The Story of My Parents' Lives.

They have fought the good fight, they have finished the race, they have kept the faith.

Leslie (László) Török

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The story of my Hungarian parents who, endured five years as refugees from a defeated nation in war-torn Germany, and finally found a haven at the 'end-of-the-world' - Australia.

László, András and Béla

Written by
Leslie (László) Török
Much of which is contained in my father's and grandfather's books.

Grandfather Béla Antal János Török

Grandmother Katalin Mária Emilia Kiss

Both my parents were born during the First World War, in Hungary, which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father was born and christened Béla Antal Sándor Mária Török in the southern town of Szeged on October 6, 1914. My mother was born and christened Ilona Irén Mária Láng in the town of Szepesváralja on February 11, 1916. At the close of the war, the Treaty of Versailles led to the annexation of this part of Hungary to the newly created country of Czechoslovakia, forcing my mother's family to become refugees and migrate to the northern Hungarian town of Miskolc.

My grandfather, nemescsói Béla Antal János Török, was a lawyer in Szeged and my grandmother, was ittebei Katalin Mária Emilia Ilona Kiss. Both branches of our family tree included the martyrs of Arad (1849), namely Ignác Török and Ernö Kiss. My grandfather served in the army in the First World War but, due to severe arthritis, worked behind the scenes as a trainer. The First World War was devastating for Hungary as it was stripped of two-thirds of its territory and over one-third of its ethnic Hungarian population.

A month after the end of the war, the Spanish flu hit the country and my grandfather had to care for my grandmother and my father's sister, Katalin, who was then 2 years old. In his autobiography, he wrote:

"In December 1918, a severe Spanish Flu broke out in the city. You, Bedakám (Béla, aged 4 years), escaped this without any trouble, but your mother and Kata became seriously ill. Kata in particular suffered with a fever exceeding 42^0. Every half hour for 48 hours, I washed them both with wine vinegar and laid them on wet sheets. The doctor said that they were saved only by my almost superhuman care for them. I didn't lie down for 48 hours, but when they were out of danger, I fell asleep, too. But thank the good God, the disease passed without any complications."

When the events of 1919 unfolded- the Chrysanthemum (or Aster Revolution), a communist take-over-- my grandfather joined the newly established officers' patrols, and my father Béla was very proud of his soldier father. Grandfather was an active member of the ABC, the anti-Bolshevik alliance, and, together with his friends, played a key role in policing and shaping the emerging political landscape. He was proud of his contributions during these months, but also acknowledged the communist opponents were, in most cases, honest people who bravely confessed their political beliefs and sometimes faced death without fear.

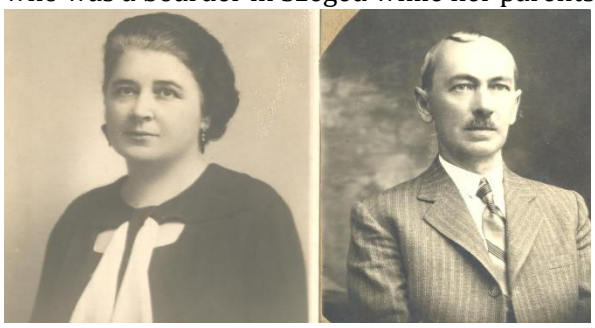
Young Béla and Kata grew up in Szeged on the banks of the Tisza River. Their father was a member of the famous Szeged rowing club, so it was natural that the children became good swimmers; young Béla swam across the Tisza at the age of six.

After eight years of marriage, my grandparents divorced. However, there was never any animosity between them. Béla and Kata were raised by their father, but they always spent the holidays with their mother, even after she remarried Dr. Béla Hensch. Her new husband and my grandfather became good friends which helped the children avoid the trauma that often accompanies split households.

My father, Béla, graduated in 1936 from the Ferenc József University. He was awarded the title of Doctor of Law, Political Science and Economics, *summa cum laude* (**with highest praise**). Béla had a reputation for his oratory and at university, he was often called upon to speak on national events. His father, Béla sr., also had a well-earned reputation for delivering orations well into his later years. On many occasions, he was asked to give eulogies for his departed friends.

Diploma Doctorat Judicial Law- 1936

My father, during his years at the **Szeged University**, got to know Ilona Irén Mária (Ica) Láng who was a boarder in Szeged while her parents were living in the northern city of Miskolc. Ica was training as a high school teacher at the Civil Teachers' College. Great was the love that grew between my parents. Ica's mother was Irén Gizella Bucsegh, born in Rimaverbölz and her father Ede Mihály Láng born Szepesváralja (both towns now in Slovakia). After that area was annexed to Czechoslovakia in 1918, they migrated to the Hungarian city of Miskolc.


Irén Gizella Bucseg & Ede Mihály Láng

Mum's Parents

There were a number of obstacles to an early marriage. My father had yet to complete his National Military Service and his planned studies had yet to be finalised. My mother also had to complete her teacher's college course. Béla realised that it would take at least two to three years for them to complete their studies and so he suggested that they should not make any commitments to each other at this time. Ica was very unhappy with this idea, but had to accept it.

Thus, in 1936-1937, Béla served as a conscript in the newly formed Hungarian Armoured Division. In 1937, he was given a government scholarship as a postgraduate student at the government sponsored Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin where, for two years, he studied political science and constitutional subjects, partly on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. While in Berlin, as an overseas student, he was given a journalist pass to attend gatherings of the Nazi Party including witnessing the

launch of the battleship Tirpitz in Hamburg. He witnessed speeches by Hitler and Goebbels at some gatherings. Dad told me that on one occasion the crowd was so compacted that the young students could lift their legs and be swept along by the crowd.

NAZI Party gathering


My father Béla in army uniform

Béla decided then that, for a career choice, he would aim for a position as a district court judge in Szeged. In 1938 he returned to Szeged and began employment at the Szeged courts.

By chance he again met Ica at a local dance. It wasn't long before the two realised that they were meant to be together.

Between May and September 1940, he participated in the military Transylvanian action which aimed to liberate Hungarians living in Transylvania now part of Romania, and was appointed as an ensign. My mother finished her diploma as a teacher specialising in Mathematics and Music.


The wedding party on Steps of the Basilica

In the autumn, on October 5, 1944, they married in Budapest at the famous Szent István (Stephen) Basilica. Their first son- me, László- was born on 16 September,1942.

Béla completed the judicial and bar examinations with honours in 1942 and was received as a judge in criminal forensics. He was then invited to report to the Ministry of the Attorney General, where he worked as a member of a legal advisory section on constitutional matters and later became private secretary to two Ministers of Justice: István Antal and Gábor Vladár. He was well informed on the background of political happenings in Hungary between the years of 1941-1944. My parents, in 1943, were then blessed by the arrival of their second child, who because he shared my father's birth date of 6 October, was also christened Béla (Bill).

A year later, as fate would have it, on his thirtieth birthday on 6 October 1944, he and all remaining reserve officers were called up for active military service. When reporting for duty at the control centre my father was first assigned to the Eastern Front against the Russian Communist Forces which was considered to be like a death sentence. Fortune, however, was with him, as he was recognised by one of the leaders who was aware of my father's knowledge of German. Dad was redirected to lead a group of motorised troops, to arrange accommodation for a battalion of the Hungarian Army retreating to Bavaria, Germany. The city of Budapest was now under siege by the USSR, it was not a safe place for his family. Dad was able to arrange transport for the family, including his sister's family (Kata and Dr. Béla Csabai and two daughters) and my grandfather in a military truck. The families travelled south towards Germany, in a separate convoy from the unit led by dad, and eventually arrived in Johannes Schwimmbach, in Bavaria, at the close of the war in 1945.


My aunt, Kata Csabai

Upon arriving in Germany with the troops and with his nearby relatives, dad was initially refused help by the local mayor. Overcome by despair, as he described in his memoirs, he raised his voice as if commanding a squadron back home. In the "Prussian" style, he had mastered in Berlin, he firmly and forcefully declared in fluent German: "This order is the command of the Führer, who has accepted us as guests of the German Empire. If this command is not met, you are violating the General Command "

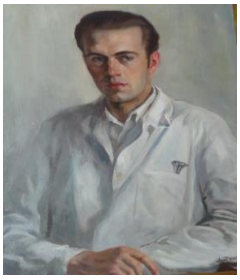
This prompted an immediate turnaround. The mayor softened immediately and began preparing the much-needed accommodations. The mayor had reserved accommodations in Marklkofen, which included some scattered farm groups a couple of kilometres away, such as Johannes Schwimmbach and Ulrich Schwimmbach, in small rural settlements. These farms could have refugees squeezed into them. The Török and the Csabai families were assigned to the farm house of the Kammermeier family at Johannes Schwimmbach.

The host had a two-storey house and had bedrooms on the first floor. They were full because, in addition to the family, there were three or four Silesian (Polish) refugees and four Ukrainian labourers living with them.

Dad met his little family again and we were happy to have lived through this difficult phase. Béla was especially relieved when they told him their story of how they survived this arduous and dangerous couple of hundred kilometres of road on their own. At that time, the American fighter planes bombed the roads in low altitudes, firing their machine guns at anything that moved-despite the fact that most of the traffic consisted of civilian refugees, often trudging along in a desperate line. In one of the attacks, one of Béla's comrades lost his wife and two small children as they travelled in a village wagon heading for what they had hoped to be safety.

The two families' car ran into a political, military conundrum, when one of the local German military commanders decided that the Hungarian "retreat "must be stopped. A roadblock was set up near Passau, Bavaria, where luggage-laden cars were banned from entry and redirected to designated spaces and courtyards. These vehicles were confiscated. Dad's brother-in-law Béla's car was left standing by the roadside. They watched helplessly in despair as the SA corps carried out this harsh command.

My father's brother-in-law, Béla Csabai, was sitting in his car with the two pregnant women, four children and my elderly grandfather. As the battalion doctor, he was assigned to two other vehicles, as well other young children and pregnant women who were very close to giving birth. My aunt Kata urged her husband Béla, as a doctor, to turn to the German health authorities for assistance. They were disappointed by the Germans' indifference, despite Hungary being their ally. Kata then took over the supporting documents and saw the commanding Gauleiter (a political official governing a district under Nazi rule) and told him the seriousness of the situation and, while crying, asked that their group be released. It seems that Kata's tears moved the official, and after some hesitation, he granted permission for the three cars to continue their journey.


Dr Béla Csabai

Thus, the families met in Eggenfelden as planned, but the Passau roadblock had deprived our family of their last remaining possessions. All authorised persons were restricted to forty-pound packages on the battalion trucks, and these vehicles never arrived. Later, my parents tried searching for them; but it was completely hopeless. We stood almost without any spare clothing. My father did not have any civilian clothes. After the war, he had difficulties obtaining a coat or appropriate shoes.

Ica, who was in the final trimester of pregnancy, said that when the family members arrived independently in Marklkofen the children were very restless and the pregnant women really needed to rest. She decided to search for accommodation. By chance, the line of cars stopped in front of a large and beautiful Roman Catholic parish presbytery. Ica rang the bell. The hostess came. Ica asked for accommodation, explaining their desperate need, but the woman refused to help. She said that the pastor was not at home and she could not let anyone into the house. The parish house was spacious and it was obvious that the premises had not been allocated to refugees. Ica was, therefore, very disappointed at the cold reception. Ica then knocked on the door of a synagogue where they were greeted warmly and given beds for the night.

However, by then, our friend Hollósy and my father reported to the commander and they were able to give the good news to the family members that we could immediately commence moving into new accommodation. In Eggenfelden we did not know that everyone's luggage was lost. The families were glad that they could embrace each other. Bedding was provided only in an open mass shelter – five or six in a room with straw bags for beds- but it was still a great improvement for the family. On

the road, for example – Ica, who was seven months pregnant, spent one night on a restaurant table for a few hours, while in another town she was crammed together in a cinema hall with hundreds of refugees, thus those who had straw mattresses were happy.

The families became almost entirely reliant on the German food supply to organise their daily lives. The German authorities issued them with food tickets. In the first months of our relocation, the German banks had exchanged our currency (pengö) into the German mark. There was a shortage of labour and those who wanted to helped the farmers. This way they could get extra food, which was even more important than the food tickets which only enabled you to buy the basic minimum., The supplementary rations were really necessary.

The Török and Csabai families could say they were fortunate to have been allocated to Johannes Schwimmbach, because it was well administered and life there was almost like during peacetime. The farmer Kammermeier had 8-10 cows and his pig stock was intact. With the help of the Ukrainian conscripted labourers, they regularly completed the day's work for the 30-40 acres of farm land. The host ate with the co-workers. The hardworking German farmer recited the Lord's Prayer aloud as everyone gathered around the table awaiting a large pot of stew. The labourers and the host family lived in a very good relationship; there was no sign of the horror stories about the treatment of forced labourers. The Ukrainian peasants lived on this German farm as if it were their own- or perhaps even better. One female worker confided to Ica that, for the first time in her life, she had shoes on her feet. In this practical relationship of land management and animal care, the ethnic differences were completely blurred.

Kammermeier farm house and barns

As my father recounted in his book: The truce - or more appropriately, capitulation - was announced on German Radio. The message was that the country had been completely invaded and the Germans now had to accept their fate. The announcer stated that, in this solemn moment, role models were needed rather than fighting men.

The German farmer and his family tried to come to terms with the news. The pictures of Hitler were, of course, removed from the walls. The host was a party member and the district head farmer, though not out of political conviction. The small farmers in Germany only tilled their land and basically stayed away from politics. The Allied military government's first public proclamation called for the handing in of firearms. The host sadly said farewell to his hunting gun. The news service vividly portrayed the sins of the Nazi government. It was then that we first heard the news of the extermination of the Jews in the Eastern European camps. We and the hosts were appalled by this news. Being devout Catholics, they could not even imagine that such heinous crimes could have taken place during the war without the public knowing.

By May we were under American occupation. The young American commander of the nearby occupying forces received our group's deputation very politely. He decided that, until further orders, the officers should keep their weapons and we ensured that we stayed together. Their battalion moved on and there was no visible change to our everyday life. The Military Government established itself in the villages of Frontenhausen and Marklkofen, and with the help of remaining former government staff, they tried to maintain order.

There were some lapses in control. One day, early in the afternoon, the sound of a powerful engine roar indicated that a group of soldiers had pulled into the courtyard of the Kammermeier home on motorised vehicles; they jumped down in a machine gun battle formation. The Commander did not come into the house, but four or five non-commissioned officers came into our room, which contained my grandfather, four children and two pregnant women, as well as dad and his brother-in-law. They turned the machine gun on them and, in broken German, demanded all valuables. My parents had to give up their watches and fountain pens, under the threat of arms. They left the house and sped away, as they had come, accompanied by the roar of the engines. The whole scene was very disturbing. For my father in particular, it was the fact that the officer obviously knew what the soldiers were doing and, therefore, chose to watch from the yard. This event took place after formal ceasefire and unconditional surrender, so you cannot call it an abuse occurring in a war situation. It was an armed robbery. Perhaps fuelled by alcohol and victory propaganda, the troops committed various crimes and terrorised the German population. This news also stirred my father into defensive action. They removed the wheels of Béla Csabai's car and hid them in our room. The car was left standing in one corner of the barn, with bricks where the wheels should be.

The local commander was in contact with the Marklkofen military headquarters and dad received an open command from them which included travelling around the neighbourhood in a farm wagon. He was given the task of creating a list of the Hungarian troops and civilians in the remote areas, small villages and hamlets scattered about. Dad discovered that in the immediate vicinity, more than five hundred civilians were billeted on farms, often living in extremely primitive conditions.

Medical help was very much needed. His brother-in-law, Béla, a medical doctor travelled daily on the horse-drawn wagon and provided treatment where possible. Unfortunately, the stock of medication was running out and the health concerns increased the gravity of the problems.

On one occasion, when Béla Csabai was doing his medical rounds, a group of Ukrainians broke into the house. There were five or six of them. They demanded that we immediately give them the keys and tyres of Béla's vehicle. My father stood up against them. The car keys were hidden in our room, but he said that the keys to the car were with the owner, a medical doctor currently on his rounds and he did not know where the wheels were. Then they told my father to come with them to the car in the barn. Dad went, but as a precaution, he took his service revolver, cocked the gun and slipped it into his riding breeches' pocket.

In the barn, the Ukrainians were looking at the car, searching around to see if the wheels were somewhere in the vicinity. Then the leader took out a revolver, he looked at my father and yelled at him that if he did not give over the keys immediately and did not show him the location of the car wheels, he would shoot. Béla does not know why he did not back down. He retorted without thinking, that only the owner knew where the keys and the wheels were, but if you want to shoot, just shoot. Maybe he felt that they were bluffing. Shooting never occurred; after a brief heated discussion in a language he could not understand, these hooligans jumped on their bikes and headed towards Marklkofen.

The family were of course agitated and shocked, they discussed the incident and were still agitated when, maybe half an hour later, we heard gunshots and saw two or three American jeeps coming into the farmyard, with American troops and the Ukrainians. The Americans looked around getting oriented. My father noticed that they were accompanied by a Russian officer, assigned as the Russian government's military liaison.

My father was brought before them, and his interrogation began. By that time, Ensign Sándor (Alex) Liptay had been invited from nearby Ulrich Schwimmbach to serve as my father's interpreter before the Americans. Of course, my father argued that the car did not belong to him, but to the group's designated doctor, who was away. Béla told them that the armed Ukrainians threatened to take the car, which he refused. One of the Ukrainians spoke to the Russian officer, who in turn whispered something to the interrogating American officer. This officer asked dad whether he had a gun. He replied in the affirmative. His friend, Alex Liptay, then advised that the Hungarians were allowed to retain their weapons on the basis of an agreement with the local U.S. authorities. Then the US officer asked where the gun was. Immediately, my father reached into his pocket and handed him the gun. The Russian officer noted that the safety lock was off and asked why. Béla replied that he was under threat and had to face possible violence. There was a short discussion between the American and Russian officers. Finally, dad was instructed that the command should immediately contact the military government in Marklkofen to arrange the collection of all the weapons. They departed without returning dad's gun, but this was to be expected. Dad was relieved because he expected that they would take him with them, since there was martial law in relation to the provision of arms. It is true that the previous American officer had stated that dad and his troops could keep their weapons, but it would have been quite difficult to find the American officer who made this decision, in the final days of the war, not to be disarmed.

Within a few days, the transfer of weapons took place, and the military government recorded our troop numbers. The general situation improved. My father's brother-in-law was given travel authorisation so that he could go more easily to visit his Hungarian patients. The food ration system started to work again. It seemed that our fate was slowly improving.

It was understood that the German army had been collected in POW camps and after disarming would eventually be issued with decommissioning cards.

If the military police - many of whom acted in a Wild West manner saw a younger man, they would immediately demand to see their Discharge Papers and if the person could not produce one, they arrested him. Dad knew that soon his group of soldiers would soon be processed to implement formal disarmament. News also arrived that many Hungarian units had been handed over to the Russians. Béla feared that the same fate might befall his group as well. They trembled at the thought that they might have to leave their families again.

Information about the situation at home in Hungary was sparse, but the news that did arrive spoke of bloody reprisals against all who had resisted the Bolshevik forces in Budapest. It was no surprise when Dad's troops were informed that the local Hungarian soldiers would be transported by trucks to a prisoner-of-war camp. There was an understanding that Béla Csabai, the doctor, Ensign Sándor Liptay, the English interpreter and the pastor would be exempted, so they could stay to look after the organisation of the lives of the families left behind.

For my father, this decision was a relief, as Ica was eight months pregnant and Béla, also an obstetrician, would ensure that, in her most difficult hours; she would not to be left alone to give birth. The parting was very difficult. My father did not know what would happen to them; would they be forcibly deported to Siberia? My parents also had to face the fact that they might never see each other again.

The Hungarian troops and my father had to be ready for their transport on 30 May 1945. Each took a backpack for their essential clothing and personal belongings; they threw a blanket over their shoulders to be prepared for a longer stay away. As the war had ended three weeks prior, all felt that they were not being delivered to a prisoner of war camp, but only for the process of disarmament to take place.

The American trucks arrived and everyone was squeezed onto the trucks, approximately thirty to forty per vehicle. The trip was not long because the convoy suddenly stopped at the Marklkofen sports ground, which was only three or four kilometres from the Schwimmbach home and all were ordered to disembark. Then, an American sergeant began to give orders. First, he instructed the troops to sit in a tight group, and then ordered the officers to line up separately in two-lines.

Soldiers brought shovels, and the troops were forced to dig pits. The shape of the pits was such that the Hungarians could only think that these pits were their graves. While the soldiers were working, the Americans were laughing with each other and pointing at us. Suddenly, the sergeant stepped in front of the group of our officers and ordered them to run on the spot. This scene was very humiliating and all felt again how low the world had sunk.

While running on the spot, my father couldn't help but mutter under his breath, like a radio announcer on the Voice of America, the well-known introduction:

'Now this is the Voice of America, America is one of the members of the United Nations'.

Their feeling of humiliation was suffocating. The grave digging was over, they just had to wait. The mood was at rock bottom- no one could hope for humane treatment. What happened was a form of revenge against the vanquished 'Vae Victis' (woe to the vanquished); this slogan it, appears, will continue to accompany all humanity.

Then again, all got onto the trucks, or rather more accurately, they were kicked onto overcrowded trucks. My father managed to breathe a little more freely, he was relieved.

The road again was not too long. It was maybe thirty miles into the Isar River Valley. Again, they ordered everyone off the trucks and machine gun units herded them towards the river bank. There was a wide grassy floodplain and this section could provide space for a large crowd. As far as the eye could see, there were thousands of German and Hungarian soldiers crowded together there. There were no buildings or barracks. The prisoners were in an impossible state, standing, sitting or lying. Meanwhile, it started to rain.

My father's group got lucky as, soon after their arrival, they started to distribute tents. Nearby was one of Rommel's army storage areas, allowing them to obtain thirty-two-person tents. There was no comfort - four squeezed under the tarpaulins, but at least they did not get soaked in the rain, like the thousands of other soldiers who did not get such a godsend.

The next morning, they finally received something to eat. The Americans distributed to all prisoners the so-called "C. Ration". The American soldiers on the front lines received three such rations per day, whereas the prisoners were given one. Later they learned that each portion of these rations contained 500 calories-just enough to stave off starvation. Years later dad referred to this as: 'The American Health Studio.' The prisoners also had difficulties obtaining drinking-water.

The most humiliating aspect was attending to their daily needs; our group was assigned a section of the field--pits and mounds, whatever worked. Soon, the field was filled with waste, and the meadow reeked. My father recalled, "Lucky was the man who had a bit of paper in his pocket and could maintain a small degree of cleanliness". In the morning the sun came out for a short time. The new arrivals explored their environment. In addition to the wide variety of Hungarian units, the majority were German soldiers.

In hindsight, my father felt that the American military leadership did everything to make this "decommissioning" process speedy but, obviously with the large numbers, the coordination was difficult, with limited organisational opportunities. The Americans attempted to improve conditions, and as a result, on the second day, our group was loaded onto trucks and transported near the village of Ganacker. Here they received better conditions. The troops were crammed into a school building: about twenty to thirty people to a room, lying side by side on the floors; but at least they were protected from rain and wind.

News was received that Hungarian troops in this region had been handed over to the Russians, thus the mood was bitter. The food was still at a minimum. Included in the so-called C rations there was a little chocolate, a biscuit and a small bag with coffee powder, but no hot water. Everyone was starving. Some had brought a little bread and some salami, so they survived better for a day or two.

On 4 June they were on the road again. Once again, they were crammed onto the trucks and got to know what the expression ***'let's go'*** meant. The trucks raced on the open road. At the bends, the trucks rarely slowed and those on board had to cling to each other and try to stay on the trucks. At Regensburg, the trucks crossed the Danube. They learned that they were in Regensburg from a German bystander, when the congested traffic had stopped the trucks.

The truck convoy had grown from two or three vehicles into a much larger group heading north; this filled the Hungarians with concern because the Czech border, now under Russian control, was close once again. Everyone thought that the end of this journey would end in a Russian prisoner of war camp. Around noon the convoy stopped and was directed to another camp.

They had arrived in Hohenfels, near an old German training camp near the town of Parsberg. The Germans used this section of the camp as a prisoner of war camp (Stalag 383) during the latter part of the war years; so, our troops now replaced the previous British and American prisoners of war.

This facility became an American prison for 'Enemy Combatants' allowing authorities to bypass the Geneva Convention rules for prisoner-of-war camps. Later it was converted into a displaced persons camp. Béla was incarcerated from June to October 1945. Although it was originally a German prisoner-of-war camp that housed American prisoners, a rubbish dump behind the barracks contained English detective novels left behind by previous inmates. Béla, through being fluent in German and with his knowledge of Latin and a pocket dictionary, started to read one of these novels. At first, each page took hours to read, but gradually, the process became easier.

My father's greatest joy was then to get news about our family from his friend Alex. Béla wrote in his book: "Even today, I can vividly see myself standing before Alex, who cheerfully yelled from a visiting cart: "Congratulations, Béla! You have a baby boy, and his name is András (Andrew)! Both Ica and the boy are well!" This news reached him about 10 days after Andrew's birth. It was approximately 7 July 1945. (Andrew's birthday was 27 June)

In the district, a Hungarian colonel called Vághó, the regimental commander of the motorised division, along with his men were allowed to live with their families. He became acquainted with the local American Major and, at one social gathering, he complained that brother troops were imprisoned at Hohenfels and their families were stranded unable to make arrangements to return to Hungary. The US Major was in a good mood, got on his phone and requested that action be taken as soon as possible to transport the incarcerated Hungarian prisoners back to Johannes Schwimmbach.

The journey back to Hohenfels on the main road was far more pleasant than the arduous one four months earlier. Finally, Béla was back in Frontenhausen. Then, they turned towards Johannes

Schwimmbach, where Béla embraced Ica and the children and, and '**we all kissed each other'**. Dad, who was skin and bone after his imprisonment, was glad to see that Kata, his sister, and her children were all well. Then, for the first time, Béla saw his small son Andrew and Kata's child Béci, who was born late September. Ica and Béla were asked to be Béci's Godparents.

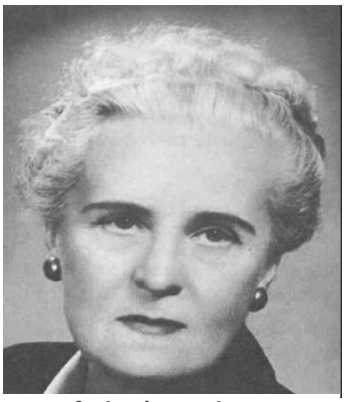
The events leading up to baby Andrew's birth were not without drama. The local Catholic priest had requested the Americans to return his parish car, that had been taken from him by the Germans. The Americans could not help, so they gave him Dr Béla Csabai's Opel car. Thus, when the birth time approached, the family was full of problems – how will they transport Ica to the hospital at nearby Frontenhausen, where there was a reservation for her? The battalion did have a passenger car in a barn, but the car's reliability was quite uncertain.

On the night of 26 June, Ica's contractions started. Béla Csabai had no choice but to prepare the old sedan to take Ica to the hospital. The car started but, after one kilometre at the top of a rising, the engine stalled and Béla failed to restart the car. Ica offered to help push the car, but Béla vehemently rejected this. Suddenly the engine started and fortunately, they reached the hospital at Frontenhausen.

Dr Béla Csabai's Opel car.

They didn't have to wait long for little András (Andrew); at dawn on 27 June, he arrived healthy and strong. The Opel car was later returned to the family after my father used his legal skills to regain possession.

From **1946 to 1949** in Germany, Béla used his knowledge of German and basic English to work at the **United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration** (UNRRA) and **later International Relief Organisation** (IRO) as a supply officer. Dad also became involved with an organisation aimed at reclaiming Hungarian assets that had been stranded in Germany. He, being trained as a constitutional lawyer in Hungary, was involved in the formation process.



My father's mother Kata Hencsch (Török)

After the war ended, when the opportunity arose, my grandfather, sister Kata, Béla and their family—including baby Béla (Béci)-- decided to return to Hungary. Those who returned and those who had stayed at home in Hungary then suffered through the trials and tribulations of the Russian Communist occupation. At that time, dad knew that returning home would only mean being torn from his family once again. As a military officer, a member of the Justice Ministry, and the private secretary to a minister in the Horthy government, he would undoubtedly be summoned before an examination board, and, at best, expected to give the communists maximum co-operation in exchange for his freedom. Béla was not prepared to do this. However, he felt that, in this

deplorable situation, it was his duty to his family to take his family home to Hungary and then, once at home, for Ica to be near her family so they could get through the difficult years ahead.

My father therefore wrote a letter to his mother, who it was hoped had survived the siege of Budapest, with dad's plan to travel to Miskolc to Ica's parents and hope that they would be able to provide accommodation for us. Dad did not believe that their Káplár Street apartment had survived, as fierce fighting had devastated that part of Buda. For security reasons, his mother hid her reply inside a loaf of bread she had baked, ensuring it wouldn't be discovered if the courier was captured. During these few months, border control was lax, and a clever man could slip through unnoticed. He returned to us without any complications.

My grandmother's letter was startling. She wrote: "Dear children! When I received your letter, I felt like a madwoman. Don't you know what's happening here? Any Hungarian of value is in prison." She asked us not to even think of returning home, at least not for the time being; we should wait for a few years until the rampage of revenge ceases. We decided that if we received a letter from Hungary containing the coded phrase: "Béla, we await your return as soon as possible'', it would mean that under no circumstances should we attempt to return home.

Our family spent a year at the Kammenmeier farm at Johannes Schwimmbach and emergency housing at Lenzfried Kempten. On one previous occasion, the sleeping quarters were made habitable by scattering DDT powder to kill the bed-bugs. (Not recommended today) My mother solved the shortage of shoes for the children by having a nearby Hungarian bootmaker fashion shoes from her leather hand bag.

Finally, we found refuge abroad in what seemed like the 'end of the world'- Australia. After being accepted into Australia's refugee program, the family boarded the ship Skaugum in Naples Italy and arrived in Newcastle on 29 November 1949. From there the refugees were transported to Greta, a country town near Cessnock. The new migrants in Australia, though "free", had to struggle to achieve economic self-sufficiency and assimilate into their new country.

Voyage to Australia on the Skaugum

The Greta Railway Station was small and was located in an almost uninhabited area. The camp management had sent brand new, modern buses to transport the migrants on the quarter of an hour journey to the central area of the camp. Dad had a surprise when one of the host officials (also Hungarian) signalled to him that he had already been selected to work in the administration department of the camp. This meant that he avoided the obligation of all refugees that, if they were unable to find local employment, they would have to work in remote areas as chosen by the Government. This had been stipulated in a two-year contract of employment that all refugees had to sign. Our mother was employed as a general hand in the kitchen of the camp; she was overjoyed at the clean white sheets in our allotted accommodation.

Mum as kitchen hand at camp

A year later we relocated to a different camp called Scheyville, near Windsor, where dad was again employed in camp administration. The camp lay on the slopes of a hilltop. The administrative buildings were built of brick. (Originally the Australian Army corps had been housed there.) The residential buildings were fibro cement, tin-roofed huts. Our family was assigned two rooms, and we settled in quickly. The field hospital was available at any time, but dental service was only available in the nearby town of Windsor.

Two years later, in 1952, our family and another Hungarian family (Börzsönyi) of four, bought a fibro cottage together in Guildford at 24 Harold St. It was west of Sydney City. At that time, it was near the border of Greater Sydney, and Australians often referred to it as the start of the bush. This was reflected by the relatively low house price. Electricity had been connected, but the sewer had not yet reached the area.

Scheyville migrants camp - Windsor

From 1952 to 1956, to better support our family, both our parents worked. Ica worked at EMI, a record and electronic appliances manufacturer and at Walton Sears, a large department store in Sydney. Béla worked at The Main Roads Department and a few other positions. A few years later, the Börzsönyi family decided to sell their share of the house and establish a grocery business. Our family financed the purchase of their half of the house by renting out the temporary cottage on the property to a German refugee couple by name of Petereit.

Family in front of the fibro cottage - Guildford

Béla's legal qualifications were not recognised in Australia, as was the case for most professions, and only a few courses provided opportunities for part-time students. It was essential that, under the current circumstances, both

parents continue to work during the day. He decided to study accounting in the evenings. By 1956 the final exams were looming.

Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 seemed to Béla be a bad omen for the future. In the meantime, in Australia, preparations were on the way for the Melbourne Olympic Games and local newspaper articles dealt almost exclusively with this event. The Hungarian Revolution of October 1956 and the ruthless Russian invasion soon captured the world's attention.

Hungarian refugees began to flood to the west. Australia stood ready to welcome some of the refugees. The local ethnic associations made preparations in this direction and they demonstrated in Sydney, at the Domain, against the bloody subjugation of their land of birth by another country. The Australian politicians almost unanimously supported the demonstrators and called for the Soviets to withdraw.

On August 14, 1956, Béla received notice from the Minister of Immigration Harold Holt that his and his wife's request for citizenship had been accepted (E.M. (2) NO. 1625), setting the date for the upcoming citizenship ceremony. They accepted all the obligations that this involved. The ceremony was held in the Parramatta Town Hall on April 15, 1957. That day twenty to thirty displaced persons, including our family, became Australian citizens. The ceremony had representatives of the press, the government and leading personalities of the city. Edward Allan Hunt, the mayor of the City of Parramatta, welcomed the candidates. Then, all solemnly took the oath of citizenship and received their certificates. Then the mayor turned to those present and asked if anyone wished to speak on behalf of the new citizens. A great silence filled the hall; this was understandable because speaking in English, without preparation, was perhaps too much for most of the immigrants. Amid the uncomfortable silence, Béla suddenly felt compelled to speak, so he volunteered to respond.

He elaborated in his speech that, looking toward the future, he was sure that we of many nationalities all wanted to contribute to this country by accepting each other and that, in time we could all help develop an Australian national unity. His speech was a great success and the Parramatta Council later sent him a beautiful picture album as a friendly gesture. Interestingly, my examination revealed a peculiar practice of the time: the children of the marriage were listed only on our father's certificate, not on our mother's.

After qualifying as an accountant, Béla was invited for an interview by Parsons Anderson and Company, a medium sized accountancy firm. Peter White, a partner, just a few years older than Béla was impressed by his efforts in this country and, at the end of the interview, hired him immediately.

Béla got to know the state's rural life because, in one single year, he went two or three times to the countryside to attend to various accounting clients. While in Bellingen the Rotary Club invited him to speak about the events surrounding the 1956 uprising.

Béla started to build up a part-time bookkeeping, accounting practice. His employer was not concerned about it. All this, of course, was done in the evenings and on the weekends. He was used to

this kind of intense working regime. By this time, our household now had all five members earning an income. We all travelled long distances from Guildford to work. At our mother's suggestion, we decided to sell our house in Guildford and buy a better one closer to central Sydney. We looked at many houses until we found one in Burwood, at 83 Lucas Road- thus the trip to the city would be cut in half. The railway station was only four to five minutes walking distance away and after a quarter-hour train ride we were in the City. Béla's private practice clients could easily reach him and it was also easier for him to get to his clients.

The Burwood family home


The Working Family at Burwood

This rekindled Béla's desire to practise law again, prompting him to take the first steps in that direction. He enrolled in the High Court Barrister's Admission Board nominees list. This organisation did not require that the candidate attend an evening course, but only sit for the set examinations.

He began to prepare for these exams, in 1962, by acquiring the necessary textbooks, but then because of various problems, did not start studying until 1964. Peter White, his boss, was surprised when told of Béla's intention to attempt a legal qualification. Peter knowing that Béla was over fifty, expressed his doubts, but wished him good luck.

Such night-class candidates usually took six to eight years to complete their studies. With really great will power, dad finished his exams in just two and a half years, and by the end of 1966, he earned the title Barrister-at-Law. He then worked for CR Potts and Company to gain his solicitors articles. The family convinced mum that she should revive her interest in music and purchased a piano. Once again, she was able to immerse herself in her love of the classics and Hungarian ballads. In 1967, my parents took a break and headed for Europe and my mother actually crossed the border into Communist Hungary, while my father met his Hungarian relatives later in Austria; he refused to go back to Hungary as the Communists were still in charge.

By 1972 Béla, even though he was not a partner of the legal firm CR Potts and Company, was producing about thirty percent of the firm's income. He thought it would be appropriate that the firm should acknowledge this participation in a win-win partnership agreement. This was refused. The big question was how much courage was needed to start a new business as he was close to sixty at an age most people were getting ready for retirement. Béla thought that, with the help of his son Béla (Bill), he could establish the business in a couple of years and then plan for a structured retirement. He worked successfully at this until his retirement.

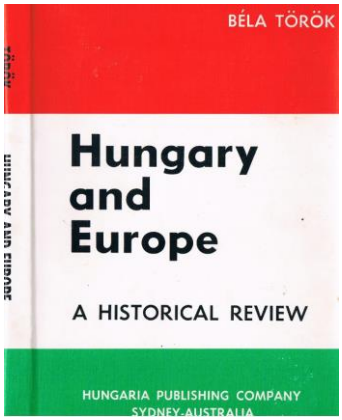
Bill qualified as a barrister first, followed by Andrew, and both later became solicitors. Bill eventually took over dad's law office, while Andrew became a city sole practitioner in the city. I, László (Leslie), became a Chartered Accountant and, at one stage, took over my father's accounting clients while my father established his solicitor's business. All the sons married. I married Maureen Doyle, Bill married Maryann Delmage and Andrew married Noni Loughlin and between us produced fourteen grandchildren. The great grandchildren count is currently eighteen.

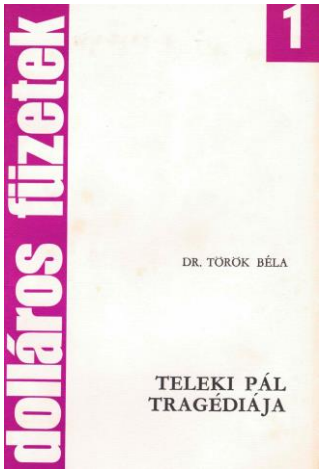
During this time, Béla Snr. was actively involved in several Hungarian organisations. In particular, he and others followed the lead of Hungarian Catholic priest Father Forró in establishing an old age home named after St Elizabeth of the Árpád dynasty. The Catholic Church and the state also supported this move and, eventually, under the patronage of St. Elizabeth, the Old Age Home for Hungarians in Blacktown became the pride of the Hungarian Sydney community.

Béla became involved with the Budapest Soccer Club, but ended his association with it when the club changed its name to St George Budapest. Later, the Australian Soccer Federation required the club to drop 'Budapest' leaving only St George. Dad also helped my brothers and me organise a Hungarian university student football team, which played for several years wearing the green and white Ferencváros stripes.

Béla was well known in the emigré Hungarian circles doing regular book reviews and articles. In his various publications, he dealt with constitutional, historical and political subjects. Between 1970 and 1971 he assisted in organising the Australian branch of the St Stephen Free University. On 4 June 4,1970 in remembrance of Trianon, his English-language editorial was published in an informational booklet.

In 1972 my father wrote a small booklet called 'Teleki Pál Tragedy'. Pál (Paul) Teleki (Hungarian Prime Minister -1939-1941) was a good friend of his father; they talked a lot and my father revealed some of his thoughts and words in this booklet. After many years of research and thinking, in 1974 Béla completed a study in the Hungarian language entitled "Turkish Dominion, German Rule and Russian Occupation" (Török Hóldoltság--Német Uralom-Orosz Megszálás) and despite his self-publishing produced only a small number of books, it received a lot of encouraging reviews. This work was revised and rewritten in English in 1979 under the title 'Hungary and Europe'. This book was not meant to be so much about public history containing references for resources nor an academic work, but was to serve the Hungarian future in the anticipated resurrection of Hungary. He foresaw the end of the Russian occupation, which began 10 years later in 1990, in





the political development of European unity, so he gave his book a theme that integrated seamlessly the concept of Hungarian and European unity as part of the Christian Western civilisation. The book received great praise from a Hungarian-born American university professor who wrote that, not only had he never read such well-written Hungarian history, but he had discovered many visionary and prophetic insights in it. Of course, there were critics who pointed out grammatical errors and improper use of some English phrases—many of whom revealed their political affiliations through their critiques. His book had been an apparent "failure" in that it was not restricted to one political view, so that none of the groups were happy with what he had written.

Mr & Mrs Kalándy meeting the Cardinal

The year 1974 was significant for Hungarians in Australia, as they were visited by Archbishop Cardinal József Mindszenty, the spiritual leader and father of the Hungarian emigration. Large masses of Hungarians welcomed their chief priest and there were touching scenes between the leading pastor and the devotees. In 1949, Mindszenty was imprisoned, after years of torture, by the Communist Government. After the 1956 revolution, the Cardinal sought refuge in the US Embassy, finally leaving communist Hungary in 1971.

March 1977 saw my father become involved in a controversial case involving Mr Ian Sinclair, a minister in the conservative Liberal Government of Malcolm Fraser. Dad was approached by a shareholder of some private companies, including a funeral parlour business whose finance manager was the recently deceased Mr G Sinclair, father of Mr Ian Sinclair. Dad was approached because of his dual degrees in both law and accountancy, as the shareholders needed expert advice on how to unravel the neglected accounting records. Despite the shareholders' unanimous support for this process, the media became involved, fuelled by the NSW State Labor Government. After much verbal prolonged harassment, the case culminated in the acquittal of Mr Ian Sinclair of any wrong doing. During this time my father's office was burgled six times, but no cash was taken-- only filing cabinets were forced open. No one was charged.

The Minister had repeatedly expressed to my father how much it hurt him to see my father unjustly attacked in this case. He defended Béla in parliament when the then leader of the Labor Party made some derogatory comments about my father's practice in the heat of a debate. These political attacks had to be worn as what is spoken in parliament cannot be held against the speaker; the investigator, a barrister, can freely attack anyone and still enjoy the protection of the legal system.

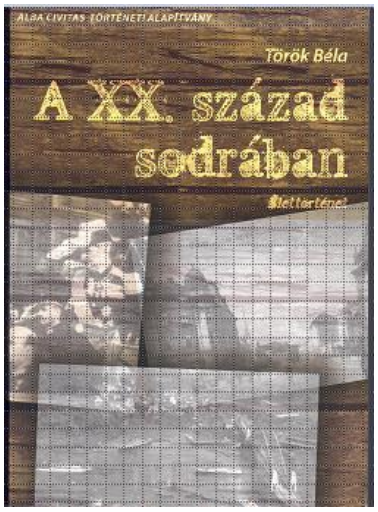
Later that year, (1977) my father expanded his legal practice by purchasing another firm and changed locations for his office. In October 1979, Béla turned sixty-five years old and worked on. He semi-retired in 1981. He still looked after a few legal and accounting clients well into his seventies.

My parents sold their house in Burwood and moved into a ground floor unit in Clarence Street, Burwood. They were close to the RSL Club which was visited by them for lunch on many occasions. Often family members would join them there. Dad spent his later years writing and polishing his major work, his autobiography. Negotiating with publishers in Hungary was not easy. The first part of Béla's book contained a lot of information about the origins of both my father's grand-parents' families, from memoirs of his father.

Mum and dad on their way to the club


My parents at St Elizabeth Old Age Home

In 2004, at the age of eighty-eight, my mother was diagnosed with early-stage dementia. About a year later, they decided that when two adjacent low-care rooms were available at the St. Elisabeth Old Age Home they would sell their unit on Clarence St Burwood and retire in this Hungarian-run Nursing Home. This was done and they arranged that one room became their bedroom and the other a lounge room which contained their memorabilia, desk and my mother's piano. Ica was soothed by the piano and Béla learnt old Hungarian songs which he sang to Ica when she was distressed. This calmed her anxieties. Ica's health deteriorated and she was eventually transferred to the Dementia Unit with her piano. Soon after, Béla insisted that he also move into the same room to keep her company during these last few years. This was originally denied but the management finally saw reason. Our father spent most of his day at her side until April 2, 2012 when Ica, aged ninety-six, died. The burial was at Rookwood Cemetery in the single plot they had previously purchased. Single plots can be used for a second burial after six months had elapsed.



Autobiography published in Hungary

Béla had a fall and boke his hip, which did not mend very well and caused him significant pain. A week before he died, he received the good news that his autobiography in Hungarian (some 400 pages) had finally been published in Hungary.

Six months after Ica died, he suffered a heart attack and yet we found him in the dining room saying goodbye to his comrades saying that he was going to sleep. Two days later after receiving his sacred rites he died on 18 September, almost reaching ninety-eight.

They are both buried in the Hungarian Catholic section of Rookwood Cemetery Homebush.

Some books published by Béla are:

'Reply to the Grey Book.' Berlin, 1939 (*Hungarian language*)

'The Hungarian and the Authoritarian Constitution' 1940, Miskolc (*Hungarian language)*

'Questions about Authoritarian Government Systems' 1940, Miskolc (*Hungarian language)*

'Some of the Principles of the New German Constitution' 1941 Miskolc *(Hungarian language)*

'Summary of the Hungarian Constitution: Hungarian studies' Budapest 1944 *(German language)*

'The Tragedy of Paul Teleki', Sydney, 1972 (*Hungarian language)*

'Turkish Yoke, German Rule, Russian Occupation', Sydney 1974 (*Hungarian language)*

'Hungary and Europe – A Historical Review' *(English language*) Sydney 1979 (translation 1974 book)

'In the Mainstream of The XX Century' (A XX. SZÁZAD SODRÁBAN) Hungary 2012 *(Hungarian language)*

*

A translation of the above autobiography was completed by Leslie Torok, his eldest son and proof-read by Maureen Torok titled: 'In The Mainstream Of The XX Century - Living History' (English)