. No officer would question its authenticity. But you must make yourself look fifteen years older!"

November 30, Thursday.

I now have a resident permit – no longer a visitor. I am entitled to three meals a day with civil rights. But I have to work for these rights. My assignment is sentry duty. I hope that my turn won't come and my new I.D. will help me out of here! That night according to plan, I await Peter's arrival. I wait in vain. I look for him everywhere, even outside the enclave – where is he – was this just a promise that he could not keep?

December 1, Friday.

No Peter. I hope nothing has happened to him. At night the dormitory glitters in the candle light. The candles are lit everywhere. It is Friday evening.

December 2, Saturday.

I meet Éva's classmate - Jenő Lindenfeld from Gyula. I had heard of him, but we have never met. He plays beautifully. He is very talented - blind since

¹Péter Szőnyi's father was referred to as "Master". He was a recognized artist.

birth. He used to go to Csaba – he and Joli Bacher. They were pupils of the editor of "The Chord of Csaba." He knew Éva's parents and looked back happily at his last concert. He tells me what he had played and who sat around the piano. His descriptions were so vivid as if it happened yesterday. Then he introduces me to his blind companion, a young piano student, Laci Schlesinger. They hold and squeeze my hand and are so happy to have someone hear their story. Their hope is to be able to get out of this hell.

Its to be a short night. I am scheduled for sentry duty at 4.00 am.

December 3, Sunday.

The relief guard wakes me up well before four o'clock. The stars are still in the sky as I begin my shift at the place indicated within the compound along the wall, where I will walk up and down until eight o'clock. But it is not even daybreak when police start jumping over the fence. "This is a protected area!" I shout, but one of them comes directly to me "Leave your post immediately." They take over: The compound is no longer a protected area and is to be disbanded. "You'd better give me your watch and anything that is gold and all your money. The Nazis are coming and the whole compound will be destroyed." Well, I almost threw, up. The Royal Hungarian Police can't be threatening us without good reason. In the meanwhile the soldiers have surrounded the compound inside with guns at the ready. There is no question of escape. They warn us to be quiet or they shoot to kill. . . The occupants of the compound had no idea what was going on. I sneaked into the gym where everyone was still sound asleep. First I woke my mother, then Böske. It wasn't easy to get them to understand the new turn of events. I had to keep repeating to explain the situation.

"They can't break up the compound – it is under the protection of the International Red Cross." Finally with some urging and prodding they started dressing and packing the absolute necessities. The "rumour" was soon picked up and everyone understood.

At exactly six o'clock the Arrow Cross – about forty or fifty in black uniforms – rushed in. These were determined executioners. No one was allowed to leave. The order came to line up in the yard with all our valuables. This did not go too smoothly. The armed Labour Camp Inmates on top of the building tried to prevent the Arrow Cross from entering, but the Arrow Cross began to shoot. The compound's caretaker and Kanizsai were shot. We didn't dare to leave the hall, we awaited our fate, paralysed with fear. Then a young soldier showed up. He was gentle and kind and went around comforting the old and the disabled, assuring them that the order did not apply to them. They will be allowed to stay. There was cruelty and compassion simultaneously. It was quite incomprehensible.

Later we were to learn that young Jews had infiltrated amongst the Arrow Cross shock troops. They were living incredibly dangerous lives. My grandmother was permitted to stay.

After this we were hustled out to the courtyard. The scare tactics served their purpose. There was absolutely no resistance and all the orders were swiftly carried out. Somewhere in the distance gunshots could be heard but here only the shouting of the Arrow Cross. They produced an enormous trunk. The order was given that all jewellery, valuables, such as gold and silver and of course money was to be deposited into the trunk. We were told that "after all, you won't need these things any longer!" My mother was still wearing her little gold chain necklace, a souvenir from the old days. She was standing beside me. It was difficult for her to part with it. I saw the trunk getting nicely full..., even without her necklace. I told her to hang on to it.

After this we parted. They were setting up the ranks for the march – women in one line, men in another – younger ones separated from the older ones. We set out in the bright sunshine. We had no idea where we were heading.

Chapter 10

Escape from the Ghetto

We spent precarious hours standing at the base. It seemed as if some negotiating was taking place. There may be some hope! It was very obvious that the SS was in charge. Someone recognized the SS Storm Trooper Kurt Becher, who was replacing General Winkelman. Again the younger men and women were separated. I was able to keep an eye on my mother. After a long wait the procession moves on. Some were directed to the railway station. The Kolumbus street ones and a few of the other were directed toward the József Town station. I was among this group.

On the Aréna Road – around Damjanich stree Dr. Lányi breaks away as we cross the street. He joins the crowd that is passing by. (I wonder how he made out?) As we reach the Klauzál Square, the old people line up next to us. I notice an elderly rabbi, a cane on his shoulder, a bag hangs from the cane with his precious possessions. He is all hunched up under its weight. Within seconds, without being noticed, I switch to his procession and take his cane and bundle. We link arms and keep going. He was so grateful. I was really touched.

Fate is uncanny. Had I not taken this step, no doubt I would have ended up in Bergenbelsen, the death camp along with the others in that group. Before long we are at Akácfa (Acacia) street. The Arrow Cross stops us at the empty apartments. We have reached the ghetto.

The group is assigned to two adjacent buildings that the janitor unlocks. They had been looted – completely empty. Amongst all the apartments only one or two of the original tenants remained. They were waiting to move to better apartments. The Rabbi and I are directed to an apartment on the second floor. There are people there already – sharing our destiny. We become a close family, ready to help each other with kind words, friendliness and hope. My room is with the Drechsler

couple and their seventeen-year-old daughter, Vera. We become good friends in no time and comfort each other. Mr. Drechsler dealt in agriculture. Their home is on Vaskapu (Iron Gate) street. They have a three room apartment. I must come to visit them one day... but our big problem is how will we sleep on the bare floor. I set out to investigate. The gate to the apartment is locked, the street completely deserted. I notice that there is a telephone booth cross the street. Someone drops in with a token of fairly regular intervals – a civilian guard on duty. There is talk that we will be served a hot meal once a day. In the basement I discover some discarded sofas and cots. I bring them up for the Rabbi, the Drechslers and myself. I even find some cushions. We wonder how long we will be staying here. How long can we take this? What are the Arrow Cross' plans? Will we be deported or just killed or would they simply set fire to the ghettot?

It is noon – a beautiful sunny day, but by evening the unheated rooms are icy cold. I cover myself with my leather jacket. It has been a long day. Perhaps my mother is in one of these buildings...

December 4, Monday.

A woman brings us a little something to eat in the morning. She lives in the building and works in Csepel. She is kind and tries to be helpful. The Drechslers ask her to go to Vaskapu street – I ask her to go to the Pannonia hoping that Peter would learn of our whereabouts. She has an I.D. which permits her to come and go. We all get together in the yard before noon and we manage to sneak some wood for a fire. We hear the bell - mealtime... a rather diluted soup. At least we were not forgotten and it's good to be eating something hot. The Csepel woman returned in the evening with quite a big parcel. The Drechslers treated us to some preserves. She did go to the Pannonia. I must be patient...



I don't see any more notes in my diary that would jog my memory. I was afraid of being caught, and did not want to cause trouble to anybody.

I spent days in the ghetto but I did not give up hope. One day in the early afternoon, in walks Péter. He smiles and apologizes for the delay. Many "orders" had been carried out under the guidance of the "Mester". He made all the arrangements to enable me to leave the Ghetto by the evening!

He has brought me clothes – a suit, which at one time must have been blue, a black coat and a hat. Then he produces the precious document – my new I.D. with my birth-date sixteen years older to avoid conscription. Now Peter becomes the Make-Up Man. He is equipped with grease and flour and transforms me into a

grey-haired fifty-two year-old. This was very important. . . but how will he get me out of here? Then he produces a cane and the lady who has been so much help holds me by the other arm. When the right moment comes, I shall make my exit accompanied by her.

Péter has gone. He has left a pair of black-rimmed glasses for me. (for my very poor eyesight!) "I have come to visit my friend from Csepel, but I can't find that blasted gate." This was the line I was to use until I reach the gate. It was totally dark. We move along, arms tightly linked, until we reach the iron gate. Here the searchlights blind us.

Identification! Police and the Arrow-Cross surround us. Trembling, I produce my papers and the lady keeps them busy with her jabber. "I had to help the gentleman. He's a refugee and doesn't know his way around. - He is almost blind." They hardly looked at my papers.

"It's O.K. Walk the old chap to the streetcar stop" – one of the police men spoke. We were already out somewhere on Dohány (Tobacco) street – near Blaha Lujza Square. We merged with the crowds on the sidewalk.

I was most grateful to this wonderful woman. To this day, I have idea who she was.

Chapter 11

Back Again at the Pannonia

The escape from the Ghetto could have been fatal, but being a "refugee from Transylvania" offered some security. The real refugees occupied hotels – of course only those with money. The Pannonia was packed with them. They too were given rough treatment by the Arrow-Cross, and were submitted to interrogation by the police.

To be an illegal at the Pannonia was risky, especially with the Arrow-Cross newspaper publishers on the first floor!

There were many air raids at this time. Everyone was forced to go down to the air raid shelter. During the raids the rooms would be checked for illegal guests. Of course they would suffer the consequences.

Romanian Ambassador, Dajano and his wife moved from the Embassy on Szentkirály street, to the third floor. Their apartment faced the street. The counsellor and his wife moved in as well. Even the Royal Hungarian police is here with his young wife. To the coterie is added the secretary László Iritz¹, the physician Dr. Szamekiu, Romanian citizen, actually Dr. Oszkár Szamek, my dentist uncle.

Oszkár and the family have two rooms. One is Vera's with her year old son Jánoska. It has a bed with a little cot in front of it. I am to share this for the time being. Oszkár introduces me his good friend, a refugee from Erdély (Transylvania) to the young police inspector and to the blundering chief of police Horváth. We go to a room a few doors up. There is a lady dressed in mourning, heavily veiled. She is sitting by the window, deeply engrossed in the Bible which she holds. She turns toward us and looks at us curiously. Then she lifts her veil. It is my mother! Péter had rescued her from the Ghetto. I learn that

¹Iritz's son, Rudi went to Montreal in the late fifties. His mother was Asian.

my mother and I are siblings! We had a lot to talk about. She tells me what she had been through. Our I.D.s particularly those for the men – were not the final papers. Everyone was a registered hotel guest as the Romanian Embassy, its employees and their families. They ate at the hotel dining room. I could only leave my room under very special circumstances. Vera would leave Jánoska with me and explain to the kitchen staff that she would like to bring some food her child. Like this I got something to eat. During the air raids I was quite worried should I be tracked down.

On one or two occasions I did go down to the shelter. It seemed that some of the hotel guests stayed in the shelter – not ever coming out, awaiting their fate. There were some who were hoping that the fortunes of the Germans would change.

Dr. Gyula Varga, a colleague was sitting near me. He was the last mayor in the town of Gyula. He did not recognize me or perhaps he did not want to?

In one of the booths were some old acquaintances: Béla Mesko, manager of the Hungarian National Bank at Kaposvár. He was with his wife. It was so good to see them. They used to live in Csaba. Zsuzsa back then was Dr. László Schwartz's wife. He was in lumber. Béla was interested to hear about Gombos' career. . . Then he winked at me. . . Zsuzsa could hardly contain her surprise at my turning up. On one occasion I sneaked into my mother's room during a raid. She wasn't there, but I hear her door being opened. They were checking to see if anyone stayed behind. I quickly disappeared into the closet. . . , then my door is opened. . . they find the room empty. Had the Arrow Cross checked the closet, then for sure I would be gunned down into the Danube.

I had enough of being a "Hotel Guest." I had to get out. But where could I stay? Surely this state of affairs can't go on much longer. Then a visitor happened by. An old schoolmate, who had been a close friend. We shared many fond memories. He was a doctor, who in these difficult times made himself very helpful. On the other hand, he refused any help for himself. Then the theatre building next to us being bombed. The hotel windows are shattered. There is a huge cloud of dust and a state of panic. We hear about Hitler's and Szálasi's proclamation "Hungary's capital must be defended to the last man". Apparently the Red Army is at the outskirts of Budapest and the battle is raging from house to house.

Rumours circulate at the Pannonia. The city is surrounded on three sides. Székesfehérvár is back in Nazi hands. We learn that "A temporary Hungarian National Government has been established in Debrecen" and we rejoice. Peace talks are going on in Moscow. . . we can hardly believe this. . . The government is

represented by János Gyöngyösi² Minister of External Affairs. István Balogh, a clergyman from Szeged, has been nominated Secretary of State. We are feeling hopeful. Gyöngyösi is well known as Csaba's left wing politician. Up to 1919, he taught Latin and Hungarian. Because of his politics, he could not get a position in Budapest. He returned to Csaba where he opened a bookstore. Later he was appointed director of the Chamber of Commerce, and then he became editor of the Békés County newspaper. The next step was politics as left wing Member of Parliament for the small landowner's party.

On December 22, the provisional national assembly was formed, the first sign of liberation. We whisper a proclamation that was shouted at Debrecen's Calvinist College: "Hungarians will live again, Hungarians arise!"

In the meantime the battle line is drawing nearer. The Red Army's advance guard is now in Kíspeszt! We can hear them through their loudspeaker – "Lay down your arms soldiers". There is even some reparation for Christmas. The sirens are silenced. The quiet is almost deadly. The police are told that Budapest will be completely surrounded by the next day.

"You had better leave" I am warned. "The Arrow Cross have taken people from here to the banks of the Danube. The last time it was a little boy with his father..."

²Gyöngyösi was in Canada at the time of Jolán's visit in 1947. His mission was either political or diplomatic. He dropped in to see Jolán when Granny and Sasa lived on Park Avenue.

Chapter 12

Hiding in Buda

I decide to move out next morning, but where to? The problem is solved by a miracle. When two elegant ladies come to my hideout: mother and daughter, Vali and Loli from Csaba – distant relatives. They moved away from Csaba many years ago and live in the suburbs in Pasarét but German soldiers have evicted them.

"You are coming with us. We must leave right away."

There was no time for questions. Rákóczi Road was empty. Only a few army trucks hurtled by on Kossuth Lajos street. The ladies were living at the Vadászkürt Motel (Hunting Morn) as refugee countesses, with credentials authenticating their noble identity. As we walk along the south side of Rózsadomb (Rose Hill comparable to Westmount), we arrive at a cottage in the alley. The owner is the manager of the rugs department at Corvin's (a department store). Laci Iritz is sending a car to pick us up. He will take us to Mr. Krüner who is the owner of the cottage and who was Vali's late husband's client. Within minutes the reception announces "The embassy car is here." I sit in the back, between the ladies. We drive without ever being stopped. It is still morning. Mr. Krüner is waiting and seems rather impatient. (Maybe he is in a hurry to get to the department store.) He quickly briefs me.

"This corner room will be yours. If you have to use the toilet, do not flush. There are people upstairs and they are not to know that anyone else lives here. I cannot supply you with food, as I am pretty hard up myself, but you can help yourself to some potatoes that are in the pantry. The stove may only be used when I am home. No smoke should be visible coming out of the chimney. During the day the room quite comfortable." They leave.

I stare at the grey sky through the lace curtains – the sky which I have not seen in weeks. The street is deserted. Its still early, but its dark already, Mr. Krüner

comes home at the time he said he would and finds all in order. He starts the fire in the stove and puts the potatoes in the ashes. He gives me a cup of tea. It is Christmas Eve and Vali and Loli appear with a basket of canned food, sweets and apples. They sit down by the stove and tell me the latest news. The net is closing in. The Soviet troops have surrounded Budapest and whatever is left of the German army. Hungarian soldiers would like to come home for Christmas, but cannot get through. We wonder – how much longer? Probably Pest will be liberated first. We should get back to the Pest side. . .

Its getting late. It would be wise, in fact necessary that Vail and Loli accept Mr. Krüner's hospitality. They move into a room facing the Rózsadomb. Next morning, we have tea in my room. We hear a noise and footsteps. German is being spoken. German soldiers' boots echo in the alley under our window the soldiers are marching by with bayonets. Within seconds I realize that the battlefield is by my window. Even Mr. Krüner would be driven out by the Germans. We have to get away, before it's too late. Vali and Loli have left. We plan to meet at Szabadság (Freedom) Square no. 12. I attempt the impossible. . . to cross over to Pest to Laci Iritz's. The sky is still grey. A cold wind blows from the Danube. The street is full of leaves and garbage. The area is swarming with German soldiers in overalls. There is a machine gun nest every ten meters. In some places, they are just stashing them away. I try to avoid the Germans and actually succeed.

Before I reach Szép Ilona (Pretty Helen) street, I check out the area, then hurry along. Where is Szabadság Tér? I'm all puffed out. I lean against the back of a bench, when to my greatest surprise a yellow streetcar appears at the stop. It's the terminus and the passengers disembark. The conductor changes places and heads off toward Pest, but he does not make it to the next stop. Armed Arrow Cross servicemen stop the car and block the exits. I.D.s Identifications Papers! There are very few passengers, some old folks clutching their little bundles. But there is no mercy. Everybody off – everyone checked – then back on. Scary moments. I produce my refugee papers – and I am let back on. That was something! I stand beside the conductor. He says: "Budakeszi is in Russian hands and these guys are still giving us the third degree!"

I get off after the bridge.

Chapter 13

"The Foreign Affairs Office"

The American Embassy is on Szabadság Square no.12. When Horthy's clique declared war and diplomatic relations with the U.S. were broken, the Americans requested the Swiss Embassy for the protection of its citizens. At the American Embassy, there were not only Swiss but, British, French, Belgian and even room for the Yugoslav Embassy. It became the official office for Foreign Delegations.

Even the Palestine delegation was located here. They were accepted by the Hungarian Nazi Regime. The Swiss Embassy was responsible for the Community's security and food. Otherwise each embassy was autonomous.

Actually the building is neither under Swiss nor under Swedish protection. Accommodations became impossible for the illegals. As soon as passes were issued, they would become invalid. The Hungarian Nazis would destroy the refugees' papers and cart the poor souls away to their extinction. At this time the building did offer protection to the embassies, their employees and even to some illegals but to get in as a refugee was almost impossible. Within its grounds were menacing-looking guards wearing Swiss National caps, who probably had recently made their escape from labour camps. No doubt they would be armed and prepared for all eventualities, so it was quite an accomplishment to be admitted. I succeeded stating that I had a message for the ambassador's secretary.

Within a few minutes a hefty Laci appears and in his usual boisterous manner, instructs the guards to let me in.

I follow Laci feeling optimistic, but we didn't get too far when Laci starts lecturing me.

"You've got a nerve to come here! I'll be in a very tough spot if they find out who you are!"

In spite of his anger, he is not going to let me down and says that no one must

know my true identity. I am to remain a Transylvanian refugee who was in civil service. Only Mr. Fischer, the Swiss Embassy's administrator was to know the truth.

I am presented to Mr. Fischer, who accepts my identity as given in the papers. He requests that I not mention being in a labour camp. I will be employed as clerk if it will meet with the consul's approval. Mr. Fischer prepares the papers accordingly. Usually this is done by the employees but they have left for the Christmas holidays. My boss is to be Mr. Fischer and my work will be extremely confidential. He gives me instructions and the SWISS EMBASSY CAP! – one left behind by an employee. I will have the Swiss Embassy's I.D. card with photo, as I will be required to go outside the embassy. Hopefully the consul, Mr. Lutz will give his approval.

Laci and I talk in the next room and he tells me "from now on, we don't know each other." His position is not official, but he is in charge of diplomatic relations between the Swiss and Romanian Embassies. He is waiting for his appointment and I must not mess it up. . . slowly I take it all in and I am quite overwhelmed at my great fortune and the Swiss Embassy cap on my head! Hopefully I will be able to play my part to the very end. I must not show my feelings. I must be polite and in control.

"My Debut" takes place: front hall third floor, The American consulate's clerk, Mr. Weisz was at his desk. We introduce ourselves and we talk. He is furious with the U.S. Embassy. He was left behind because he was from Slovakia and spoke Hungarian. He is in charge of safekeeping and security for the building.

"Now why should I be the one to guard the building and its treasures from the Nazi bandits? I should be in New York with my family. But no, we are all stuck here!"

He then introduced me to his wife, his son and his mother-in-law. They spoke Hungarian but with the usual accent. Then the questions turned to me.

"You're a refugee? Didn't you have to enlist?"

"I'm over fifty and didn't have to."

Mrs. Weisz threw her hands up in amazement. "He looks so young, eh Józsi, and he's older than you – he's in great shape!"

Then Mr. Weisz asked me what I'd be doing and also about my salary. I told him about my low paying office job. He drew himself up and revealed his fantastic salary and how much he was able to save – IN DOLLARS. . . We listened to each other's story and then got down to business. He said many American citizens come to the consulate these days. They all want to get out of Budapest. He tells me that there are great opportunities to make money. "Let's make a deal", he says

mysteriously.

Next day Consul Lutz sends for me. I am given a great welcome. He asks me to take a seat and speaks to me in German. He said he had excellent references about me and how important it is these days. I will know in thirty days as to whether my position would be a permanent one.

The next two days were very busy – so many "clients." They came with expectations. They were ready to bribe – anything to be able to get out of Szálasi's Empire with a passport. At the time, those living in the building were assured of food, but this routine soon ceased when the city came under siege.

There is no food, no electricity and no water. The windows on the streetside are shattered from the blasting. We are on our own and must manage as best we can. I have been assigned to another room and have to share with others. But downstairs on the main floor, I was quite surprised to see another world spacious rooms, elegantly furnished bedrooms with boudoirs and large cupboards. When I entered, I was met with hostile glances especially when I disclosed to them that they would have to share their accommodations for the night. Despite their protestations, the "high and mighty" would have to be deprived of some of their privileges. Dr. Károly (Charles) Wilhelm, attorney and formerly government consultant, chaired the Jewish Council with his wife. He was certainly not happy at being disturbed. There was Baron Splényi (?), member of the upper house with his snobbish wife. It was obvious that the section facing the yard was safe from bombing. These rooms soon became jam-packed. My other discovery was at the air raid shelter. The basement was a labyrinth leading into the neighboring building. This was the Hold (Moon) Street National Savings Bank with its many many basement cubicles.

A loud discussion was going on in one of these. I step inside to find young soldiers, infantrymen, their rifles hung on the coat racks. They are terrified when they see me...how on earth did I get there? They had been waiting for their "liason"...the resistance. They were young kids. There was a distinct aroma of pork sausages being cooked. I set off in that direction.

This is the Bank's kitchen. The cooks are young girls, kind and friendly and I was treated to generous morsels. One of the girls happened to be from Transylvania "too" from Csík. I was soon put through the test. "Well, I had spent some time close to Maroshéviz. Last summer I was working on the railroad." I had to make up stories about my job as civil servant and this gave me access to the kitchen. I became a very important person from Erzsike's point of view and she concocted plans in the event that we return to Transylvania.

I check out an another room. This is where Laci Iritz' beautiful young wife,

Adrienne was kept safe and secure. She used to be an actress, playing minor parts. Now she was cut off from the world, Laci's orders. She was most anxious for the moment of liberation and she was worried about her little daughter who was staying with her mother on Bécsi (Vienna) Road. Otherwise all she did was sit in front of the mirror reading and studying her roles, longing to escape from her safe haven.

Upstairs things were not going that well. The Hungarian Nazi Organization in the fifth district had been notified of Lutz's visitor. We were warned that no one should be hanging around in the hallways. We lowered the heavy drapes. I could hear loud footsteps when someone was approaching. It was a relief to hear them pass by. What could they be talking about? What were they quarreling about? One cannot imagine that either Lutz or the Swiss Embassy would be involved in the atrocities.

I was shocked to learn that although we were under the Swiss Embassy's protection the glass greenhouses on Vadász (Hunter) street had been broken into and raided. Shots were fired and someone was killed. Next day they took away- Artur Weisz, one of the directors of the International Red Cross and Ottó Komoly, an engineer. They were executed. The Swiss Embassy was totally without power.

This is not such a safe place after all. Mr. Lutz went out of his way to protect the refugees. Sándor Grausz was in hiding at the Embassy. To relieve Grausz's anxiety Mr. Lutz took Mrs. Grausz under his "personal protection". The consul and Mrs. Grausz fled from Budapest at the end of December. The Grausz' were legally divorced and Mr. Lutz married the lady later! We have learned that Lutz gave testified against the Hungarian Nazis with as much daring as Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish Embassy's counselor. Wallenberg was known to stand outside the Embassy and personally hand out safe-conduct passes to Jews. Lutz was not as well known, but he rescued thousands in safe houses of the Swiss Embassy. The Hungarian Nazis must have killed Wallenberg – there was no trace of him. . . Lutz, because of his wonderful deeds in those perilous times, was nominated for the Nobel prize.

Before I was hired, Mr. Fischer specified that my job would require going out to the Embassy building. This was obvious as the Swiss Embassy was on Stefánia Road. Somehow I would have to make my way there from time to time. Mr. Fischer did follow through and even found me an escort. The situation on the street was quite disquieting. There were artillery guns in firing position at the Stock Exchange Palace at Szabadság Square and I had to go to Türr István street to take a parcel to his lady friend. . .

"As you are going out anyhow, please take my sweet little dog. It's been weeks

since he's had fresh air." I set out with the little black poodle on a leash, wearing my Swiss cap I was scared but there were no problems.

Early in January in 1945, I finally had news of Károly Varga. Dr. Imre Böszörmény, Debrecen's attorney for the King's Council, was permitted to come to the Embassy. He had just run into the teacher Mihály Vasas (Cica's husband) who invited him to his home. That is when he met Károly Varga. Károly's job there is chopping the wood and keeping the house warm. The three apparently get along very well.

One night when we were all in the big room, which was so nicely furnished by the Wilheims, they woke me to say that there were two young blind men banging at the door, calling my name, begging to be let in. They were the two pianists from Kolumbusz street, Jenő Lindenfeld (later known as Lényei) and Laci Schlesinger. They looked terrible. They were filthy and starving. They pleaded to be allowed in or they would throw themselves into the Danube. There was no more food in their last hiding place; no way could they manage any longer. I decided that I should take the chance and let them in, and did not ask anyone's permission. Next morning I was ready for the lecture I was sure to get and there was plenty from Laci. We hardly had any food left. I found a barrel with raspberry jam in the stockroom all frozen. This is what I gave them. Each day began by getting them washed.

At about this time I became involved with very confidential discussions at the embassy. Mr. Krausz, a Palestinian Zionist was the organizer of an emigration movement under the cover of the Swiss Embassy. He was negotiating with Mr. and Mrs. Aladár Weisz who had a textile wholesale company on Erzsébet (Elizabeth) Square. When I was too close Miklós Krausz tried to change the subject, but I heard "Waldsee..." This is where I got my last news from Éva. During the summer, I got a postcard with the message "I am in good health" It was printed, but it was addressed in her handwriting. Mr. Krausz was just explaining that "Waldsee" was a horrific Nazi lie. The name was a cover-up. In the west they had already heard of the Polish town Oskiecim or Auschwitz in German, the infamous death camp, where the elderly, the disabled and children were taken. Upon arrival they were brought to the so-called bathhouse. The doors would be sealed tight. The showers would spout poisonous gases. The corpses were then incinerated in the crematories. The occupants of the camp were aware of the fate that awaited them, seeing the continuous smoke spouting out of the chimney. I was paralyzed with fear. I just did not want to believe this but hearing Mr. Krausz and knowing about the Szálasi gang's nefarious deeds, Hitler's exploits could well be imagined. I clung to the doorjamb to keep from collapsing – but still I hoped. Éva was young

twenty-two years old in great health. She was into sports. No! But her parents: Imre (Emery), he was very ill and Margit (Margaret)– so fragile; little Lilike, her sister, seventeen years old, ever smiling – will I ever see them again? Oh it hurt.

Terrible times ahead – bombings – detonations. The Margit Bridge was blown up, then the Lánchíd (Chain Bridge) and finally the Erzsébet bridge. The Red Army's detachment was in the neighboring district. We hear them through the loudspeaker set up in the railway station. "Give up the fight". The announcement was in Hungarian and German. "Think of the poor citizens." But the battle rages on. Its been snowing for days. Nobody can sleep, even though it is still quiet in this district.

But then on January 18, at dawn, the first Red soldier appears at the gate. . . What absolute happiness. It is true, we are finally liberated. End of years of nightmares, humiliation and hiding. End of living in anxiety. We are free! The dawn of a new life, a new Hungary. . .

We surround this one soldier and hug him. He does not allow this celebration to continue. He goes up the stairs, up to the first floor, to the hallways, checking each room. "Nyemec soldat?" (German soldiers?) he asks. We explain that this is the Swiss Embassy – off-limits to Germans. He seems relieved and goes away. But within the hour another four arrive and order the men to the gates – to be taken away. I was surprised to be lined up with the others. I had no idea as to what was happening. One of them had his eye on my watch and I shoved him away. The young guards at the gate save me. I did not have to go and managed to hang on to my watch, a precious gift from my father-in-law. The young guards spoke Russian and we reported the "incident" to Mr. Vonnuss, who had replaced Mr. Lutz. He saw to it that all the embassy's employees have proper Russian language. I.D.s.

This morning we watched the goings on at Szabadság Square from the window. The square was quiet. Beside me was Évike, Aladár Weisz's eighteen year old daughter. Up to now we had not spoken only to say hello.

"I must congratulate you" she said. "My mother and I thought that the show you played could only be played at the Víg Theatre." "Actually, who are you?"

This conversation continued as we walked along arm in arm down the street. It was great to breathe fresh air again. We were free. The noise of the shelling from Buda did not bother us. We walked along the snow-covered streets, avoiding the mounds of horse manure. I had plans. By the time we got back to the Embassy, my new I.D. with photo awaited me. "Schweizerische Gesandtschaft in Ungarn" (Swiss employee in Hungary). It was now in three languages, Hungarian Russian and English.

"I certify that György Kiss is employed by the Swiss Embassy to represent British, American and other foreign interests. Co-operation of civilians and military is hereby requested."

It was signed by Dr. Zürcher administrator in charge and had the Soviet Army's commanding officer's seal and signature. I headed off toward the Város (City) Park. Since the second of December, I had no idea what was going on and I was afraid of what I would find... Kolumbusz street was deserted. Here and there I see someone – but inside in the same dormitory through the window, I see my grandmother as she is tidying up. A miracle – an unbelievable miracle! Only a few were permitted to stay when the Nazis took my mother and me. Those that remained suffered from great deprivation. There was very little food. There was someone in charge and at one state a soldier would bring my grandmother little parcels of food. She did not understand the soldier and never did learn who her good Samaritan was. Because of her deafness she did not have a clue as to what was happening. Many times she thought that this was the end. As she could not hear, often they would have to chase her down to the air raid shelter with the butt of a rifle. Sometimes she thought she would never see daylight again. She was spared from the sounds of the bombardment! She knew nothing of the heroic deaths in the labour camps. Probably she did not even realize that she was at the mercy of the Nazi executioners. She was only worried about us.

My mother was waiting for me at the Pannonia Hotel. Laci kept her informed. Oszkár and his family were heading toward Szabadság Square. My mother had a plan of action. There was a distant relative, a refugee, who lived on Vörösmarty Street. We would move into her apartment in the courtyard. She found a sleigh and I was to put her and my grandmother's things on it. I started off. Along the way, I managed to get beans, peas, lard, flour and even some sugar. Then I picked up scraps of wood on the railroad tracks near the station.

My sister was still enjoying the Maestro's hospitality. I went over to their Baross street home to thank them for their kindness, and offered to reciprocate by providing for Péter.

On January 18, Károly hiked to Békés. There was no train service. He was anxious to get to Kastély (Castle) Street no. 1, to his house and to be back with his wife Jucika and the children. The family had been in utter despair with no news about Károly.

It became my job to approach Ambassador Puskin, with an interpreter, in the matter of food and supplies for the embassy. He was not at all encouraging and stated that we would have to look after ourselves.

The first to leave the Embassy were the Yugoslavs. They had checked out the situation in their country and found the news favourable.

I was in charge of the "stockroom." There were a few dozen shirts and was told to give them away to those who were in need. The two blind chaps were the first benefactors of the rather filthy shirts and the supply was soon gone.

I went to see my uncle Miska (Mike) with a large loaf of bread hidden in my knapsack. They were delighted with my present, having come back from the ghetto and in hiding. My cousin Laci Vörös was still missing. He was far away still coming home from Mauthausen.

At this time Zoltán Vas was in charge of supplies. Later he became Budapest's mayor. Under his administration life got going in Budapest. Milk, so important was being sold at the Hold (Moon) Street market. Mrs. Sándor Nagy, an employee at the embassy, rushed off with a bottle, never to return. She was found at the corner of Vécsey Street, lying in a pool of blood with her broken milk bottle. The Germans in Buda finished her off with a hand grenade.

Gradually the embassy was set in motion. Many stopped by. They found it inconceivable that life could ever get back to a normal state: the destruction, the blown up bridges, the never-ending siege, so much misery. They assumed that it would take at least fifty years for their capital to be rebuilt. Such a depressing sight! Some houses burnt down, or completely caved in. On the Nagy (Grand) Boulevard others appeared to be dangling between heaven and earth. The Adrian Insurance building on Deák Ferenc Square was still smoking.

Among the visitors to the embassy were my rescuers Vali and Loli these two incredibly courageous humanitarians, ready to risk their lives to save another's. Their elegant appearance and good looks depicted an aristocracy which was most helpful in their mission. They had endured tough times since we last saw each other at Pasarét. I will never be able to repay them!... they are leaving for Paris...

My true identity could no longer be hidden from the embassy. I had to confess that my papers were false, but they let me stay. They would recommend legal status and an option for Swiss citizenship. I thanked them for their good will, but I could not consider leaving my native country, now that the Horthy-Szálasi fascist regime is no longer.

János Gyangyosi was the provisional government's foreign minister. As he was a close friend, the embassy requested that I go to Debrecen to see him for food supplies for the embassy's community. I was glad to be able to be of some service.

Chapter 14

The First Passenger Train

Commander Csernisov authorized the shipment of food to the embassy.

It was seven thirty in the evening of February 13, when I took the very first train that left from the Nyugati (West) Railroad station. When I presented my papers at the station signed by Csernisov, they were quite impressed and I was seated in the officers' car, in the company of Soviet officers. The train went to Szolnok where we arrived next morning at seven o'clock. There was, no train to Debrecen that day. I had to spend the night in Szolnok. Szolnok's railway junction experienced severe bombing. The population fled from the town and had not yet returned. It was very quiet. Dezső (Desmond) Csényi, the railway man, put me up for the night. Dr. László (Leslie) Szatmári was travelling with me. He too was a lawyer. While we were in Szolnok, he looked up Dr. Zoltán Pécsi and Dr. László Radnai. We were all at the same labour camp. Pécsi was the director of Szolnok's legal council, Radnai was in charge of his father's law office. His father had not yet returned.

We were told that the castle in Buda had been liberated. Many German soldiers were taken prisoner, and now all of Budapest was under the Red Army. But past the Danube the battle raged on.

On February 15, (Thursday) early in the morning, we were at the demolished railroad station. As our papers were certified by Csernisov, the station master again assigned in the seats in the officers' car. A little Hungarian-Russian dictionary was passed from hand to hand and we learned that one of the officers was a math teacher in the province of Kazak. The captain sitting across from me took my lighter which I had at the labour camp and kept it as a "souvenir"!

It was late by the time we reached Debrecen. We were quite amazed when we got to the main street. There was absolutely no sign of there having been a war.

After Pest, it was like an oasis – everything was clean and ship-shape...

We follow our orders and make our way to the city hail. We presumed that the I.D. check would be a mere formality. But no. We were treated with great suspicion as probable spies. The I.D. with photo and Csernisov's papers were no help. I tried calling Bandi(Andy) Wiener, Debrecen's mayor who had been my friend at the labour camp, but no one picked up the phone. We were kept in custody until morning. The next official on duty looked at our papers and sent us with an escort to the appropriate office. Our escort was a Soviet soldier.

Chapter 15

The Liberated Debrecen

We were not prepared for this Debrecen, day or night. People were well dressed, elegant. The stores were open and well stocked. There was no sign of destruction or war.

Our first stop was – cigarettes. The "Magyar" brand proved to be superb. Store windows glittered. There were pastry shops and restaurants. The Arany Bika (Golden Bull) Hotel and the Gabrinus Restaurant were in full operation. . . Needless to say, we honoured these places with our presence and gobbled up the milles feuilles and the pastries and gulped down the black coffee. We paid cash – we had plenty. This was a virtual Canaan. The locals seemed to have no idea what had been going on in Budapest!

I run into Pista Radó at the Arany Bika, a dear friend from labour camp – one of the first to make his escape. He jumped off the train and hid in a cornfield. They tried gunning him down, but he had disappeared. He is editor of the Néplap (the People's Press).

We talked about our squadron and wondered who was still with them and who had succeeded in making the break.

Pubi Blum lived in Debrecen – a young man, very tall, always willing to help. He was a medical student and stuck with the squadron till the very end. He is no more. Emil Werner never made it back and he so wanted to be with his little daughter again. I can still hear him grinding his teeth all night. He was a great guy. The Blayers are gone. Feri Fisch deserted – but no news about him. Dr. Zoltán Vítál can now be found at the House of Finance – consultant for the Ministry of Transport and the Postal department. Previously he had been employed by the Post Office, and in the Horthy era, he would have been addressed as "Your Honour."! Bandi Wiener is back at his old house the "Wiener Palace" – but he

changed his name to a more Hungarian-sounding one – Kádár. Miska Erdei was lucky – he managed to get his shop back. After all this news, I set out to look up my buddies, but Bandi Wiener insisted that I stay for lunch.

Then I had my coffee with "His Honour" at the House of Finance. Zoli offered me a position as legal adviser at the Ministry of Justice. He showed me around. Each ministry was allotted only one room.

My next stop was the Erdei's. Miska was a very successful businessman, quite a bit older than I. His wife was not Jewish and therefore able to keep the business going with Miska's gentile partner. While we were stationed at Hajdúhadház, she took every opportunity to visit her husband. Miska was often given leave. On May 25 in 1944, before we were transferred from Hajdúhadház to Gödemesterháza, Miska offered to take my winter clothes, so that I would not have to drag them along with me. He brought them home and his wife put them away for safe-keeping. I was most grateful and now I was looking forward to some change of clothes. She said I should have come much sooner (!) The Russians had ransacked their home and absconded with everything. Oh, well! We're alive – that's what counts!

It was all very sociable. I was invited to be their guest during my Debrecen stay and I was delighted to accept their kind invitation. They hoped that I would not mind that the other room was occupied by a Russian captain who was a physician and shared his room with a nurse. "No problem"!

Chapter 16

A Meeting with the Members of the Provisional Government

The way I recall, I had four days to complete my mission in Debrecen. The first day was a Saturday and I looked up Gyöngyösi at his home. I was given a warm welcome. He had numerous questions about the Budapest situation, my family, my friends and Dr. Oszkár Szamek. How can he help and what were my plans for the future? I asked him about his appointment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He told me the whole story. On the sixth of October, the Red Army drove out the fascists from Békéscsaba. This important event was commemorated in the *Alföldi Népújság* (The People's Journal of the Lowlands). Marshall Malinovszky was revered for having liberated Békéscsaba and the county of Békés from Horthy's rule. The article appeared in French and Slovak. It pleaded for understanding and compassion toward its peace-loving people, who even in the midst of war showed no ill will or inhumanity towards its enemy aid called upon the large Slovak population whose language and spirit were Slav, like the Russians, for their co-operation.

Two days later an armoured truck stopped in front of Gyöngyösi's house and a high-ranking officer stepped out. His orders were to take Gyöngyösi to the commander at the Ukrainian battlefield. He could not understand. Gyöngyösi's wife trembled with fear. The officer was very polite and told them not to worry. It was only upon arriving to Debrecen that he learned that they wanted him to edit a booklet in Hungarian – "The Political Battlefield". This happened early October. It was during this period that he met Zoltán Vas in Békéscsaba and then in

Szentes, Imre Nagy.¹ It was decided that the provisional government's headquarters be established in Kossuth's² Debrecen and not Horthy's Szeged. Gyöngyösi played an important role in bringing about the coalition. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Small Holders Party. A month before he accompanied János Vörös and István Balogh to Moscow where the armistice pact was signed (June 20, 1945). He recalled how only Marshall Vorosilov was present among the allied powers. The three had been authorized to sign this historic document on behalf of Hungary's provisional government, which in fact became a declaration of war against Hitler's Germany.

I asked about what was on the government's agenda. Apparently there was to be land distribution under Ágoston Valentinyi, the Minister of Justice together with two lawyer friends of mine from Szeged, Béla Burger and László Koch. (Both changed their names to more Hungarian sounding ones – Dr. Ernő Béla Bojta and Dr. László Réczai. They are advisors to the ministers and are instrumental in preparing the documents for land distribution. This was to be its second most important legislation. The first was a ministerial decree regarding procedures in civil tribunals.

I knew nothing about all this and was amazed to learn what was happening. Gyöngyösi thought I came to Debrecen because of political ambitions, but when I explained my assignment, he was very obliging. The problem was that he had an appointment in Csaba (Békéscsaba) and would only be back on Monday. We arranged to meet again on Monday.

After this I ran into Béla and Laci. I congratulated them on their appointments as advisors to the ministers and on their historic mission together with Gyöngyösi. It was lunchtime and they took me to the special dining room at the Gambrinus. This was reserved for the members of the cabinet. I was introduced to Father Balogh, the state secretary. He was seated opposite to us at this long table. As it was Saturday, they did not have to go back to their office. We walked about and stopped for coffee at the famous pastry shop across the way from the House of Finance. We just chatted and chatted.

There were many stories, the hardships and the dangers that we miraculously survived. Laci's bravery was truly incredible. A classmate of mine was appointed Szeged's district court judge for land registration. We used to sail together in

¹Zoltán Vas was appointed government commissioner. Imre Nagy (1895–1956) led the Hungarian revolt against Soviet domination in 1956. He was Prime Minister in 1953–1955 and in 1956 he was executed because of the part he played in the revolt.

²Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) Hungarian politician and key figure in the 1848 revolution for Hungary's independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

the regattas on the Tisza River. He too had his share of hard times. He was the manager at Miskolc's munitions plant. He offered his job to Laci and went underground. Laci was then sent to forced labour camp. At the time he was involved with the Social Democratic Party.

When the Red Army reached Szeged he was back and then changed of his name to Récsei out of sheer happiness. Next day was Sunday and I had an invitation for lunch. Laci and I went for a walk on Péterfia Road to the Great Forest. It was all so familiar. On August 31 in 1940, I happened to be in Debrecen on the day of my "Conscription to Transylvania". Thanks to Éva, I was demobilized I was at the barracks on the outskirts at the end of Péterfia Road, not far from where Oszkár Szamek and Sanyi Révész were billeted, both dentists. Together they were assigned to barbarous "military manouevers."

Monday morning I went to the House of Finance Building for my meeting with the Minister of External Affairs to present the Swiss Embassy's request and to renew peacetime diplomacy. This had been endorsed by Gyöngyösi. Then I was directed to the Ministry of Supplies, in the same building. With Gyöngyösi's introduction, I was promptly received by the Minister, Gábor Faraghó. Previously he had been Lieutenant General in the police force. Under Horthy, he delegated to go to Moscow for the peace negotiations. I could hardly believe that Horthy's man, who had been in charge of the gendarmes, could ever be a delegate for establishing Hungary's new democracy. But this was his goal and it signified his sincerity.

I was unaware of the conflicts and some questions were brought up. "In the present situation the government cannot assume responsibility for this community. How many employees does the embassy have?"

He did not even wait for the answer and opened his desk for his writing pad to take notes.

"Well, I'll see what can be done. Come back in a couple of days."

As I am writing, I come across another diary for 1945 and it brought back these memories.

There was an entry on February 13, a Tuesday when I boarded the first passenger train from the Nyugati station and I came upon two documents related to this Debrecen sojourn.

"I certify that Dr. György Kiss, Budapest resident at Szabadság tér 12, is an employee of the embassy and is being treated for bronchitis and colitis at Hatvan Street no. 6 in Debrecen." signed and sealed Debrecen 1945. III. 7. Perényi.

The seal was that of the "Royal Hungarian University, Surgery Clinic."

The second document was from the Ministry of Supplies, a purchasing and transporting permit, for 80 kg. of flour, 60 kg. of potatoes, 60 kg. of lard and meat products.

During labour camp years and ghetto days and later when I was in hiding, I became accustomed to hunger. Arriving to a liberated Debrecen, I had no problem adjusting to the joys of regular meals. But I had a reaction and came down with a contagious Ukrainian disease. I had a high temperature and could not sleep at night. Next day I collapsed at the Erdei's. My temperature was running between 39 and 40 degrees and I remember stumbling about the Erdei's house with no one home. That's when I discovered my monogrammed hankies, which were supposed to have disappeared with the Soviet looting!

A Russian medical officer came to see me and arranged for a car to take me to hospital. My temperature would not go down. Laci Réczai kept checking up on me and was a regular visitor. He arranged to send a letter and a parcel to my mother. After about the fourth day I was beginning to feel better, but I was very worried about my family.

I left the hospital at the beginning of March and headed to Csaba to check things out.

A couple of days before I left the hospital, Laci Réczai and Béla Bojta came to see me. They felt that the time had come for me to make plans for my future. Réczai, as Minister of Justice, offered me a choice of positions one of which was chief judge at the civic court, a position which would involve rebuilding the new democracy. I was flattered, but I had other priorities and explained I wished to investigate the consequences of the intolerance and oppression brought about by Hitler's Germany. They explained that this would not be under the justice portfolio but in the department of Internal Affairs. I said that I should join the police force. Bojta and Réczai were quite surprised and thought I was in a rather aggressive mood.

"What do you mean by repression? Up to now the government has not dealt with this matter."

I was referring to the traitors who supported the German occupation, those who joined the S.S. and those who changed to German sounding names during the Second World War. They heard me out and wondered what steps I would take. My plan was to define and regulate who should take part in the restructuring. The disabled would not be penalized but I would consider their resettlement to Germany,

Béla again tried to persuade me that as a lawyer, my place was in justice. But

I was rather surprised and excited about my new goal and could not be deterred.

"This is under Ferenc Erdei's jurisdiction, the Minister of Internal Affairs. It has to be discussed with him. Gyöngyösi is coming to see you. Talk to him about it."

It was only after they left, that I tried to visualize myself in this undertaking. What would it be like? I was so anxious to get out of the hospital that finally I sneaked out.

Fresh air at last! It was about noon and I headed to Gambrinus. As luck would have it, I ran into the Gyöngyösis. Mrs. Gyöngyösi said that she heard that I was to be chief advisor for the law enforcement agency.

Next day this discussion was continued with Gyöngyösi and the question of repatriation of deportees. Apparently, the government is powerless. The matter was not even brought up during the peace talks. Of course they are aware of the problem and there is a committee dealing with this. Ten thousand Hungarians are awaiting repatriation in the Katowic and Krakko districts.

If only Éva would be among them. Perhaps I ought to go there, rather than to Csaba. But they say it is not possible – fighting is still going on in that area. Gyöngyösi sets up a meeting for me with Erik Molnár, Minister of National Welfare. He deals with the deportee problem.

It was rather surprising to be greeted in the communist minister's waiting room by a woman dressed in servant's uniform complete with the maid's bonnet – "I shall tell Her Excellency". Mrs. Molnár appears and accompanies me to her husband's office. He had been a lawyer in Kecskemét and addressed me as "my dear colleague" rather than comrade. As we drink our coffee I realize that Gyöngyösi had brought up the subjects that were of great concern to me – the victims who had been abused and the deportees' immediate repatriation. The difficulty was that these problems would only be dealt with when the government is re-established in Budapest.

I am back in hospital – there is a question of jaundice. One friend visits me – who had been in labour camp – György Faluhegyi. He deserted in Germany. Many many young people were killed by the Hitlerjugend (Hitler's Youth). Can this ever be forgiven?

It is Saturday, March 3. I am at Gyöngyösi's and I learn of my appointment with Erdei for Monday. I mail a little parcel with butter and yeast along with a letter to my mother – registered. On Monday, finally, I leave the hospital. I go to Father Balogh's talk: "What I Saw in Moscow" – his observations and perceptions during the peace talks. The lecture was well attended, but the content was rather superficial.

March 5, Monday, I meet with Erdei in the morning. I wear navy blue suit which is so shiny, I can almost see my own reflection. He was very friendly. He knew about me and wondered what I meant by victims of German oppression. Apparently this had not been brought up but he felt that it should be dealt with. I was to put forward a proposal and would be appointed advisor to the law enforcement commission. This would require a few weeks when the government moves to Pest. When the government transfers to Budapest, I was to contact Erdei.

I tell him that this would be quite convenient as my mother and grandmother are in Pest presently, but I had planned to go to Békéscsaba to make arrangements for their return. Then I could go back to Pest to accompany them to Csaba. I mentioned that I would need a relocation permit. Erdei smiles.

"Well, I should have known. Gyöngyösi put in a good word for you because you're from Csaba. That's great: Now I am going to ask you for a favour and there will be no strings attached."

"Of course, Mr. Minister."

"What is going on in Békéscsaba is not good. Filipinyi, the chief of police, does not go by the rules. The comrades in Csaba are fanatics. They are opting for an Independent Soviet Republic! You must have connections in Csaba and could look into this. I would like you to take over and have him removed. Please consider this as a favour to a friend. I assure you that this would not reflect on your appointment at the ministry. Because this is such a delicate situation, I cannot give you any official authorization on this matter. Comrade Szobek, chief administrator for the county of Békés, is a good friend of Filipinyi and so turns a blind eye to his machinations."

(I should mention that in 1946, during the First Hungarian Soviet Congress I was a delegate and Mátyás Rákosi³ had a reception. When he learned that I was from Békéscsaba, he reprimanded me: "What are you people doing, you leftist separatists, trying to form a Hungarian Soviet Republic?")

Perhaps I ought to bring this memoir to its conclusion and let my readers decide its ending. Did I follow through Erdei's request in the Filipinyi matter, or did I merely wait for my appointment at the ministry to work on the repatriation project? These were tough times, you never knew what was going to happen. . . so I shall continue.

³Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) became involved with the labour movement in Hungary as early as 1901. During the First World War he was a Russian prisoner of war. From 1941 to 1944, he lived in Russia, where he was the leader of the Hungarian Communist Émigrés. He returned to Hungary in 1945 and became its prime minister.

I went back to János Gyöngyösi and discussed my talk with Erdei. Gyöngyösi disapproved Erdei putting me in such a hot spot.

"You are not a member of the Communist Party and you don't know the situation in Csaba. Without authorization from Erdei, no one will talk to you."

He persuaded me to look up Erdei next day and request a written authorization – otherwise it would be a useless undertaking and he will introduce me to András Szobek who will be driving to Debrecen. I would be able to get a ride to Csaba and discuss the Erdei matter. Before saying goodbye, I brought up the deportee situation. He reiterated that at this point nothing could be done.

Next day I looked up Erdei and mentioned Gyöngyösi's qualms, but he stuck to his position. Well, I'm ready to go. I had bought a nice loaf of bread and asked Mrs. Gyöngyösi if she could have it delivered to my mother in Pest. Szobek never did show up and so I didn't get the ride. The train to Csaba via Váradi was not considered safe – I headed toward Szajol.

Chapter 17

Home at Last

It's snowing. I was traveling with quite a lively bunch French P.O.W.'s returning home. We reach Szajol at noon. Still no scheduled train for Csaba – but there is a freight train and I climb aboard. I arrive at nine o'clock. The station is in total darkness. As I walk along Andrásy road, the lights go on for a few minutes. What a shock – utter devastation. The inn next to the station the little "Kakas" (Rooster) – flattened. The buildings on the Horthy Miklós Road in ruins. The lights go out – the town falls into darkness again.

I'm heading toward Haán utca (street). Oszkár and his family had planned to leave Pest and move home. Haán Street no. 8. They left Pest on February 14, and already everything seems to be in place. I have no wish to visit. I rush off to Apponyi Street no. 5 – my office address and what was our home. I can't go in – its locked. But I don't even want to. That life is no more – what could I possibly hope to find? Just across no. 4 – my mother's place – the plaque is still there: Dr. Emil Bíró, Attorney.

Old Mariska néni, the caretaker has the little apartment which faces the yard. Her daughter and beautiful little granddaughter live with her. I knock. When they come to the door, they hardly recognize me. It was surprising how little they knew about the recent events. They were astonished that my mother and Zsuzsi were in Pest, waiting to come home. I will be staying in her apartment – I will be sharing with their roomer János Murányi. The family will be staying in the kitchen. Murányi is a policeman. He was at work. "You can have the room as long as you like, Sir". János will have to share it. This all happened on March 7 in 1945.

I set out early next morning. . . there are familiar faces – my colleague, Dr. Géza Varga, notary and the mayor's deputy. He gave me a great welcome.

Szobek, the county governor, will be chairing tomorrow's national committee meeting – members representing various political parties will be present. He suggests that I consult them and he will introduce me to the mayor, Dr. Pál Lukács, who previously had been consultant for the police department. Apparently, even in Horthy's time he was known for his leftist leanings. As we enter the city hall, I ask him if he knows anything about Éva's young brother.

He tells me that Tibor and some others from the labour camp did manage to escape somewhere around Goma. This was last October. But then the Russians surrounded that area and they became prisoners of war in Arad and were shipped to Ploesti. Those poor Jews with yellow armbands – so hard to believe, but that is the way it was.

My next task was to obtain a permit to move to my office and apartment. It had been requisitioned!

Pali Lukács jumps up from his chair when he sees me and gives me a hug. He is delighted when Géza tells him of my mission. Was he Erdei's informer? It will be a hard nut to crack. They tell me who is who in the National Committee. They suggest that I look up Mihály Kocziha, who represents the Hungarian Communist Party on the committee and Károly (Charles) Fock, member of the Civic Democratic Party – two very important and useful persons. I looked them up that same day.

After very confidential discussions, each agreed to speak up for me at the National Committee next day – March 10 – a Saturday. The meeting is always held at the City Hall, in the office of the Cultural Councilor. András Szobek, the governor of the County of Békés would preside. I was soon called in. This committee knows that I am a lawyer and have applied for the position of chief law enforcement officer, as was agreed by both Kocziha and Fock. Szobek asked some rather irrelevant questions and finally said that he would bring the matter up before the National Assembly's closed meeting. I was to wait for the decision in the adjoining room. After a few minutes the door opens and I am invited in. Szobek informs the members of my past record and my activities since liberation, all of which were met with approval. They are aware that I wish to continue with my law practice in Békéscsaba. I note Kocziha and Fock's smiles. It appeared that Szobek either misunderstood – or more likely – did not want to understand. I was prepared that I might not be accepted – but not in this way.

Next day I called on János Gyuska, the town secretary for the Communist Party. I wanted to follow through with my promise to Erdei. I could start with the position of chief law enforcement officer and delay resuming my law practice.

Then I continued on to Apponyi Street no. 5 to my office and apartment. Dé-

vald who lived on the ground floor helped me get into my office and apartment. What a sight! Only the cabinets and the sofa were still there – the place had been cleaned out. Éva's clothes, my suits even the clothes hangers and the sofa cushions. Éva's beautiful grand piano – gone! The empty bookcase, letters, photographs strewn all over the floor. No rugs, of course. A terrible sight. After Horthy, in the Szálasi era, Csaba did not have to suffer the pillaging as in the rest of the country. I can imagine what it could have been like. People should have known that I was not deported but simply performing "useful jobs" and that I was to return. I reported this to János Kocziha – he manages the housing bureau. He believed that some of the things could be recovered. Pál Gabriel, the stonemason, one of my old clients, had some of Éva's things for safekeeping. He returned everything.

I met my roommate that evening – the policeman. We became acquainted. He tells me that he is a volunteer and does community service for the police department. When food is available at the market he is permitted to pick up some provisions for himself. We talk about the looting, which apparently occurred when Csaba was being liberated and during the German period, whatever was moveable was taken. Many things have turned up at the barracks next to the railway station. I might be able to find Éva's piano.

Next day, Sunday, I went to meet with János Gyuska, the town's Hungarian Communist Party honcho, at headquarters. In previous times it was the elegant Casino! He had been a partisan. He knew of my return and had unfavourable reports about my conduct while in labour camp... my friendship with my commander, which resulted in mistreatment of others. What an accusation! Could it be based on my deserting with the private, the blue-collar worker from Békés – Károly?

This can be cleared up – the Lerner brothers are here – they were there. Actually, Gyuska did not take this accusation as fact and said he would be in touch in eight or ten days after he looked into the matter.

That evening I was able to laugh at this story with the Sipos couple, who had invited me to their home for a wonderful dinner. I had to replace Dr. István Sipos as physician for the regiment. He has been back since the end of October and is practicing again. Nóra¹, Pista's wonderful wife followed him to Erdély and Gödemesterháza. She was an Italian countess and therefore exempt from

¹Pista Sipos met Nóra when he was studying in Italy. I remember this elegant lady (Italian Countess) who learnt Hungarian. I met her when I was in Hungary in 1947. Gabi's big sister was named after this Nóra.

the fascist decrees. Actually, she had tried to persuade Éva to accompany her to Gödemesterháza so that she could sneak her to Arad in Romania and help her escape. . .

I still had one more day in Csaba. This day was to be dedicated to resolving my problems regarding the apartment. I was assured that the matter would be taken up in a few days. Next day I was ready to go. I had an enormous army knapsack, packed full of goodies, so that we would have plenty to eat in Pest for a couple of days.

My last evening was spent at Emil Gáti's. He is a major in the police force and is involved in criminal and procedural law.

Chapter 18

Back in Pest

It is now a Tuesday, March 13. I am at the Csaba railway station. The station-master knows me as a frequent traveler and treats me with the utmost respect and then the Soviet station manager escorts me on board to my seat in the officers' compartment. I am in the company of Soviet Officers who are very friendly and we chat. One is called Yenkief Elhem. I write down his name. He and his companion will only go as far as Szajol, which is as far as the train goes. They are very interested in Pest and would like to see it. I give them my address and promise to show them around. It was well into the night before the train finally left the station – and by that time we had all fallen asleep. We are at Pusztapó when I wake up – not far from Szajol. We say goodbye - "Daszvidanya". The train goes to Szolnok and my new travelling companion is a Cossack major. . . Then at Szolnok there are no passenger trains – only freight trains and I climb aboard. The end of the line is Kispest. Its not going to be easy to trudge downtown with my heavy knapsack. I don't remember how, but I ended up with a little cart and was able to load all my stuff on it. I made my way past Kőbánya reached Vörösmarty Street by five o'clock. What a sad sight it was seeing such pathetically frail people – my mother and sister were both sick. My grandmother was not willing to take the trip home to Csaba. My goal was to get everyone back as quickly as possible. I was feeling sick too. This has been too much for all of us.

I was amazed at the tremendous progress that has taken place in the month while I was gone. They have started clearing up the ruins. People are walking around with plates of glass for their windows. Here and there a store has opened its doors; at the entrances of buildings vendors trying to sell their wares; posters on walls with information and news. . . Zoltán Vas and his wife Sára are big news – just back from Moscow. The citizens of Budapest express their gratitude to Vas

who has saved them from starvation while the city was under siege for so many weeks. Sára's name comes up in the matter of the country's health service. Life has begun!

Yet the Száasi Gang are still proclaiming "1945 is Ours"!

On March 15 the dream of the landless peasants is coming true. The provisional government has decreed land reform. Estates are expropriated.

I report to the Embassy next day and to my surprise I find that I was paid for February and March a total of one thousand six hundred pengő! Mother and I go to the City Hall, to the commissioner's office for resettlement authorization. Regulations stipulate that costs would not be covered... Dr. László Falk, the district judge, asks for our patience. He showed us the deluge of claims he has received during the past weeks.

Éva's birthday was the first day of spring. We always celebrated it with Beethoven's Appassionata – its beauty, its passion, the wealth in its harmony, meant so much to us. This was our favourite. I loved to hear Éva play it. Where is she, her friends, Joli Bacher her mother's dear friend, who became Éva's first piano teacher. Joli néni was so confident that the Légrády Károly apartment was a safe place especially with the air-raid shelter so close. Joli néni spent Christmas with the family of one of her students. The Christmas tree candles were blown out during an air attack and the five story apartment building was totally destroyed. Never again were we to see that kind-hearted Jolika. György Faragó, her last teacher is no more. Ernő Szegedi has not shown up at the Academy of Music. Magda Zoltán's father waits for her return – but in vain.

I looked up Klári Langer – she is a photographer – and her friend Mara Spitz. Éva used to live with them when she moved to Pest after her graduation. I took every opportunity to visit her in Pest in that congenial atmosphere.

Because of our health problems, it was important that I get to Csaba. I repeat my request to Dr. Falk about resettlement and it is that office I run into a familiar face – György Kucsera – we were boy scouts so many years ago. He was there with his young wife and their two-month-old baby – requesting resettlement.

I offered to help Falk and he happily accepted. I spent a whole day with the government's resettlement committee and I was able to make arrangements for transportation by freight car for my family and the Kucseras.

In two days we were at the Nyugati (West) Railway Station with settlement permits in hand and the freight wagon number to which were assigned to. György was to come for us with a cart and we would load up together and head for the nearby station. Next day – Sunday – still in Pest, but on March 26 on Monday, finally, we are off to Csaba.

Its very cold on that Sunday – there is an icy wind. We had run out of wood for the stove. Mother and I went along the railroad tracks looking for suitable kindling. We were all packed with our meagre possessions – ready to go.

Chapter 19

A Visit from the Soviet Soldiers

It was dark when I heard the knock at the door. Two Russian soldiers! I didn't recognise them at first. Sargeant Elhem Jenkief and his friend. We had traveled together from Csaba to Szajol. I had promised to show them around Pest. They said that they had to report to headquarters in Kispest and would continue on next day across the Danube to their unit. Fighting was still going on in that area. They were hoping to see a little bit of Pest, Hungary's capital. They wanted to see where the battles took place and what was left of the city after the siege. They were very anxious and to prove their eagerness they began pulling out treasures from their bags placing them on the kitchen table: flour and sugar. Actually, they were hoping for supper and lodgings for the night. Supper was no problem, my mother had just begun to prepare the meal. But lodging was another matter. I said we would work that out somehow. I had to tell them that they had come at the very last minute. We would be leaving the next day. I would take them on a very short "sightseeing tour" now, though the sun had already set. When we get back a nice hot supper will await us. After that I'll help with overnight lodgings and so we set out.

We went along Podmaniczky, then Constitution streets. A traumatic sight – bombed out houses, buildings in ruins – then on to Személynök street towards the Parliament Buildings. That street was in fair shape as far as the Danube River Bank, but it was getting hard to climb over huge chunks of debris from the ruins and the bombarded buildings. They were shocked to see the blown up bridges. The Margit híd (Margaret Bridge) was hit twice. At the access to Margit sziget (Margaret Island), the bridge re-emerged propped up! The Lánc híd (Chain Bridge) was in the Danube, as was the demolished castle.

The sun had set at Hármashatár Hill, its faint rays barely giving light to the river

– the river where blood had flowed the vicious Nazi executions. My companions realized what had happened.

After supper, I took them over to Izabella street, to my uncle. They were given a warm welcome. A sofa bed and a cot were set up for the night. We went back together to Vörösmarty Street for their belongings. When we were walking together a black cat ran in front of us. Jenkief took it as bad luck. I just laughed and we said goodbye.

It was well after midnight when we are awakened by loud shouting and banging on my window at the courtyard side. "Open up you robbers!" What is going on? "Go away – we're trying to sleep." This did not help – they kept on banging. I had to open the door – three angry men, Oszkár Faludi, the housing director and the janitor. Faludi was out of his mind – screaming like crazy. He accused me of stealing his silver, his cutlery, candlesticks, his china etc.

"Last night everything was still in the big basket and it's gone now. It must have been the Russian soldiers. They saw where everything was and that's why they kept coming back here. . . "

The janitor agreed. He knew that they had been to my house and were in my company. They were sure they had found the thieves and it looked bad for me. How would I be able to leave in the morning and use my reservations, which were not that easy to get. I had to travel with my family. . .

It was dawn, banging again. I had to let them in. Faludi brought the guard - a Soviet soldier with a red armband and a green cap and the janitor came as well. They search the tiny apartment. The soldier digs into our packages all ready for our journey. "Davaj davaj" he says and urges me to hurry and get dressed.

My mother and sister are terrified. I can hardly get them to calm down and can hardly control myself. . . I give Faludi a piece of my mind.

The guard, Faludi and I set out towards the Nagykörút to the army headquarters – the Britannia Hotel. I'm taken to a large auditorium where I am seated at a table and the interrogation begins with the help of an interpreter. The officer is annoyed that I had arranged for lodgings for the soldiers.

"I bet you can't even tell me where they spent the night" – he said.

"Of course I can – Izabella street 43, apartment no. 1"

"Well they didn't report to headquarters – a major offence and it all looks very suspicious" – says the interpreter.

"If they really are staying at that address, you are in the clear – but they will be in trouble."

The soldier and the interpreter will escort me to Izabella street. I am told that if they find the soldiers, they will be arrested. But I have to wait at the Britannia.

Time is at a standstill – maybe an hour before we set out and the train leaves at ten – how can I get rid of these guys?

Finally we set out to Izabella street to find only my aunt Éva home. She is terrified seeing me with the soldiers armed with their bayonets. I try to explain what is going on.

"Those were some guests you sent me!"

"Where are they?"

"They asked Ibolyka (my young married cousin) to help them with some shopping. One of them wanted to buy a purse for his wife – he didn't know his way around."

The officer calms down when he realizes that the soldiers belongings are still there. They go through everything – even the beds. Things are thrown out of the closet, the contents of the bags thoroughly checked. The place is now a disaster – but they find no evidence of the stolen goods. The soldiers are not expected back before noon. The officer orders the soldier with the bayonet to stay. When Ibolyka returns with the soldiers, they are not to know that the comrade awaits them. So off we go to headquarters. It doesn't look too good for my trip to Csaba. Jankief was right about the black cat.

The officer reports to the commander, who appears to be somewhat relieved. He turns to me and says that I must return at seven o'clock in the evening for the interrogation. I was given a slip of paper permitting me to leave the Britannia.

I made a mad dash to Vörösmarty street. Gyuró Kucsera really knocked himself out – he brought everything downstairs and loaded up the little cart. I didn't even have to go up – everything was ready. We pushed along to the rail yard and located our freight car. Gyuró's wife was already there along with cute Mici Gurzó from Csaba. She was nursing her baby.

Gyuró and I arranged the suitcases at the end of the car so that my mother and grandmother should be fairly comfortable.

I told them what had happened. He pushed me to the back of the wagon, worried that Faludi might send the patrol after me. The train pulled out at ten o'clock. My mother and my grandmother both burst into tears – tears of joy. When they were forced to leave Csaba – they were sure that they would never be able to return – like the poor souls who were, taken to Auschwitz.

Zsuzsi looked so sad as she sat down. Péter could not come to see her off. He was very sick. I tried to comfort her and said that he will soon recover and come to visit her. Then we would take care of him – he could stay with us. But Zsuzsi's thoughts were far away. She hardly heard what I was saying. Péter was gravely ill. He had been doing without for so long – living in such a dangerous and hectic

world – in his life-saving mission. It was meningitis. His mother was giving him the best possible loving care.

It was only when I was back in Pest that June when I learned the outcome of the "detective story". Apparently some Ukrainians moved in just across the Street from where we stayed at the Vörösmarty apartment. That particular night, when the gates were shut, they were able to climb up from the outside and get in by opening the window without disturbing anyone and took off with the big basket of valuables. It was through brilliant detective work, that the culprits were discovered. Jankief and his pal were cleared.

Chapter 20

Moving Home

The train rattled along slowly. We were exhausted and dozed off in the light of one candle. We arrived at Törökszentmiklós in the morning. Soldiers had occupied the station. The train moved on toward Szajol. At long last we arrived in Csaba by the evening... My family heads towards the Szameks. I spend the night with Mariska néni and next day the housing bureau notifies me – my late step-father's (Dr. Emil Bíró) office is available. However, the apartment has been assigned to the daughter of the director of the orphan's tribunal. What a shock! I have to move in with my mother. János Kocziha asks if I want to take the matter to court. Definitely.

I don't have my typewriter and I have letters and submissions that must be written. The house and the office have to be cleaned. Clients have started to appear and I have to look after everything: opening up the office, checking out problems, receiving the clients and trying to track down Éva's piano. Szeged's Judicial Office has to be notified of my return and my appeal to the commission has to be submitted for verification. I phone comrade Gyuska to tell him I'm back. I have a long talk with Éva's communist friend, Jóska Spitz who knows of my plan to join the party...

Then I go to Andrásy Road no. 9 to Éva's parents' flat. Éva and I set out from here four years ago. We were so happy – full of wonderful plans... The rooms are empty and bare – but they bring back memories of glorious times. I never realized how I loved them. Dear Mother – she was so protective and Imre, if I needed him, he was ready to do the impossible – Lily always with a happy smile and Tibi forever bragging about his lawyer brother-in-law to his friends. How I miss them all.

On March 31, I place an ad in the "Népujság" (Citizens' News) hoping to

locate Tibor.

A few days later comrade Gyuska called. We seem to be on the the same wavelength and after a short discussion he asks me to come to the office of the security commission. I was to refer to him, as I would be replacing Comrade Alajos Balla. The latter had been informed supposedly. But Balla didn't seem to know anything about it and looked rather shocked.

I must settle down and take care of my mother, my grandmother and my sister. No more fooling around. Just then Emil's (my late stepfather) secretary stops by. She has since married and moved to Mezőberény. She has brought back my "Remington Noiseless". So, now I even have a typewriter. I call the typewriter repairman, Sándor Tóth, who quickly restores it into working order.

"Do you think you can find a typist for me?"

"Well, of course – I have a young relative, a beginner, but she did work at Dezső Tardos', the lawyer, before they took him. Do you want to give her a try?"

"She worked for Dezső bácsi? Oh, that's fantastic!"

Dr. Dezső Tardos had his office in the József Square building. He was considered to be the best attorney not only in Csaba, but in the whole county. He belonged to a masonic lodge and was president and legal advisor of the Chamber of Commerce, the Rosenthal Mill and the Excelsior Knitting Company, the Békéscsaba Savings Bank – to mention a few! I was in the same labour camp as Dr. Bandi Ellmann (Somogyi) uncle of the above mentioned Dr. Tardos. He ended up in Germany with his unit. The Hitler Jugend gunned down the captives who had been herded together. Bandi threw himself to the ground, succeeded in avoiding injury and made it home.

Well, now I am ahead of myself, while trying to go back to this memorable day for all of us, when the Soviet troops chased away the last of the German soldiers from our country. Even the little border villages and Nemesmedves were liberated. April 4 was a most wonderful spring day.

Two days later, a young girl with auburn pigtails appeared at my office, uncle Dezső's last assistant. Her name was Dóra Szlancsik. Her father was the carpenter in charge of maintenance at Deutsch's Excelsior Knitting company. She was so sad about her last days working for Uncle Dezső. She was devoted to him.

Because of the devaluation of the pengő, I said I would pay 20

"I'd like to discuss this at home. And please don't call me Dóra. My family calls me Dódi¹."

I picked up some documents from Emil bácsi's office manager, Dr. Ferenc

¹Dódi became Gyuri's wife, mother of Judit and András. She remarried and is alive.

Sailer, a lawyer, as well as a filing cabinet. Now the office is furnished.

I begin to forget about my discussions with Erdei, as the clients come drifting in. There are some who are in the legal procession for financial gain – but there are others who are dedicated. This is their mission in life. But one has to eat – to survive.

On April 9, after selling an inheritance, I made my first 100 pengő and on that day 10 boxes of matches cost 45 pengős.

My first clients were Dr. Elek Remenár, an administrator at the hospital Einhorn, a merchant in the iron industry, a young man by the name of Braun, János Kergyik, a policeman and a Seventh day Adventist, Margit Polgár, a dressmaker. Next day even more clients showed up, one who used to be my gym teacher in high school, Dr. Jenő Czinkotszky.

Chapter 21

Our Martyrs

It was around this time that one of my friends from the unit got back from Deutschschutz, Germany, István Forschnen (Fazekas). Apparently most of the unit was executed.

My colleague, Dr. József Ellman from Nagyszalonta was shot as were so many: the young actor, Vilmos Komlós' son, Jancsi, Gabi Kurschner, Pali Lisszauer, Laci Propper and as mentioned earlier Emil Werner from Debrecen and Pubi Blum, the medical student, the two Blayer brothers. Poca Havas, grandson of Kner from Gyoma, Feri Haiman, Ákos Gáli from Gyula, László Sárkány from Sarkad and the list goes on. We were anxiously awaiting a colleague who was a neighbour and a friend – Dr. Ferenc Fischer. He took care, of my office after I joined up. Then he was taken away to forced labour camp and we have not heard of him since 1942. He was the best, a strong character, brilliant and honest. Dr. György Erdélyi endorsed communism and it is presumed that he was killed with Feri Fischer on the Eastern battlefield while clearing minefields. Csibi Guttman, a cheerful soul made it out of Auschwitz. Her husband, the eminent Dr. Endre Brüller, her childhood sweetheart and love of her life, did not return. He had been my schoolmate and university classmate. László Havas from Szeged, not long married, was very proud of his father, the regiment's bugler, who died a war hero. László is missing. Dr. István Weisz another hero husband of Lili Vajda, a medical student, put to death at labour camp. Dr. Árpád Bosnyák, Dr. Viktor Färber, Dr. Károly Fenyvesi, Dr. Henrik Herzog, Dr. Ernő Károlyi, Dr. Dezső Kemény, Dr. Géza Lusztig, Dr. Ernő Prónai, Dr Gyula Schwartz, our martyrs and colleagues, deported to Auschwitz, ever to return. These names will not be forgotten.

Ah there's good news about Dezső Tardos and his daughter Olga. Through some stroke of luck, they were not taken to the Auschwitz death camp but to the

Graz area, where he was employed at the gas works. Olga's husband was there as well. He had been in our unit in 1943. All three were liberated. But then tragedy struck on their way home – father and daughter were killed during an air raid. Laci Sándor, the young husband, survived. Tardos loved both his children, but Olga was his favourite. She inherited her father's brains and his wonderful spirit.

This was the first grim account we learned from eyewitnesses. There was no news about Olga's mother. She had been "choosen" along with Dezső bácsi's daughter Kató, from his first marriage and with Mrs. László Frenkel. The Tardos' had lived in complete harmony – a wonderful family – always in a happy mood. Dezső bácsi loved to play cards and was the most dedicated family man. The legal fraternity had the utmost respect for him.

Chapter 22

The Morally Corrupt

During these troubled times, some of our confreres showed no conscience. Miklós Gönczy worked in Békéscsaba while at law school. Upon graduation he managed Dr. Lipót Holländer's office very conscientiously and was quite involved with this family. He would be invited to tea parties given by Jewish girls. During these precarious times, he became public prosecutor.

It was some days after my return that I was to learn of Dr. Gyula Révész, a physician at the Csaba hospital. He was shipped out to a labour camp at the battlefield – never to return. (Dr. Révész was Vera Szamek's husband and the infant János' father.) This happened in 1942. Nora, the wonderful lady, always ready to help wanted to adopt János, should he too be subject to deportation. The application was submitted to the judicial advisor, Gönczy. It was known that he reported the matter to his superior, Dr. Alfonz (Czibesz) Nyíró.

"Surely the Szameks can't imagine that I would permit a Jewish bastard to be legally adopted be a Christian?!" Nyíró told the Szameks about this. When Nora and Mrs. Szamek ran into Gönczy and explained what happened, the reply was that he must have been thinking of the other Dr. Szamek (Dr. Lajos Szamek, the gynaecologist) – that family. "Disgusting" said Nora. "Obviously you don't care which Dr. Szamek, nor do you care about saving a child." Gönczy had nothing to say!

There were other experiences with Csaba colleagues. This was in 1943 in Nagyvárad, Dr. Kálmán Dobay and Dr. Ervin Knyihár were involved with the Nazi Arrow Cross Party. Their plan of action was to enforce anti-Jewish laws to frighten away their respective Jewish colleagues. Previously Knyihar had been a member of the Social Democratic party!

Kálmán Molnár was quite a bit younger, a member of the association, one of

the first. When he saw me he crossed the street. His office was in the lane of Apponyi street. There were five law offices there. It was known as "Swindlers' Lane".

After this, Kálmán and I simply ignored each other. There were two "Associations" whose members were informers and spies. Thanks to them doctors and lawyers of Jewish blood were shipped to the forced-labour camps and no more problems with competition!

Chapter 23

Latest News from the "Prairie Journal"

As I was writing, I found an article in the paper published in Csaba. The date was April 11, 1945. The paper was falling apart – it was yellow. This was a special edition, in which I had two ads. In the legal section, there was the announcement of my return to legal practice, with my address on Apponyi Street no. 4. Under the missing persons' section, was my search for Jenő Lindenföld, the blind pianist, who was at the Swiss Embassy Building with his friend, back in January. He has not been heard from since.

Something else is legible in this crumpled newspaper. "Tolbuhin's Troops are now in the center of Vienna. The battle is on the famous Ringstrasse. The Russians have occupied the Parliament, the City Hall, the Opera, the Police Chief's Headquarters, the Post Office and the Castle... Four thousand soldiers have been taken prisoner. Malinovski's army has taken several positions south of the Danube. The Russians were moving in to the west and have encircled Vienna, cutting off the Germans' last line of retreat. In Slovakia, the Russians have taken four communities, Pozsony (now known as Bratislava) and in the west and south. The Moscow radio assured the Austrian people that their independence is guaranteed by the Allied Powers...

There is an article about the ceremony which was held at the Kossuth statue for the Citizens of Békéscsaba celebrating Hungary's liberation.

The officers and soldiers stood in formation at the Kossuth statue. The Workers' Glee Club opened the ceremony. In a speech from the state, Colonel Lőránt Lőrinczy expresses his overwhelming gratitude

to the Russians for liberating Hungary and its peoples. The Colonel said: "For six years humanity has been ravaged by a world war never known before in the history of mankind. We Hungarians are a mere fragment of this incredible destruction. Its leaders were the guilty ones, aligning themselves with those who were the cause of the suffering and torture of its peoples. These leaders were promised fame and glory – they were the lowest of the low. They propelled Hungary to war... The Soviet Union stopped the fascist plunderers and dealt them such a blow, which brought about their hasty retreat. Ten thousand soldiers perished because they were lead to this war by such cruel and merciless creatures. The soldiers were too exhausted to hold back the conquering Red Army... We praise the great Soviet and are grateful to them and their glorious army for having rescued Hungary from a firry destruction. The despicable enemy, who devastated our native land pushed us to the brink of disaster, has departed..."

I should mention that Colonel Lóránt Sztachó Lőrinczy had been Horthy's field officer. There were many tributes in praise of Dr. József Domokos, who will never be forgotten. He was a lawyer born in Békéscsaba, a communist who supported Mátyás Rákosi. Domokos is a courageous man but in frail health. His clients were confident of his commitment. Some who pursue the legal profession do it for their livelihood, but there are others who are dedicated. Lőrinczy was on the brink of poverty. Criminal lawyers extract huge sums from their clients. His fee was a mere 100 pengő. When defending a case, he prepared a fantastic plea and had an audience of colleagues and judges. Töreky, Szemák, Kreyzel were renowned for their rough manners, but they controlled themselves in front of him. They were afraid of his reaction, his knowledge. They respected him for his honesty. This man saved thousands of lives, a persevering fighter, who defended his clients. Detectives watched his and his clients' every move. They tapped his phone and they knew that he had underground connections which they could not prove. The tribute goes on and on.

This man later became involved in Community welfare and even after this tribute was written continued to function in positions acceptable to his high standards of justice.

I was reading this article while in the company of Domokos' wife and his friends, on the terrace of the Hotel Csillag. The author of the article, Zsigmond Zsille did not know whether Domokos was dead or alive. Actually, he was at the Mauthausen death camp.

Going back to my ad in the paper, in drops Jenő Lindenfeld from Gyula, it was the morning of April 14. He "made" it back. He was Gyula's only survivor. He seems to have recovered from those days in Pest among the ruins appeared quite relaxed. Its good to chat with him. He promised to get Éva's piano back and I was to accompany him to the town's Soviet administrator. At first the department refused to co-operate. But we kept going back and Jenő entertained them with his piano playing. Finally we found out that it was a Viennese piano – not Éva's.

Chapter 24

Péter Is No More

April 24. We are all in mourning – tears in our eyes. Terrible news. "Peter is no longer with us": He died on the 16th of April. For three weeks he was between life and death. You had such courage, you rescued my little sister and so many of us. You saved lives of strangers, people you did not even know – at the cost of your own. You had such spirit and compassion. You believed in justice and you had hope for a better world...and now, when the world is beginning to rebuild you are nowhere.

My grim task was to tell Zsuzsi. She lost the one she loved. In her paintings, her aquarelles, she was searching for Péter. That is all that remained of him.

Chapter 25

Károly Varga's Homecoming

I was badgering Jucika. "How is Károly doing? How did he get back to Békés?"

"Actually, I thought he was dead. When the people started trickling back from the labour camps, there would be a meeting each Thursday. They would discuss who they saw and just any information at all about people's whereabouts. I frequently attended. The first news was that he died in Putnok and was buried there. But no one could tell me where he was buried. I was told that a young chap had been assigned to bury him and that he was to let me know. I was always told the same thing, but never what caused his death. I knew he was dead, but somehow I did not really believe that he could be dead. On this particular Thursday, I went to Csaba again hoping for more news – but no, nothing. Then I decided I should tell the children. But how could I? Though probably they did suspect when they saw me sorting letters and tying them up, telling them that they could read the letters, but to be careful not to lose any. I walked home ever so slowly thinking about all this, when about 700 meters from my house I see a stranger. I didn't notice that he turned in at our house, nor that he had gone inside. The little boy next door said: Juci néni, Uncle Károly is back. – I couldn't believe it, but he said he was positive. I thought if it was him, then I would have seen when I reached the fence. The kid must be joking. As I close the gate, a horrible feeling comes upon me. My two little girls run to me shrieking. They slam the door so hard, I was sure the knob would fall off. Maybe something happened to my little boy, while I was gone. The girls hug me and squeeze me so tightly almost choking me: "Mummy, Daddy is back!" We go inside. Well that was the man I saw before. He hardly had time to ask the girls "Where is your mother?" The girls said "She is looking for you". I almost had a heart attack. My feet were rooted to the ground at the doorstep. Károly, quite overwhelmed, led me inside. Our son could not

believe that this was his father. "This is not my daddy. Daddy is dead – far away". It took a whole week to convince him. He always saw his father in uniform and he was only two when he saw him last."

"Do you know" Károly said, "had Gyuri not been with the unit I would be the dead man in the ditch at the railway station."

Then she began to explain how Károly made the trip from Pest to Csaba. . .

"Imagine, just as he set out, the Arrow Cross arrested him and took him to this big building. There were several people locked in there already. It is now fifteen years since these men were put to death. Károly planned to escape before the execution. The guard was outside the gate, repairing a bicycle. Károly approached him, and asked if he needed a pass. The guard looked up and said "Yes, as far as I know." and he kept working on the bike and Károly just sneaked out. He was scared that they would notice and shoot him. He began to run when he got to the corner. Then he saw Russian soldiers who were picking people up. He passes by a family trying to load up an old truck and he went to help. That's how he escaped. He went on – no money – no food. He found an ear of corn. That was something. He was careful to avoid busy streets. At the station, he tried to find out about trains to Csaba. The railway man said a freight train was to leave soon and they traveled together. The chap had a big heart and shared his meager rations with Károly, so they got off at Csaba and walked to Békés. This was the twenty-sixth of January a Thursday." I only saw Károly much later.

He is now a policeman in Békés. He was very anxious to hear about Laci Propper – "the chap with the glasses – real smart".

As I started to tell him the sad story, tears came to his eyes. Then he told me about his host at Ráday utca, the teacher Miska Vasas and his wife Cicus. They came back to Csaba some two months ago - they live on Bajza street.

Chapter 26

Békés County's Late Governor

It was April 22, a Sunday. I spent the whole day in bed. No matter how hard I tried, I just could not get up. I was so stiff. It took time before I could get up from the sofa. I was all hunched up. It was on that day that Miklós Beliczey and his wife wanted to come to visit – but there was no way I could have them and it created a bit of an awkward situation. A few days later I was able to get up and I called on them. Miklós and I were friends back in the thirties, when we used to fence and were in competitions in Csaba I was secretary at the fencing club. Miklós was Géza Beliczey's only son, a member of the upper house, a landowner. He had a degree in agriculture and went on a study tour to America, Africa and many European countries. He spoke English, French and German. His wife was an Austrian countess, his father-in-law an officer in the Hussars. Miklós was president at the fencing club back then. We represented the organization. There used to be regular meetings and we often got together. Usually Miklós' chauffeur would park the car in front of my office. The funds for the club came from rather meager donations. We requested help from patrons and organized fund-raising balls.

The members of the association represented a cross-section of Csaba's youth. The balls were delightful, created in a convivial atmosphere. The democratic and compassionate Miklós never missed a ball, always elegant in his tuxedo. Together we greeted the mothers and fathers with their daughters in the special box seats set up for the grand occasion. Miklós kept this ritual up even in the early forties. By then he held very high position in the administration of Békés County. He was always the distinguished gentleman.

This was in the days when Kállay was prime minister and there was an atmosphere of change – anti-semitism – in the air and on the written page – where

the swastika made its appearance. Members of political parties in opposition of this perception came under police surveillance. Democratic politicians lost out, needless to say.

I ran into Miklós Beliczey who fought anti-semitism, but on March 19 he was forced to resign. His new position was – carpenter. At this point his main concern was to be able to support his wife, his three children and his 73-year-old mother. All his assets had been expropriated. For six days he had been planting so that they would not go hungry. His democratic attitude had resulted in poverty. He felt that both his political career and his work in the civil service had been beyond reproach. Ninety percent of the civil servants served under Sztojay's¹ government and then came the Szálasi era.

It was sad to see the outcome of honesty and sincerity. The political police targeted him as Horthy's man and this was their revenge.

At this time this was Miklós' only problem. I tried to console him. The court hearings were to begin and he should be able to clear his political record. Hopefully he would be assigned to a suitable position in the department of agriculture or administration.

¹Döme Sztojai (1883–1946) became Hungary's prime minister after the German occupation from March 22, 1944 to August 29, 1944. He fulfilled the demands of the Germans and tolerated the Gestapo activities and the deportation of the Hungarian Jewish population to the German death camps. He was later executed as a war criminal.

Chapter 27

First Eye Witness from Auschwitz

My young cousin, Laci Vörös, has come back from the Mauthausen concentration camp. He managed to escape from IIs, near Graz early in April and became involved with deportees and their problems.

The first deportee from Auschwitz arrived on May 4 to Békéscsaba – Jenő Weisz, the tailor, very religious, who practiced Orthodox Judaism. His house on Szív (Heart) street is filled with people, anxious to see him and speak to him. He is smiling again, but his light blue eyes are filled with tears. He thanks God that he escaped from the crematory and is positive that his wife is alive, as he had seen her a few days before the camp was liberated – just for a few seconds. The women were probably being transferred on an other route. There is a deluge of questions - hopes – fears. Jenő tries to spare them from the horrendous truths and does not speak about the atrocities. He tried to imply that there was hope and had seen my father-in-law Imre after the first line-up - but not since.

Seven hundred and seventy families had been deported from Békéscsaba – two thousand two hundred human beings. Only Jenő Weisz's wife survived Auschwitz. Considering that he was much older, surely my twenty-two year old wife and her little sister Ildike would make it through the suffering, hunger and cruelty.

There is no end to one's optimism and hope for one's beloved.

May 6, Sunday. Just two lines: "My darling I dreamt of you last night. You have come home...it was so beautiful..."

Chapter 28

The Prophet

I had advertised in the "Missing Persons" section of the newspaper, in my search for my brother-in-law. I learned from the town clerk, that he (the town clerk) was in the Gyoma area when he managed to escape from the labour camp with his buddies - but they were not lucky – they were caught and arrested, shipped to Arad. We made a list of the persons from Csaba in this group. I was allowed to travel to the Arad-Bucharest-Nagyvárad region. Actually Joint (the Jewish Aid Organization) officially authorized the mission.

On May 9, when peace was celebrated throughout the world, I was on board the scheduled express to Arad in search of Tibi.

In a few hours, I arrive at Arad and I try to locate Joint and the Orthodox community. It was known that these captured ones were given food and drink by the people at the station, but no one was actually from Arad. Unfortunately, they had no further information. They suggested that I return and they would try to contact Bucharest.

I looked up some friends, the Kornis' the Kálmáns, the Varjas. Ina Kálmán invited me to spend the night at their place. She felt that I should stay in Arad, as I would be able to accomplish so much more locally. In these uncertain times, such a journey could be useless. She said I should stay with them until my mission was accomplished. Ina was Roumanian. Hungarian did not come too easily, but she was full of kindness and good will. I knew Kálmán from Csaba. Actually, we were related through his previous marriage.

The next day was Ascension Day – a holiday. I set out looking for more information. The clerk from Joint recommended that I go to Bucharest for help. I walk around a bit and look for Hellman and Leichtert, inmates from labour camp – but I couldn't find either.

Walking around the theatre district, I see some very interesting placards – Romanian Government public welfare notices: missing persons search conducted by the Red Cross.

"László Kiss Köröspataki, the noted prophesier, in co-operation with the ministry, was offering his assistance. On May 10, Thursday at 4 p.m. he will offer his services without charge. He is well known and respected. He is considered honest and his exceptional expertise in the matter of information on missing persons. . . "

It was almost noon, when I rushed to the Kálmáns with this incredible news. But they already knew about it and showed me the newspaper write-up on Köröspataki. There were additional comments, the government offered full support in this humanitarian cause.

Kálmán accompanied me to the theatre. By the time we arrived, the place was packed, but we managed to find two seats together upstairs on the balcony. There were far more women than men – women with tears in their eyes, some were even on the empty stage. Kálmán explained that many of the enlisted men had yet to return. Some had joined the guerillas in Yugoslavia. Nobody has heard from them. This is why the government is involved.

There is tremendous applause as Köröspataki steps on stage. He is a very soft-spoken man. He begins by explaining that telepathy is now scientifically accepted – that it is possible to see and feel into the future without technology. The audience was not to misinterpret the introduction to his presentation. He had one request everyone must pay very careful attention – have faith and trust. One feels that he has full control of his audience.

Now he instructs: "Hold both hands together and squeeze your fingers." We all follow, his orders – there are no exceptions.

"Try to pull your hands apart. . . just try." We all pull hard – but no one succeeds. Then he asks for some volunteers to come on stage. At first he chats with them and asks questions.

He chooses women and men from this group. Then he begins with hypnosis. When they are in a trance, he shouts to them and tells them that they are in a summer storm. . . they are quick to react and look up to the imaginary sky. The men turn up their collars and search for cover. The women try to pull up their skirts to cover their heads. You can almost visualize the rain pouring down hard. Then he wipes out his command. The little group under hypnosis is quite unaware of the happenings. . . There were variations of similar demonstrations. Two subjects are asked to remain on stage. . . and now the real action begins.

The ones on stage are asked to give the names of two relatives who are missing, their ages and where they were when last heard from. This caused quite a commotion. Everyone shouted names, and addresses. Köröspataki assured the audience that each person will have a chance.

The search begins with the two subjects on the stage. The first participant gives us details about a partisan who is in Yugoslavia on the highway from Nis toward Belgrade. Köröspataki replies that he was wounded and is very weak, but is on his way home, very anxious to be with his family. . . one of the women in the audience bursts out crying.

People were even inquiring about those who are no longer among the living. They were told where the person was buried – even the depth of the grave. Someone wanted to know about a person who had been deported from Hungary – from Dés. Köröspataki smiles and suggests that he visit this person as he has returned home.

This was a turning point for me. I had not believed that he could help me in my search for Éva. But now I ran downstairs and found an empty seat in the first row and waited for my turn. There were so many of us – it would take Köröspataki all night long to hear us out. Surely he must be exhausted after hearing hours of these outpourings. The presentation reached this point. He announced that he would reply to a few more. Then he asks that those with photos come back, write some information on the other side of the photo, so that he would be able to proceed and reply to each request. He will be at the ticket office in a few days. I was pleased with Köröspataki's announcement. I could not have been able to cope with bad news. Maybe in a few days I might hear something. I decided to wait until I return from Bucharest. I had a photo of Éva, which Klári Langer had made.

It showed my Éva with her beautiful eyes and well-shaped brows, black wavy hair and slightly moist lips. . . I put this in an orange envelope that Kálmán gave me and wrote

"Dr. Kiss Györgyné sz. Péterfi Éva szül. Békéscsaba 1922. III. 21
deported from Békéscsaba 1944. VI. 26. Where can she be? c/o
Kálmán Weisz, Arad Street V. Babes 16".

Then I wrote the same details on my business card. It was to be given to Köröspataki personally. Kálmán promised to pick up the reply. His son Gabi was missing.

Next day at three o'clock as the Lei's inflation peaked at 28,000, I purchased my ticket to Bucharest and took the express from Arad. There were no seat reservations at that time – even for long distance travel. It was only after Brasso, that

I managed to find a seat and I arrived at Bucharest, Romania's capitol at eight in the morning. I see the armed guards with plumed hats surrounding the king's palace. My destination was the Joint Office at the Red Cross. I saw some girls who had returned from Auschwitz. This seemed like a good omen. They had come to Bucharest via Scandinavia. They were so happy to have survived.

As it was Saturday, I had not realized that nothing could be accomplished. I wandered about and reached the outskirts on Fiesta St. no. 3 and managed to find lodgings with the Szávas in a little village hut where I had supper. Otherwise everything was so expensive. I was able to devote Sunday to learning about Tibi. The Jewish Aid Agency was amazingly uninformed. They only had information on about fifty Transylvanians who had been inmates in the forced labour camps. There were no prisoners' lists. I gave them a piece of my mind.

After this I looked up the elite and the V.I.P.s of the religious community. I presented my list to Dr. István Vámos, but he offered little encouragement. I was directed to Dr. Székely at the Hotel Athens. Then on the following afternoon Dr. Vámos again and Olivér Lantos – nothing was achieved. They were not even aware that the prisoners were taken from Romania to the Soviet Union.

Later I was lucky to run into one of my comrades from the unit, Pali Gerle. He was working as an overseer at the estate owned by a count. This count had him exempted from forced labour camp. We were really glad to see each other. He had news about my room-mate Dezső Róth from Szerencs who had escaped from the unit and was back home. Running into each other was great, but I did not succeed in my mission regarding Tibi.

It is early morning and I am back on the Express, heading toward Kolozsvár (now Cluj, Romania). Fortunately, there was a connecting train to Várad. Next day I was back in Arad.

Várad used to be a special place in my life. I spent quite a bit of time there between 1941 and 1943. The Rimanóczy Hotel was the headquarters. In 1941 we traveled through Várad on our honeymoon. My good friend Laci Kiss insisted that we stay at the famous Vaiszlovits which was full of wonderful treasures and beautiful rugs which the owner had brought back from his travels to the far East. I first met Laci in Sarkad at Sándor Nagy's house, a forest ranger. I had been invited to Várad. This was on December 5, 1940. He tried to arrange for a work permit for me, but was not successful. We became really good friends. He was a widower – his brother-in-law was a senator in Bucharest. Later he was to become the managing director of the Tenkei Autobus Company. I was introduced to business acquaintances, which was helpful in developing a clientele. An excellent beginning for my law career. I became a regular commuter between Csaba and

Várad.

Laci was in Tenke and we were not able to meet. He was at Bica's, his brother-in-law. We did manage to talk on the phone. I met some of my comrades, quite a few chaps from my unit in Várad. The first was Feri Dávid. He had hopped on a train, at a station in Transylvania, only to find it was heading back to Várad. He had to get off. Then I met Laci Kahán and Laci Jakabfi. They had no idea about what was going on in Pest during the period between the end of 1944 and early 1945. They could hardly believe me.

I arrived at Arad finally at one in the morning. I did not want to disturb the Kálmáns at that time of the night and waited in the lobby of the Hunter's Horn Hotel and only later hurried off to Babes 16.

What awaited me was beyond my highest hopes. Kálmán smiled and handed me the orange envelope.

"You're lucky! First your business card fell out and there was nothing on the back, but on the bottom of the photograph very clearly written "Near Maria Elend, Klagenfurt". (not far from Vienna).

"Klagenfurt?! That is in Carinthia. How could Éva have got there from Auschwitz? Was she brought there for farm labour?"

Kálmán stood by Köröspataki's revelations. I accepted.

By midnight I was on the train back to Csaba. After a little nap, I rushed off to my office to the mail and I dictated two very important letters to Dódi. One was for my sister and the other to Laci Vörös on Bethlen Square. I asked them to contact the International Red Cross and I asked Laci to get in touch with the Austrian Red cross as well. They were to verify the information that Mrs. Éva Kiss had been deported to Maria Elend. Laci had to find someone who was going to Vienna. There was no mail service to Austria at the time. Later on I was able to contact the mayor of Maria Elend. I was ready to go there should there be any news. The Red Cross had no knowledge about deportees in the vicinity of either Maria Elend or Klagenfurt. This was June 4.

A month later I got a letter signed and sealed by the mayor of Maria Elend. "Frau Éva Kiss war hier." (Mrs. Éva Kiss was here.) She was brought to work on the local estate as a Jewish labourer. She has returned to Papa in good health." Incredible! How did Köröspataki come upon the identical name? A mystery! I was to learn the tragedy some time later – little by little, though actually I never really did find out about the coincidence. Perhaps it was better that way.

Chapter 29

What Still Remained from Our Home

Sometime ago I had a letter from András Lipták, Békéscsaba's mayor advising me that my furniture, which was being stored, can be picked up. However, when I went to pick it up, the furniture could not be located. I was told that as I was not a refugee but a deportee I would be required to make a legal settlement should the previous occupant of the dwelling return. The decree was not applied but the empty apartment was assigned to another couple and I was being charged as the apartment was unfurnished!

Finally, I realize that I must come to terms with reality. What was there left from our little home? Well, they did not touch the walls! An earlier order required my giving up our paintings. All that remained was a picture of Éva as an infant, painted by Kolozsvári and some sculpture by Sámuel Filipinyi, a few books. (Somebody found a better place for my special editions of Jókai and Mikszáth.) Éva's books: Pantheon Edition – Beethoven's Life and Works; Meyer's Concertmaster; Young Mozart – here is a dedication "To a Future Great Pianist", from János Kálmán; A Look at Hungary's History of Music (Beautiful piano pieces) which was presented to Éva upon her matriculation with an inscription from the principal, Dr. Benedek Banner. Under the book cover, I discover a few words, written in pencil "Dear Gyuri, I hope that one day we will be able to share our love of music" and there is Éva's signature.

Oh, she was so proud of a dedication from Zoltán Kodály: "To Éva Péterfi – Sing my Children". Then I found a miniature piano, the top of which could be opened. It came with tiny music score and candle sticks on either side, which were half the size of a needle. This used to be our good luck charm. That was all

that remained but I took it as a positive sign.

Nothing seemed familiar. I went down to the cellar and found old photographs in the woodbin, full of mildew. I brought them upstairs to the sunlight. There was a little brown book with the Hungarian coat of arms, the sacred crown and angels with a little sticker "Mrs. George Kiss nee Éva Péterfi" I open it – Éva's graduation class picture with the matriculation seal. She is wearing a white sailor's shirt, looking so happy as if the world had just opened up for her. This picture was taken four years ago. She probably needed it for her work permit.

She did find work at the farm of an estate. Friends wanted a safe refuge for her. As a farm labourer chances of survival from being taken to a ghetto, were far better. But this was not meant to be. Her boss was Ede Pfeiffer. On her employment card of May 23 she was registered as general help but by May 29 she had to leave. Her boss had given her an excellent reference "exceptional in every way, bright, dependable, honest." I tried to get in touch with Mrs. Pfeiffer. She too had to flee and had not yet returned.

I met Mátyás Hankó who complained to me that Éva did not take his advice. He succeeded in hiding people on various farms. László Kádár stopped me on the street one day and asked me to come to his office as he had some things for me. The office was in the same building as one of the Gestapo Units. Kádár had my "Schaubek" stamp album – a well-organized collection of selected stamps up to the year 1922. Vandals appeared to have expertise but not too much time. Only stamps of little value remained.

Emil's enormous safe was there – but emptied. The Germans had found these things in different places – but they ended up together in the same place!

Éva's parents lived on Andrásy Street, upstairs above the Hauer Department Store. Only Tibor, the left-winger survived. He is now known as Tibor Simon. Hungarian Slavs requisitioned the Péterfi's home. I went through the apartment with Tibor but it was empty. There were some prayer books strewn about. One time the piano virtuoso Iván Engel used to give concerts here. A Jew was not permitted to hold a concert in public.

Tibor started putting together some old framed photographs – one of my father-in-law in military uniform, taken during the First World War. I got him to come with me to the basement, where Éva's music was scattered about and in pretty bad shape. Then I discovered some letters that we had written to each other. I picked them up – one by one...

A last look from the street side balcony... I remember how we stood there together on the occasion of our engagement – with my grandmother – our parents – our arms about each other – happy smiles on everybody's face. We set out for

our honeymoon from here with horse and buggy which brought us to the railway station.

Chapter 30

Political Screening Committee

I ran into Gyuska at the barbershop. He is the town secretary for the party. He waited for me until I was finished and together we took the long way about to avoid the monument for the 101st regiment. He finds the new regime hard to take, but plans to continue until I take over the running of security for Comrade Balla. Until then I was to assist in the management of the Békés County's police office.

I was ready to be of service with this change toward democracy and prepared to make the sacrifices required, but I lacked the confidence for the position of being in charge of the community's security. Had I given up my law practice, I would have been in Budapest working for the Minister in the Department of Interior Affairs. But I wanted to stay here waiting for my little woman to return from Auschwitz. My mother and grandmother are my responsibility and I can still be useful to the community with my profession. Gyuska accepted my point of view.

The Peasant Party's Posters began to appear at this time. They were announcing a lecture to be given by Ferenc Erdei, the Minister of Interior Affairs, on the day of Pentecost. After the lecture I was able to speak to Erdei. Oh yes, where was I? He was counting on me referring to our earlier discussion – the matter of restitution for those who had suffered so much. A great deal could be achieved. I reported on the events of the Szobek-Era. Erdei was still anxious to have me take on the position previously offered.

Some days later, the town messenger delivered an ornately sealed envelope from the governor of Békés. I was to meet with him at eight o'clock on June 22, according to decree 1.080/1945 regarding my qualification in jurisprudence for the investigating committee.

This is the text of the oath:

As member of the investigating committee, I solemnly swear to carry out my duties in serving the Hungarian people without prejudice and in the spirit of justice.

I had to fill in for a colleague and I was immediately delegated to sit at the committee's first session. Next day my appointment was reported in the "Viharsarok" (Stormy Corner) news. I found the town's MKP (Hungarian Communist Party) co-operative. I had no problem with the representatives of the other parties nor with the trade unions. They were ready to accept my recommendations – but this was just the beginning. Soon members of the freelance intelligentsia, those with official permits, lawyers and notaries, employees of private firms and people who left the country and moved to the west were to be screened.

Finally, I had to go to Békés because of these emigrants. I was in charge of the investigation. Often I'd have to walk there or go by bicycle – ten kilometers there and back! I was ready for the undertaking and worked conscientiously. There were those who presumed that I had ulterior motives and was benefiting from the connections which would evolve. Sometimes a client from Szeged would ask me to defend them in the matter of a police investigation. Of course I had to refuse these cases and referred them to colleagues.

Chapter 31

Mosaic of it All

About this time someone had returned from Auschwitz. It was the frail, no longer young Eta Goldfin, who had been carted away. She was the very first person who could tell me something about Éva. "I don't know the exact date. Éva and I caught scarlet fever at the same time. We both ended up on the isolation ward at the hospital, but we haven't seen each other since. Isn't she back? I was sure she would be home by now."

I go back to sorting letters, sheets of music, the photos from the basement – trying to organize everything – when a sweet young girl comes in, Ancsi Prónai, a colleague's daughter. She had been deported – but not from Csaba. She was snatched from the streetcar in Budapest and taken to Auschwitz earlier than the Csabai people. Miraculously she managed to get away from there in May.

She knows about my sorrow. She was afraid if left completely alone, I would go insane. Ancsi, the little angel, was watching over me, trying to help. Together we look at the photographs, the wonderful memories.

She tells me: "I know Éva was in great shape. She would have recovered from the scarlet fever bout. Don't give up hope. Éva will be back." On another occasion: "Éva was so beautiful, they wouldn't mistreat her."

My work, chatting with friends and acquaintances – these were my tranquilizers. Ancsi has no idea to this day how much she helped me. I still hoped. . .

The second eye-witness was Vali's sister-in-law, Mrs. János Vámos – Erzsike. She was quite a bit older than Éva, very elegant even after Auschwitz.

All she knew was what Eta Golfinger had already told me – the scarlet fever. But Eta had not seen Éva after again she was taken to hospital.

"Even with her hair chopped off, she was still so beautiful." The stories about the scarlet fever and the hospital gave me a glimmer of hope.

Jucika, Károly Varga's wife dropped by . "Gyuri, I came to tell you about my dream-last night. Your wife was coming home, with her little sister. My dear grandmother reassured me too: Éva will be back:"

A colleague from Szeged, Dénes Návai, wired me. "The Csabai people are in Linz". Oh, if only it would be true.

"Éva where are you? If only I could see you!"

The next to return was Bözsi Horvath. She told me a lot. She and Éva were together in the same prison block. "We had to stay standing for hours. She collapsed. This was three weeks after our arrival. She developed a high fever and was taken to the Birkenau Hospital for contagious diseases in another section." She has not seen Éva since. Apparently, when Éva was discharged she was transferred to another camp. For a while Bözsi was able to keep an eye on Éva's little sister Lili until about August 13. Some of this group were taken to Ravensbruck. Lili was among them and has not been heard from since.

Bözsi Horvath believes in facing the facts. "When I was hospitalized on August 21 in Birkenau, Éva wasn't there any more."

I talked to Mrs. Imre Bíró, a widow, who owns a ladies' dress shop. She had just got back and had been with Éva in Auschwitz until her hospitalization. Later she and Lili were taken to Ravensbruck. Then they got separated and she lost track of Lili. She was positive that when they were brought to Auschwitz, Éva's mother was one of the first to be "chosen". She can't remember anything after these events. The few who did return to Csaba, returned without their mates – the husband without the wife – the wife mourning the husband.

Jenő Weisz was the only lucky one – his wife did get back, a quiet religious lady. She tries to comfort me. "You must have faith."

No, it was all beyond me. Even in my wildest dreams, I could not envisage the horrors of Auschwitz. It took many years before I had the courage to visit the site and face its reality. I had to see how it was schemed and connived right to the final stage – the crematory...

Bözsi Horvath recovered from scarlet fever. They must have taken Éva straight from the hospital.

„Die Körper der verstorbenen Häftlinge werden laut Befehl vom 4. Januar 1944 mit Autos direkt ins Krematorium gebracht, die auf ihren Rundfahrten zu den Nebenlagern die Leichen zum Krematorium in Birkenau fahren.” (Hefte von Auschwitz 12, Verlag Staatliches Auschwitz. Museum 1970. page 130).

(Documentation in German taken from the Museum of Auschwitz in 1970 regarding the transportation of the bodies to the crematory.)

In 1944 entire families would be exterminated.

Dr. Ignác Szamek, chief medical officer at the Hungarian Railroad company had at one time been András L. Áchim's¹ doctor. This eighty-four year old physician, had been given the highest award when he graduated to become a most respected was deported. He was deported with his wife, daughter and son-in law, the granddaughter with her husband, and the couple's little girl! No one from this family was ever to return.

Dr. Lajos Szamek, Dr. Ignác Szamek's son, was an obstetrician in Csaba. Upon his return from forced labour camp, the SS at Pusztavám surrounded his unit. The two hundred and sixteen men were forced to dig a deep trench and the SS gunned down the all the Jews. This is how this wonderful forty-eight-year old physician died beside his comrades. His wife and two children were put to death in Auschwitz. Fourteen members of this family were exterminated.

Dr. Lajos Szamek's cousin, Dr. György Szamek, a brilliant student at Csaba's High School, graduated in law and practiced at Makó. He along with his family were taken to a camp in Austria. As the Red Army was advancing, the SS Commandos blew up the camp on April 13 in 1945. Out of the seventy-seven captives only Mrs. Imre Szepesi, nee Dr. Sára Szamek managed to escape – one week before the camp was liquidated. (Her husband died of a heart ailment in 1933) Another bright Szamek was György, a chemical engineer. He was expelled from the university in Szeged in 1932. He was tried and accused of being a communist as had been Dr. Sára Szamek's husband, Imre Szepesi. Both had been tried in court, but Szepesi died in jail. György Szamek fled the country and tried to continue his studies in Prague and Bologna, but was not permitted to stay in either country. Finally he did succeed in getting his degree in Zurich, and from here his friends in Pest helped him immigrate to Holland where he became chief chemist at a pulp and paper mill. His beautiful sister Vera joined him. Early in 1945 both fell into the Nazi hands. Their widowed mother, Mrs. Jenő Szamek – Klári néni – a staunch and feisty communist waited in vain for her children's return in her little apartment on Wahrman street.

And all this is just a drop in the ocean.

¹András Áchim (1871–1911) was a well-to-do peasant who founded the Hungarian Independent Socialist Peasant Party, the first to advocat the distribution of large estates. He was assassinated by his personal enemies and political opponents.

Chapter 32

At the Zoltáns'

Back to Budapest – a trip I could no longer delay. It was the end of June. I went to Magda Zoltán's apartment on Katona József Street, but only the old gentleman was there, a skeleton, tears pouring out of his eyes. He says he knows and feels that Magda is no more, she hasn't come back. . . and Évike? . . . I tell him how much I know. "Terrible, terrible" . . . We both realize that it is hopeless.

On Bethlen Square, Laci tells me that he had checked out everything - results are negative. But there have been some happy endings. Gyöngyösi is trying to be encouraging. He has learned that the International Red Cross has traced some deportees to Scandinavian countries. They are gradually making their way back, and there are some who do not intend to return.

Chapter 33

Beginning of Public Service

A little round-faced chubby man drops into my office on a summer afternoon. We have never met. This was comrade János Vizsnyiczai who took part in the October 1944 uprising the so-called "City Clean-Up". At the time he was secretary of the National Trade Union's Advisory Board, in the County of Békés.

"What brings you here Comrade Vizsnyiczai?"

"I think I came to the right place" he says. "I would like you to be in charge of the Trade Union's education program. The government has some proposals under way to offer better representation and improved democratic services. Workers will have to be trained to fill in this gap. Those who apply will be given a questionnaire to verify their suitability. The ones who qualify will be given a course on the justice system. The topics will be outlined by the Trade Union. The reason I am here, is to ask, can we count on you?"

I am not going to go into too many details. In the first phase of the introductory course, twenty-three students passed and they were hired by civil service. Before only high school graduates were accepted. I am trying to determine at which point Comrade Vizsnyiczai approached me and why was I so eager to accept this appointment.

I was looking for work and wished to be involved in the party, its programme and its goals. I hated the old regime with its corruption, which still existed.

Chapter 34

My Pilgrimage

My Dear Readers, I must confess that when I started writing about the 1944 happenings, I was actually reliving these events, returning to the places and seeing the people who had been of such help to me in those appalling times. I went back to Putnok thirty years later to bring back those chaotic times, the stifling atmosphere that surrounded the hospital and the six days when Károly Varga's life was so close to death.

The Budapest East Station Express to Miskolc and Ózd left fifteen minutes late to arrive at Putnok for 11.15am. The station was so familiar, when I stepped off the train. There was a bus ready to leave. The driver tells me that he stops at the town hall and that there are no hotels in Putnok! I go back to the station looking for the baggage room to check my knapsack and walk to town – but there wasn't one. The young attendant offers to look after my pack and gave me useful information. I set out in the direction of the Agricultural College on Bajczy Zsilinszky Road. As I approach the town, I am impressed by several imposing buildings on the campus. I approach the janitor and ask to see the gym. He cannot find the key. If I could only get accommodations to make this trip meaningful!

I'm sent to the entrance of the administration buildings to the caretaker's office, where a very kind lady speaks to me. She is in charge of supplies. They were in the midst of renovations and would not be able to accommodate me. But she had some suggestions. I told her the reason for this visit. She showed great interest. This is where she spent those "bitter cold days". Back then after we left, on December 17, Putnok was liberated from the German occupation. She drew a little map for me, to help me find the places I had been with Károly Varga. She showed me the best way on foot, where to catch the train and which bus to take. Of course I realized that I would not be able to do it as I did in '44. So back

again to the station. I just took the bare necessities and checked the rest with the attendant. He gives me some useful directions.

I walk along the railroad tracks and take the first fork to the road. Now I can see the church steeple – just like back then. There is a little noise behind me – lady riding her bike. She has a loaf of bread on her rack and is probably going home from work. When she is close I ask her "Does this road go to Hét?" "Yes, yes.

As I approach the village, I see two men on a horse-drawn wagon hauling manure. There is a sign on the wagon "Agricultural Co-operative". They ask me the time. "It's exactly three o'clock". The horse gets the whip. Apparently they have finished their shift... Gradually, I begin to reach the houses. They are amazingly clean. I see some villagers. We don't speak but we tip our hats. They probably wonder who this stranger is with his canvas bag. I reach the town hall and spot the man who was doing the renovations at the college – as well as the chap from the railroad station.

When I was right in the village, I noticed that I had just passed Mrs. György Lökös' house. I go back a bit and open the gate. A little boy is sitting on the front porch. "Is this the Lökös' house?" "Yes." Then the grandfather appears – a broken old man. He approaches me with suspicion.

"What can I do for you?" he asks as I greet him with much emotion. I tell him that thirty years ago, he was so kind and welcomed me with my friend into his home...

"During the war, so many stopped by. No, I don't remember you. There must be some mistake. Perhaps the neighbour, but not here..."

This little discussion takes place on the porch.

"I'm not wrong, and I'll prove it to you. From the porch the door leads to a little room, there is a bed and above it hangs a life-sized picture of your son in uniform. He died a hero."

That rang a bell. "Yes, you were such a gentleman. Now I remember. You wrote a letter to me when you got back. You even sent a message from Dubicsány with a man from here to thank me. I forgot all about it."

That happened a good twenty years ago. I had been sent to Dubicsány. I was walking along the road when I noticed a horse drawn wagon with a sign bearing "Hét".

"That's when you came by and visited me."

"Well, this time I came from Pest and walked here from Putnok as I had with Károly. I came to thank you for all you did for us".

"Yes, I knew you were retreating from the battle front and you were roaming

about. I helped many soldiers then. My, that was a long time ago. I am eighty-four now!"

As we were chatting a plump, rosy-cheeked woman appeared, the little boy's mother. "Are you Etelka? I brought you a little present." I handed her a box of chocolates. No, she is Piroska, the older daughter. She has four children and is a grandmother

"Where is you mother?"

"She gets up at dawn and works in the garden until late at night. Sometimes she only comes in at 11 o'clock. I cooked some kohlrabi. Please stay for supper. My husband, son and daughter work in Putnok. They should be here very soon."

I tell them that I left my things at the station in Putnok and that I was very tired. "I would love to spend the night here again." I realized that she was rather surprised at the turn of events, but she was very kind and offered a bed in her daughter's room. We chatted and I learned about the family.

The old man used to have a farm of 18 hectares. Back then he was treasurer of the Pasturers' Association. In the fifties he was jailed as he was labeled a kulak and then sent to Kazincbarcika to do farm labour.

Little Etel was an excellent student. She had a special bent for poetry. Unfortunately, after high school she was not accepted at the university. She had hoped to be a physician. Instead, she became a pharmacist. They live in Pest. Her husband is a mining engineer. They are at their summer cottage at Zebegény. There was one more little sister – Ika. She works at the central post office in Miskolc. They had just moved into their newly furnished apartment, when her husband had a fatal motorcycle accident. Their child never had a chance to see his father.

Old Mr. Lökös and Piroska leave me in my room when in pops an attractive elegant young lady, very self assured – brimming with confidence. "I'm Zsuzsa Tóth, Piroska's twenty-two year-old daughter". She is manager at the garment factory in Putnok. First she worked on the assembly line, then seamstress. She is full of ambition, but not happy. Supposedly there is equal pay for equal work – but it is not the reality. She has a very responsible position. They export to the Soviet.

The older son arrives with his father. They came by motorbike. They work together in construction at one of the co-ops in Putnok. Zoltán Tóth, the father is a sheet metal worker. The son works as a mechanic.

Instead of kohlrabi, we have chicken paprikás for supper, served with an excellent wine. Piroska does not appear. Zsuzsa is our hostess. Dear Lökös neni comes in from the garden when the sixth installment of the Reymont Peasants comes on their TV.

I'm up early next morning. My train leaves at 7 o'clock from the deserted Pogonyi Prairie station. While we are having breakfast, I give my business card to Zsuzsa's husband. Perhaps my colleague in Miskolc could be of some help to Ika with the problems she must be having. Zsuzsa accompanies me through the cabbage fields to the station. I buy my ticket to Center – just in time.

It's a short ride from Pogonyi Puszta station to Bánréve, which has now become a border town. We head toward Sajólénártfalva, which is now called Lenartovce (CSSR). There is a bus to take passengers to Fülek, Losonc and other Slovak towns. We make Center in fifteen minutes. I get off and check with the station-master for directions to Királd. He seems surprised that I took the train. This way I will have to do a bit of mountain climbing – a good hour hike.

I set out past the big lumberyard and cut through the meadow in the valley, then along the cemetery. There is a quarry and I can't find the path to the mountain. No more trails – at best deer tracks and uphill. Down below far away, I see a man raking up the hay. I try yelling to him and finally he hears me and points upwards. So I keep climbing, though I had doubts about his suggestion. Finally I reach a clearing. I even hear a train whistle. I'm alright. But it was not easy to find my way through the thick shrubs. After all it's been thirty years since I made my last "excursion" to Királd. After about an hour and a half of wandering about, I end up in the yard of someone's house. I see a little old lady and ask about Czakó bácsi. I was told that he died very soon after the liberation. Mrs. Czakó had to move from the Hatház community to a smaller house and she passed away a few years ago. I saw their daughter with her husband not too long ago."

I went to Hatház and found that the new neighbours in the community had never heard of the Czakós. I went by their old place and see the tiny name plate. It was so sad that I could not clasp Mrs. Czako's weary hands. . . Then a little boy joined me. He had just come from the bakery and was tying a large loaf of bread to his bicycle. He showed me the renovated nursing home with its emergency clinic and waiting room. Even he had to make inquiries to be able to direct me to the building, which used to be the Gendarmerie. As we go along, the little boy speaks up and says, "If you need more information there is an old gendarme who used to work there in 1944 and even a German Nazi!"

The occupants of the house were most hospitable and showed me around their newly renovated home. The little room, which had been so jam-packed, became a nicely equipped kitchen. They were just preparing to have lunch. The lady of the house was standing over the hot stove. We had a look at the backyard where the outhouse had been converted into the pigsty, and was all fenced in.

I learned that there would be no point in my attempting the hike further through

the mountains from Hangony to Feled as it would be cutting through the borders between the two countries. They would never understand what I was attempting to do after thirty years. Should I take the bus to the Bánréve border? But then I would be heading toward Sajólénártfalva and not Feled. Decisions. Decisions. The train from Királd to Putnok took only minutes. When I get off, I see a familiar face. It was Zsuzsa. We had said goodbye a few hours back at the abandoned Pogonyi station platform. She thought I would continue according to my original plan heading toward Feled. I was trying to dig into my store of memories. What did happen when I was making my way from Ózd to Feled?...

Chapter 35

Epilogue

Éva stayed with her parents and her sister throughout the ordeal. She sacrificed her young life and happiness. Other values had more moral significance for her.

I was an eye-witness to the inhumanity, the torture and cruelty, the maniacal annihilation of families.

These unforgettable painful memories stay with me and do not go away, forever tormenting me.

Forget? No, I cannot, nor must not. We must hang on to our memories.

Budapest June 20, 1975.

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